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Remediating Fassbinder in Video Installations by Ming Wong and Branwen Okpako

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In his early plays and films, Rainer Werner Fassbinder tackled the politics of race, immigration, and interracial relationships, and hereby offered a prescient treatment of topics otherwise largely neglected in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Like many artists of his generation, Fassbinder had become skeptical of the Brechtian premise that art could tell truths that would shatter the false consciousness of the oppressed and thereby precipitate social change. His interest in the persistence and variability of power and domination, in complicity and masochism, led him to experiment with popular and political dramaturgies, styles, and genres, from Brechtian defamiliarized acting and the anti-Brechtian Critical Volksstück to melodrama and camp (Sieg).[1] Fassbinder's thematic and formal repertoire, which ranged from camp spectacles such as *Die bitteren Tränen der Petra von Kant* (*The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant*, 1972) to socially critical treatments of racialized labor, accounts for his continued appeal to multiple audiences. His experimental mixing of political styles made his work attractive to contemporary critics and artists grappling with the continuing challenge of 'decolonizing' abiding structures of racialized feeling and perception. Nonetheless, the politics of race in films like *Katzelmacher* (1969), *Angst essen Seele auf* (*Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*, 1974) and *Whity* (1970) also came under scrutiny in the past decade (Layne; Mennel; Nagl and Blankenship; O'Sickey; Sieg 2002). In particular, the theoretical discussion of Fassbinder's aesthetics sought to assess the relationship between the politics of racialized desire on screen and the biographical and social context of filmmaking. It is well known that two of Fassbinder's three long-term relationships were, respectively, with the Afro German actor Günter Kaufmann, who starred in *Whity*, and the Moroccan-born El Hedi ben Salem, who played the title role in *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*. If we assume that Fassbinder's films were inspired by his desire for these men, it is nevertheless unclear whether work on the films duplicated or suspended racial class dependencies, and whether these social relations left any traces in the final product. Ben Salem's and Kaufmann's working class background and aspirations for upward social mobility and professional acting opportunities through their intimate relationship with Fassbinder suggest that the films enacted rather than worked through racialized class differences. Barabara Mennel, in an astute essay on the racial politics of *Ali*, notes a peculiar tension between Fassbinder's professed antiracist politics and the characters in the films, on the one hand, and the way in which the camerawork allows and invites racist pleasures, on the other. She

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[1] For a discussion of the politics of the Critical Volksstück, a genre modeled on the dramas of Marieluise Fleisser and Ödön von Horvàth from the 1920s by artists like Franz Xaver Kroetz, Martin Sperr, and Rainer Werner Fassbinder, see Cocalis; chapter four in Sieg 2002.

concludes: "…the question of whether these kinds of representations signify a process of working through or acting out on Fassbinder's part, or whether Fassbinder empties stereotypes to deconstruct them, or whether he reaffirms them, is still contested" (Mennel 204).

Fassbinder's reception parallels much-discussed controversies in queer studies, which were catalyzed by the works of Victorian photographer Arthur Munby, French author and playwright Jean Genet, and American photographer Robert Mapplethorpe, whose stories and images were similarly informed by the artists' sexual orientation and interracial relationships.[2] Since the 1990s, sexually charged representations of racial difference in these artists' works have no longer been read simply as evidence of social acceptance and political solidarity, which could furnish potential models for the multicultural sensibilities and requirements of our own time.[3] Instead, queer scholarship in particular has engaged with this set of works to figure out whether and how eroticized, sympathetic images of a racialized Other may in fact archive more conflicted, politically problematic impulses.[4] Grappling with specific cinematic dramaturgies and compositions has become a way of working through the mediatized archeology of the present to ask how race is produced and reproduced as a "structure of feeling" (Raymond Williams) through cultural texts and practices. Yet these kinds of critical questions have been posed towards Fassbinder's work not only from within academia. Perhaps due to their very ambiguity, Fassbinder's films offer compelling objects of attachment and resignification for contemporary artists of color working in Germany, including two Berlin-based artists whose work shall be the primary focus of this investigation. Two video installations by Ming Wong (*1971) and one by Branwen Okpako (*1969) engage films by Fassbinder as productive intertexts for their own artistic reflections on racial oppression, solidarity, and desire in contemporary Germany.

Wong, born in Singapore to Chinese-speaking parents, received graduate training in art and digital media in London and moved to Berlin in 2007. The pieces I will discuss here—*Lerne Deutsch mit Petra von Kant* (*Learn German with Petra von Kant*, 2007) and *Angst Essen/Eat Fear* (2008)—were made following his relocation to Berlin. They form part of the artist's sustained engagement with racialized, often queer identities in the form of drag reenactments of scenes from key exemplars of global art cinema. By playing a broad range of Fassbinder's iconic characters himself, but excerpting only dramatic highlights from Fassbinder's films and looping these on video screens and the Internet, Wong appropriates and extends Fassbinder's analysis,

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[2] The work of German artists Hubert Fichte and Ulrike Ottinger has received some critical attention along similar lines (Sieg 2002).

[3] Munby, who photographed his wife, the domestic servant Hannah Cullwick, has been discussed extensively in Ann McClintock, but also in Lorenz, and Lorenz and Kuster. Genet's anticolonial, queer politics are examined by Said; Kobena Mercer's groundbreaking essays on Mapplethorpe raised the problem of the white photographer's fetishizing gaze but also arrived at a skeptical assessment of the notion of the gaze (see note 2)

[4] The writing of Black British critic and filmmaker Kobena Mercer on Mapplethorpe's depictions of black men first articulated skepticism about what he interpreted (by borrowing from feminist film theory) as a fetishizing, white gaze and thus opened up a different way of theorizing the politics of such images. However, Mercer later famously reconsidered his critique, because it had put disproportionate weight on the power of the cinematic apparatus to shape viewers' responses and interpellate them as white and racist. Mercer's second essay thus initiated another shift, which was political as well as methodological, since it not only situated photographer and models as part of a shared subculture of queer men with AIDS, but modified the notion of objectification through rigorous historicization and ethnography. His move emblematized developments in film studies, which overall has also tempered the totalizing, deterministic tendencies of apparatus-centered film theory.

forcing camp, drag, and the critique of racism into the same frame in new and constructive ways. Branwen Okpako, in turn, was born in Lagos/Nigeria in 1969, studied political science in the UK, and during the 1990s enrolled in the Deutsche Film und Fernsehakademie in Berlin, the city where she now lives and works. She is best known for her two documentaries *Dreckfresser* (*Dirt Eater*, 2000) and *The Education of Auma Obama* (2011), and her feature film *Tal der Ahnungslosen* (*Valley of the Clueless*, 2003).[5] Her installation *Seh ich was, was du nicht siehst?* (*Do I see something you don't?*, 2002), which I examine later in this article, was first shown at a festival of digital arts in east Germany, and more recently exhibited in Berlin (2013) and Washington, DC (2014). These two artists confront what remains promising and troubling about Fassbinder's cinematic fantasies, which were shaped by the artist's intimate involvement with men of color on the one hand, and by his leftist, antifascist commitments on the other.

Fassbinder incorporated racial difference into cinematic fantasies that were fuelled by inequalities of social power, to create scenarios that intensified and aesthetically heightened white dominance and black submission. His early plays and films largely conformed to the dramaturgy of the Critical Volksstück. This style of political theater sought to build up pressure in order to catalyze and fuel change outside of the theater. *Katzelmacher*, first performed as a play and then adapted to film, best exemplifies this dramaturgy: it confronted viewers with exaggerated, silent social tableaux in which the positions and postures of German villagers confronting a newly arrived Greek laborer spell out social relations of inclusion and exclusion. Moreover, Fassbinder's choice to cast himself as the guestworker Jorgos, which I have discussed elsewhere in terms of 'ethnic drag,' denaturalizes racial difference, because his doughy, pasty body fails to warrant any of the racial truths that the Bavarian villagers project onto the foreign worker.[6]

While the films of the early 1970s that are of interest to Wong and Okpako continued to feature the silent social tableaux derived from the Critical Volksstück, they also more centrally engaged the *cinematic* archive, and began to consider the political potential of camp, melodrama, and other film genres. In addition, they featured actors of color. *Bitter Tears* eschewed a feminist rhetoric of equality in favor of camp spectacle and feminine artifice. Though not overtly about race, the film, which dramatizes a lesbian love triangle of sorts between a fashion designer, a model, and the designer's servant, was read as allegorizing Fassbinder's own troubled relationships with Günther Kaufmann, an Afro German actor and the object of his unrequited desire, and the film composer Peer Raben, Fassbinder's long-term collaborator and also short-term lover. The displacement of race to the biographical subtext and the camping up of gender raises the question: what are the consequences of appropriating camp, high melodrama, and masochism for the dramatization of race and immigration? Can such an appropriation dismantle national or racialized

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[5] While Wong has begun to attract critical attention during the past two years, Wong and Okpako have yet to achieve wide recognation among scholars and general audiences. See Fenner for a comprehensive bibliography on Okpako and a complete filmography.

[6] While the guestworker himself does not protest against racism, the play/film *Katzelmacher* nevertheless condemned what I have elsewhere termed the "violent white gaze" (Sieg 2002). Jorgos emblematizes the Critical Volksstück's rejection of the Brechtian faith in the class-conscious actor who can see—and work—through oppressive social roles. However, ethnic drag in this instance fails to correct Brecht's own delimiting of the defamiliarization-effect to the critical European theater. For a detailed examination of the political potential and limitations of Fassbinder's adaptation of the Critical Volksstück, see Sieg 2002.

identities in analogous fashion to how *Bitter Tears* dismantles gender? This is the question taken up by Ming Wong's remake, *Learn German.*

Ali, which dramatizes the marriage between a Moroccan guestworker and an older German woman, told a similar story as *Katzelmacher*, but cast the buff and hypermasculine El Hedi ben Salem, Fassbinder's Moroccan-born lover at the time, in the title role. Mennel argues that the way in which his body is eroticized on screen serves to fetishize racial difference. Moreover, she reads the film's emphasis on stillness and its many 'frozen' scenes as inviting masochistic delight and summoning spectators to "invest the scene with fantasy and find pleasure in the suspense" (Mennel 194)—a damning judgment about a film that ostensibly condemns racialized exploitation and suffering. Wong's remake, *Eat Fear*, hones in on, and subtly revises, the very features that Mennel identifies as the hallmarks of a masochist aesthetic and the sources of the film's troubling political ambiguity. Finally, the western *Whity* (1970) brought a queer s/m sensibility to bear on a story of racial oppression. Perhaps because it combined different modes of socially critical aesthetics that were attached to homosexuality and race respectively, it was long ignored by audiences and critics. Okpako's installation *Do I see something?* highlights the underappreciated potential of *Whity*'s refashioning of racist mythologies and nostalgic longings for white domination. But the installation also brings to the forefront the question of agency for artists of color, who work in cultural institutions marked by racial hierarchies that remain disavowed. *Do I see something?* calls into question the tendency to conflate Kaufmann's portrayal of a masochistic Uncle Tom character with his amorous relationship to Fassbinder, or with the domination of black by white Germans *tout court*.

The reworking of Fassbinder's films within the genre of the video installation "remediates" cinematic fantasies of race in the double sense of the word: (a) as a transposition of one medium that has historically shaped racial feeling into another, and (b) in "correcting" or "redressing" the injuries perpetrated against racialized populations. In their mapping of the different meanings of *remediation*, media scholars David Bolter and Richard Grusin note the aggressive subtext that haunts digital media's incorporation and repurposing of older media (Bolter and Grusin 341). They explain the conceit of digital media to "improve" on older, analog media by the new media's greater capacity to efface the operations of the representational apparatus (340) and thereby generate "immediacy." However, they also point to the competing logic of "hypermediacy" which "acknowledges multiple acts of representation and makes them visible" (328). The remediations undertaken by Wong and Okpako are characterized by hypermediacy. By moving the screen from the black box of the movie theater into the white cube of embodied performance in gallery spaces, they transpose the analog medium of film into that of digital video. Moreover, by critically engaging German film as a repository of racial feeling, the three video installations I will discuss here remedy troubling aspects of Fassbinder's cinema and present their emendations as both homage and critique. The installations call attention to the act of watching as medium- and site-specific practice, while also bringing into view changes in the conditions of cultural production and reception, audience demographics, and spectatorship. They thereby open up a critical, particularist look at how race functions differently in specific geopolitical locations, historical moments, and media.

Remedying Performances of Germanness in *Learn German with Petra von Kant*

Fassbinder's *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant* (1972) tells the story of high-fashion designer Petra von Kant (Margit Carstensen), who meets and falls for the voluptuous and opportunistic model Karin (Hanna Schygulla) only to be subsequently abandoned by her. Meanwhile, the dour, silent servant Marlene (Irm Hermann), who does all the work around the flat (including fashion designing), intently watches the unfolding drama. Once Petra recovers from her lovesickness and returns her attentions to Marlene, the latter leaves her. The film is set in a baroquely decorated designer loft that can be read as a model of queer camp aesthetics: the heightened theatricality of the costumes, make-up, and language, the protagonist's vacillation between hysteria and pathos, and the homosexual *amour fou* at the center of the plot bear out an interpretation of the film as a high-camp exploration of sexually charged power differences in rituals of dominance and devotion, bondage and abandon. Its emphasis on femininity as artifice, masquerade, and excess operates in comic juxtaposition, moreover, to Petra's professed commitment to principles of equality and sincerity associated with second-wave feminism. While the dialogue juxtaposes this dogma to a more traditional, patriarchal mode of femininity embodied by Petra's friend Sidonie, the film's camp sensibility also proposes an alternative to this patriarchal-feminist dichotomy, one that exposes "womanliness as a masquerade" (Joan Riviere), and *plays with* power differences rather than leveling them—especially in the rituals of class performed in the games between the servant Marlene and her mistress Petra. Such a camp aesthetic, catalyzed by gender and sexuality in *Bitter Tears*, diverged from the filmic deconstruction of nationality and race exemplified in both Fassbinder's earlier *Katzelmacher* and his later *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*.

Ming Wong's remake, titled *Learn German,* premiered as a ten-minute, single-channel video installation that presents scenes excerpted from *Bitter Tears*' fourth act.[7] Wong casts himself as Petra sitting by the phone, waiting for her ex-lover to call

Figure 1: Ming Wong, Excerpt from *Learn German with Petra von Kant*, 2007;
http://www.mingwong.org/index.php?/project/lerne-deutsch-mit-petra-von-kant-video/

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[7] Later exhibitions of this installation in non-German speaking countries, as well as the version posted on Ming Wong's website, would remedy audiences' lack of familiarity with the original film, with Fassbinder's overall work, or with the German language, by screening Fassbinder's *Bitter Tears* on a small TV set next to Ming Wong's video projected onto a larger screen (email communication with the artist, July 18, 2013).

and drinking herself into a volatile state. The character careens between rage and yearning, in turn pleading to be loved and lashing out at those around her. Attired in a long, green satin dress, a large red corsage worn around his neck, and short blond wig, Ming Wong delivers his performance against a simple white background and dingy beige carpet, with only a few props: a telephone, a bottle of gin, and a tray with a tea service. Whereas in Fassbinder's film the scene includes other characters (Petra's daughter, mother, friend, and Marlene), Wong delivers a solo performance. *Learn German* juxtaposes his visibly Asian body to the camp femininity of *Bitter Tears*, and contrasts the poor means of an itinerant artist with Fassbinder's richly resourced film. However, Wong's video installation does not merely *add* race, class, and nationality to the camping-up of gender, but throws into doubt camp's ability to evacuate social differences and hierarchies. While spectators may laugh about Petra's exaggerated femininity and delight in the way camp puts gender in quotation marks, the satin gown and blond wig also read as class and racial signifiers that do not yield the same pleasures when held at a distance from the artist's body. Instead, they read as painful and uncomfortable signs of social differences and hierarchies. Wong's drag may highlight Petra's whiteness as a previously implicit aspect of her nationality, or of her identity as an artist, but his masquerade of whiteness does not (or does not only) register as camp. His costume and make-up, indeed the entire installation are haunted by the specter of the parvenu, the wannabe, which has historically bedeviled artists crossing "up." Wong thus exposes the false universalism of camp as a technique of subversion, to which certain bodies do not have access.

The installation's title invites us to consider what is German about the love story of Petra von Kant, and why Wong chose this particular film—rather than others by Fassbinder that forefront German history and identity more centrally—to stage a process of acculturation. One clue can be found on Wong's website, where he contextualizes his video installation with reference to the situation in which he expected to find himself in the unfamiliar city of Berlin, to which he was about to move:

> With this work the artist rehearses going through the motions and emotions and articulating the words for situations that he believes he may encounter when he moves to Berlin as a post-35-year-old, single, gay, ethnic-minority mid-career artist - i.e. feeling bitter, desperate, or washed up. ("Ich bin im Arsch")

> With these tools, he will be armed with the right words and modes of expressions to communicate his feelings effectively to his potential German compatriots.

Wong's move to Berlin was not solely motivated by the attractive prospect of a residency at the Künstlerhaus Bethanien, where he had obtained a fellowship at a time when Berlin was seeking to rival more established hotspots of global contemporary art such as New York and London; he also realized that he could no longer afford to live in London.[8] In light of his statement, the imperative mode of the title of his piece suggests a sense of compulsion caused by economic necessity. In addition, it alludes to one aspect of the German Immigration Law of 2005, which mandates "pre-

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[8] See the interview with Wong in http://www.initiartmagazine.com/interview.php?IVarchive=12 (accessed June 18, 2012).

integrative" German lessons for non-EU nationals who wish to apply for a visa.[9] Even as his work is committed to complicating and deconstructing identity categories, *Learn German with Petra von Kant* thus brings into view the coercive monolingualism created by nationalist policies.

The work also figures in the unacknowledged ethno-racial presumptions of the global art market: as art scholar Joan Kee points out, the major players of global contemporary art are likely to have gone to the same schools and read the same books, yet artists of color, even when they are educated in the same institutions, are still expected to perform the racialized identities that postmodern, "global art" has purportedly rendered obsolete (Kee 263). Wong recontextualizes Petra von Kant's drama of abjection, yearning, and aggression as a drama of professional anxiety in the context of migration. He distills the grand affects of the film's climactic sequence, but recontextualizes them to thematize the unresolved contradictions of identity in an art world contemptuous of a supposedly outmoded identity politics, and hence of the display of suffering or protest. Petra's intense emotions are appropriated for a staging of the conditions under which a Chinese-speaking artist from Singapore is at once ethnicized and also refuses that ethnicization. Conversely, *Bitter Tears'* circulation in the "universalist" frameworks of global art cinema and in the similarly decontextualized arena of transnational queer cinema is particularized as "German" in Wong's installation. At a time when the new, controversial integration tests adopted by some German states signaled that not all prospective immigrants were presumed able or willing to integrate, many critics feared the insistence on language learning might cloak deeper, essentialist suspicions about immigrants.[10] The meritocratic monolingualism mandated by the German immigration law of 2005 thus becomes a metaphor for the false universalism and aesthetic monolingualism of the field of global contemporary art.[11]

The transformation of *Bitter Tears* into a one-person performance crucially alters the triangular structure of Fassbinder's film, whose *mise-en-scène* is organized around the gaze of the silent servant Marlene as the privileged spectator of Petra's theatrics, which are ostensibly about the trashy Karin. Marlene's longing glances at her mistress evidence her appreciation for Petra's performance, and her prompt attention to Petra's stream of orders signal a masochist aesthetics that hinges on *her* agency to set the terms of the relationship and reject proposed changes, such as Petra's request for an egalitarian relationship at the end of the film. Ming Wong rotates the film's top-bottom axis, which hinges on Marlene's scopophilic pleasure, from an on-screen dynamic to one that involves actor and spectator. Ming Wong performs Petra for us, just as Petra performed for Marlene. In Fassbinder's film, Marlene's departure remains part of the diegesis, and suggests that either she—or Petra—will find new

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[9] The law's ostensible purpose was to prevent *Zwangsehen* (forced marriages) between German nationals with a migration background, and spouses from their country of origin or that of their parents or grandparents. Interposing the work of learning German between German national and foreign spouse, the law sought to operate as a prophylactic preventing the illegitimate production of an increasingly polyglot and multicultural German populace through traditional, coercive sexual relations. The ideal of a monolingual nation, in turn, became wedded to modern, consensual heterosexual marriage, as well as homosexual registered partnerships.

[10] The integration test adopted by Baden-Württemberg was regarded as particularly controversial. Critics pointed to the way in which immigrants were presumed to be hostile to gender and sexual equality.

[11] For a critique of monolingualism in literature, see Yildiz 2011. On the issue of German language learning, citizenship, belonging, and racialization, see Linke 2004.

partners for their games of dominance and submission, or that a less conflict-ridden script holds no interest for the cinema. By contrast, Wong's installation implicitly asks spectators to respond to his drama of subjection. One response might be to question or protest the unequal terms under which he participates in international artistic exchange. Whereas in the film Marlene had refused to do so, the video holds out the possibility of changing the rules of the game, and of releasing spectators from the masochist relationship. It thereby throws into relief both the possibilities and the limitations of camp as Fassbinder's signature contribution to art cinema's dramaturgy

Figure 2: Petra (Margit Carstensen), all dressed up for her first date with Karin, being inspected by Marlene (Irm Hermann). Still from Fassbinder, *Die bitteren Tränen der Petra von Kant*, 1972.

and mode of spectatorship at that time. In an article on transnational video art that includes a discussion of Wong's *Learn German*, Feng-Mei Heberer has very perceptively argued that Wong's drag reenactment of a now-dated melodramatic vocabulary suspends "the necessity of suffering in trying to belong [that is] so prevalent in Fassbinder's […] work" (Heberer 122). While Fassbinder's appropriation of melodrama politicized melodrama's naturalization of suffering by underscoring the pain of (national) belonging, *Bitter Tears*' affective economy remained wedded to the reproduction of racialized identities and relations. I agree with Heberer's characterization of Wong's *Learn German* as an attempt to "continue" and "critically expand" Fassbinder's political project (Heberer 123), rather than reject it outright. Wong's drag reenactment of Petra's high-camp anguish historicizes and denaturalizes this suffering, and thereby releases contemporary spectators from the white, masochist gaze.

Wong created *Learn German* while he was still in London, and first displayed it there. His website reveals that the piece is among his most popular. I myself saw it during the temporary exhibition *Kunstinvasion* (*Art Invasion*, 2008) in a

decommissioned flower market in Berlin-Kreuzberg.[12] The motto of the event, which opened for two days only and presented works by about sixty, mostly German artists was—appropriately enough—*Flüchtigkeit* (ephemerality).[13] Unlike more cinematic video art, which was displayed on large screens in the dark basement, *Learn German* was installed on the building's well-lit main floor, jostling for viewers' attention with numerous sculptural pieces, photographs, sound installations, and performances. Visitors could glimpse Ming Wong's video on a small, old-fashioned box television set either while strolling through the vast, open space, or, if they were intrigued enough to watch the entire ten-minute loop, crouch down on a white shag rug that appeared to be a cheap version of the one in Fassbinder's original. The rug both extended the screened space into the hall, and subtly highlighted the class difference between original and reenactment, as well as between the performer's space and that occupied by the viewer. Across this gap, the small dimensions and placement of the monitor on the floor, moreover, brought the bodies of those willing to give Wong/Petra their attention into close alignment with hers. By thus enforcing an

Figure 3: *Ming Wong's video installation Lerne Deutsch at Kunstinvasion, Berlin, 2008.*[14]

empathetic if uncomfortable pose, the installation made palpable both Petra's and Wong's distress. The setting, one in which Wong's modest installation competed with many other art works, helped recontextualize Petra's nervous breakdown as that of an aging, foreign artist's professional crisis, dramatizing his fear of failure and yearning for acceptance and fame. But his dramatized anxiety in turn also served to recontextualize the kind of festivalized urban space epitomized by *Kunstinvasion*, which—like many other such temporary usages of public buildings—sought to advertise postindustrial Berlin as an exciting, creative city in constant, rapid metamorphosis. The shabbiness of the battered TV set and the cheap rug clashed with the neoliberal discourse of urban reconstruction, and flagged the economic and social

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[12] At the time, there were plans for using the former flower market as a permanent art gallery; it has since been converted by Daniel Libeskind and integrated into the architectural ensemble of the Jewish Museum on Lindenstrasse. Today it houses the Jüdische Akademie Berlin.

[13] Kunstinvasion was one of a number of spectacular, artistic *Zwischennutzungen* (temporary usages) of publicly owned buildings during the 2000s, which were designed to prompt discussions about the use of public space, raise awareness of Berlin as a prime site for the arts, and advertise the city as a dynamic, constantly evolving destination for tourists and investors. Some of the most spectacular Zwischennutzungen took place in the former Staatsbank in Französische Strasse, the former Postfuhramt in Oranienstrasse, and the former Palast der Republik.

[14] The author has made every effort to contact the copyright owner of this image. Please contact her with further information at ks253@georgetown.edu.

vulnerability the much-touted "creative economy" imposes on those positioned as its main agents.[15] On the eve of the great recession, Wong's installation allowed spectators to consume precarity as spectacle and experience the toll these forms of labor take from the situated perspective of the creative, migrant worker.

Angst Essen / Eat Fear as a Critique of Universalism

Ming Wong produced *Eat Fear* as a single-channel, 27-minute video installation and showed it at the Künstlerhaus Bethanien in Berlin-Kreuzberg as a solo exhibition in June 2008, at the conclusion of his year-long residency. Since then, the piece has screened in Germany and internationally, most recently at Fassbinder JETZT (Fassbinder NOW), an exhibition of video art inspired by the filmmaker at the Deutsches Filmmuseum in Frankfurt/Main. A shorter version of *Angst Essen* is posted on his website and YouTube. In the following, I explore how Wong's reenactment of Fassbinder's *Ali: Fear eats the Soul* unmakes the film's masochist aesthetics, which had physically arrested oppressive social dynamics, frozen them into poses, and compelled their endless repetition.

In her ground-shifting reading of Fassbinder's *Ali*, Barbara Mennel demonstrates how the melodramatic love story of Emmi, an older German woman, and her much younger husband Ali functions as a humanist protest against racial discrimination that is nonetheless undermined by the racial fetishization of Ali, who was portrayed by Fassbinder's then-lover, El Hedi ben Salem. Ali's fetishization hinges on his progressive "unveiling": he is the only character in the film whose body is shown, several times, in the nude. The camera's lingering on his genitals illustrates the racist fantasy according to which "the Negro is eclipsed. He is turned into a penis. He is a penis," in the words of Frantz Fanon (quoted in Mennel 199); Mennel underscores how troubling this is in a film that purports to condemn racism. Wong's *Eat Fear* calls attention to the disavowed racial fantasy structuring Ali's positioning as mute, hypersexualized object, while his white German wife, who tends to Ali's victimized body, gives expression to, and thereby displaces, the victimization of the racialized foreign worker. This displacement of victim status from Ali to Emmi is made possible both by the camera's fetishization of Ali's body while his face remains blank, and its focus on Emmi's emotionally expressive face. Key to this transfer of spectatorial empathy was the contrast between Brigitte Mira, an accomplished theater and film actor, whose portrayal of Emmi sharply differed from the blank-faced style adopted by the rest of the cast, including ben Salem.

Two scenes from Wong's installation illustrate the potential of the remake to undo both the racial fetishization and the narrative orchestration of identifications that previously enabled the enactment of a revisionist fantasy of German guilt. In a much-discussed scene in Fassbinder's *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*, Emmi invites her colleagues, whose approval she craves, to ogle and touch her husband; their comments about his cleanliness, soft skin, and muscular physique reduce Ali to a sexual object, and after initially humoring them, he eventually stalks off and leaves the apartment. The scene uncomfortably mirrors spectators' own voyeurist enjoyment of Ali's body, but then focuses on Emmi's distress after Ali leaves, and dwells on her weeping in shame. Wong's *Eat Fear*, by contrast, ends the scene with Emmi's betrayal of Ali, as she

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Figure 4: Ming Wong, excerpt from *Angst Essen / Eat Fear*, 2008.
Clip available at http://transit.berkeley.edu/2014/sieg/

explains his abrupt departure to her colleagues as originating in Ali's "foreign mentality." The women's leering is not only self-reflectively highlighted for spectators as the performance of a racist gaze, but Emmi's remorse for her complicity is not allowed to blunt the indictment of that gaze. Similarly, the last scene of *Eat Fear* blocks the shift of identification and empathy from Ali to Emmi, who sits by his hospital bed following his collapse from what the physician diagnoses as a psychosomatic illness. Whereas in *Ali*, the camera dwells on her sorrowful face, Ming as Emmi turns his face away from the camera, so that the focus remains on Ali. Throughout *Eat Fear*, Wong portrays Emmi in a style much closer to the deadpan look or stylized emotions of the other characters, thus forestalling her ability to monopolize suffering and empathy. In short, the video's editing and subtle changes in composition prevent the narrative from undermining the staging of race as spectacle and racism as a disease.

Moreover, Wong's adoption of drag, which extends to all the German characters in the film, captures each character without making the actor disappear into the gendered or racialized role. Wong's masquerade as Ali fails to warrant the character's hypermasculinity the way ben Salem's body had in Fassbinder's film; the disjunction between Wong's slender body and hypersexual role, which characterizes drag, helps underscore the fetishizing gaze of the German women, while at the same time blocking the racist pleasures awarded by the camera. Wong's impersonation of German women in this scene underscores the performance of race through relations of looking, in the same way *Katzelmacher* had. That film's critique of the violent white gaze had been short-circuited because racism was attributed to lower-class, culturally backward, rural Germans positioned as inferior to the urbane spectators of Fassbinder's drama. In other words, the orchestration of identification and critique hinged in part on class stereotypes that exempted most spectators from self-reflection. Not only does Wong's German drag in this scene manage to render whiteness performative in a way that neither the Brechtian theater nor the Critical Volksstück (whose practitioners regarded it as a corrective to Brecht) had succeeded in doing; the setting of this scene in a sparsely furnished *Altbauwohnung* also includes the urban creative class in its address, rather then letting them off the hook as had the Critical

Volksstück.[16] Whereas Ali's theme song "Black Gypsy," as Mennel points out, underscores his exotic difference and subsumes it under an undifferentiated blackness that leaves his subjectivity inaccessible, Wong's installation of *Eat Fear* at the Künstlerhaus Bethanien and on his website situates the figure of Ali in proximity to Turkish labor migration and restores to it a historical specificity that works against the spectacle of mythic black masculinity. *Eat Fear* thus accomplishes what the Brechtian theater and its alternative, the Critical Volksstück, had failed to attain.

Fassbinder's film progressively unclothes and exposes the protagonist's body, but undermines any critique of white voyeurism and projection, first by suggesting that Ali narcissistically enjoys his own sexual exposure and, finally, by stripping for the camera, volunteering to confirm the fiction of the big black penis. In the early 1990s, Al LaValley had naively praised the unveiling of the studly Ben Salem as a sign of gay desire and empowerment (LaValley 120-21). By contrast, Wong's *Eat Fear* reenacts the exposure of Ali's nude body without either suggesting Ali's complicity or confirming the racist fantasy of the big black penis. Wong's choice to wear a prosthetic penis in the strip scene allows him to capture and expose the racist gaze without confirming the fiction of black hypermasculinity. The awkward and

Figure 5: Still from Ming Wong, *Eat Fear / Angst Essen* (2008).

Figure 6: Ming Wong, Still from *Eat Fear* (2008).

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[16] For detailed critiques of the politics of the Critical Volksstück, see Cocalis; Sieg 2002.

lackluster heterosexual intercourse that follows allows for a queer reading—and it frees this queer look at sex from the earlier racial fetishism. Wong's remake thus opens a connection between queer and interracial kinds of love, and between queer and anti-racist critiques of Germanness that had been foreclosed by ben Salem's positioning as mute black stud. This intervention is all the more urgent today, when sexual and racialized minorities have drastically different access to discourses of national, European, and more generally "western-democratic" belonging. Tensions between German gay men and Turkish immigrants, for example, escalated into heated accusations of Muslim homophobia right around the time when Ming Wong moved to Kreuzberg, the home of both queer and immigrant populations.[17] His remake allows for the examination of gay complicity with German racism and orientalism.

Wong's drag reenactment of the fetishizing gaze calls attention to the eroticization of racial difference and *integrates it* in the anti-racist critique for which Fassbinder's film is famous, but which it does not quite deserve, as Mennel demonstrates. Its editing disrupts the narrative centrality of Emmi's sentimentality in this post-fascist drama of German guilt, and instead retains the focus on the figure of Ali. While it does not elaborate Ali's subjectivity, the installation restores historical referentiality to this character by situating it in a new context. The primary accomplishment of this reenactment, I argue, is that it clears a path for spectatorial identification with Ali as one of the positions in this cinematic fantasy of racial difference, desire, and victimization. Wong's donning of all the roles in this scenario—not in the mode of camp or parody, but in the mode of identification—makes literal the operations of fantasy, and mobilizes its political potential to work through sexual and racial power relations. Last but not least, *Angst Essen/Eat Fear* offers a vehicle for queer identification without simultaneously interpellating spectators into racial fetishism; as such, it opens up possibilities for solidarity between antiracist and queer projects that had previously been blocked.

The single-channel installation was shown on a large wall-sized screen in the otherwise empty Gallery 2 of Künstlerhaus Bethanien, a simple white cube that was darkened for this installation. In formal terms, this makes *Eat Fear* a "cinematic video installation" in contrast to *Learn German*'s sculptural installation on a small, antique television monitor.[18] Scholars have discussed the cinematic video installation as a

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[17] In spring and summer of 2008, several attacks on LGBT youth by young immigrants, and the publication of a homophobic article by the immigrant newspaper al-Salam, led to German gay and lesbian organizations' accusations of homophobia on the part of Muslims, and immigrant organizations' accusation of racism on the part of German gays and lesbians. In fall of 2008, a series of public discussion and roundtables sought to address and allay the conflict, which continues to fester, however. In summer of 2010, Judith Butler explained her refusal to accept the Award for Civil Courage at the gay parade (Christopher Street Day) in Berlin with the sponsoring organization's "complicity with racism," which she condemned. Her speech called for solidarity with queers of color in Germany and elsewhere. In July 2013, more fuel was added to the conflict when Berlin's gay mayor Klaus Wowereit brought a suit against Turkish-German rapper Bushido for his sexist, homophobic lyrics in the song "Stress ohne Grund," which was put on the index of cultural products endangering the youth. See Haritaworn and Petzen for a detailed discussion of the discourse of Muslim homophobia.

[18] Other pieces by Wong, which also use large screens, are realized as sculptural installations, such as his *Death in Venice, Chinatown,* and *Life of Imitation*: they surround the viewer with screens and create three-dimensional environments, forcing the viewer to move through space. A good example is the installation of Chinatown at Redcat Gallery in Los Angeles, of which a walk-through is available on YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=33sgsE96T5I. *Death in Venice* was mounted on three screens, two large ones and one small one. Viewers were sandwiched between the two large screens, requiring them to pivot between them, never able to view both at the same time.

**Figure 7: Ming Wong, *Angst Essen*, exhibition Gallery 2, Künstlerhaus Bethanien, 2008.
By permission of Künstlerhaus Bethanien.**

merging of, or dynamic interchange between, the two media in terms of aesthetics and institutional context (Kim 128). *Eat Fear* illustrates the blurring of the white cube of video art with the black box of cinema, exemplifying how art cinema, and indeed the wider cinematic imagination, have penetrated other cultural spaces, and assimilated cinematic techniques into video art. When compared to *Learn German,* the much higher production values, longer duration, use of a range of indoor and outdoor settings, larger cast of characters, and more sophisticated editing technology (some scenes show Ming Wong occupying several different roles) all underscore the video as self-conscious complement or response to the cinematic original, rather than as its "poor cousin," as it were. But *Angst Essen*'s immersive address also prefigures the vanishing of a critical space outside that which is deconstructed, and which was still available in *Learn German*'s poor, frog's perspective. If the earlier work invited visitors to assume a low-angle perspective onto the art world, and expressed skepticism about global art cinema's capacity to particularize its universalist pretensions, *Eat Fear* locates critique within the artistic media it reworks.

Only one year separates the two installations, yet the events that occurred in the months following Wong's arrival in Berlin provide clues to the evident shift in approach and perspective. In 2007, when Ming Wong moved into his workspace in the Künstlerhaus Bethanien, the place was at the center of fierce debates about the role of art in social transformation processes. In the eyes of local activists, the Künstlerhaus that hosted Wong became identified with the neoliberal politics of the global art market and affected Wong's position as an international artist. Since its founding in 1974, Künstlerhaus Bethanien had resided in a sprawling, former hospital building of the same name, along with many other arts and social associations as well as the municipal government's unemployment and welfare offices. It is a non-profit, international cultural center that annually awards residencies to approximately twenty-five foreign artists, who are funded by a range of international partner

institutions.[19] It hosts and promotes emerging artists from Europe and beyond, offers them workspaces, and helps them establish professional contacts. Many artists who first arrived as fellows have remained in Berlin and contribute to its vibrant art scene. After 2005, when parts of the Bethanien building were squatted by a leftist collective, a conflict developed between the squatters and some of the original tenants, which led to Künstlerhaus Bethanien's move to new premises. The collective had comprised a number of anti-racist and feminist groups, who opposed the neoliberal urban restructuring of the city, the privatization of public property, rising rental costs, and attendant processes of gentrification and displacement. Künstlerhaus Bethanien, perceived to be catering to an elite clientele of international artists and thus complicit with the urban transformation processes the activists condemned, did not fare well in this new environment. The collective established new protocols for determining the use of the space, which proved impractical for the Künstlerhaus Bethanien. Its dedication to providing artists with spaces of their own, and its contractual obligations to international partners prevented it from entering into daily negotiations around space use, and made it appear unwilling to participate in democratic decision-making. The founding of a new exhibition space named Kunstraum Kreuzberg in the Bethanien building cemented the bifurcation of cultural scenes in Kreuzberg.[20] Kunstraum Kreuzberg's permanent collection comprises works by Kreuzberg's residents, and prioritizes overtly political, broadly accessible, and locally produced art.

Although *Eat Fear* does not represent this situation, it nevertheless forms the installation's backdrop and informs the installation format. The stairwell in which Emmi first listens to her fellow cleaning staff's gossip about German sluts who sleep with foreigners, and where she later participates in shunning a Yugoslav cleaner, is the very stairwell leading up to the Künstlerhaus Bethanien offices. Visitors of the

**Figure 8: Ming Wong, *Angst Essen*, Stairwell of Bethanien building;
by permission of Künstlerhaus Bethanien.**

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[19] The German term "gemeinnützig" that describes the legal status of the organization Künstlerhaus Bethanien can be translated as "non-profit association for the public's benefit."
[20] While Berggruen's activity as an investor received predominantly positive coverage in the press, after he bought the venerable, financially foundering department store chain Karstadt, he has more recently been portrayed as only one more "locust" (a derogative term for private equity fund managers) destroying middle-class businesses.

gallery, where *Eat Fear* was first exhibited, might have recognized this setting as part of the Bethanien building; perhaps this was a very subtle hint that bullying and ostracizing were present in the very environment where such behavior was officially condemned. Because international art was regarded as complicit with neoliberal restructuring, and incapable of participating in grassroots democratic processes, the critical perspective on global art that *Learn German* opened up in the low-angle "crawl-space" of the video installation was no longer possible. Socially relevant, critical art was seen as the prerogative of the "local" to which Wong did not (yet) have access.[21]

Do I see something you don't? Spectatorship and the Subversion of Racial Fantasies

Whereas *Ali: Fear eat the Soul* is described as Fassbinder's most popular film on the Fassbinder foundation website, *Whity* is one of his least-known. Although it was the most expensive production at that early stage of Fassbinder's career, it failed to gain a distributor in 1970. Now that it is available on DVD, however, it has begun to attract attention among scholars of German critical race studies.[22] Masochism is present in *Whity* not only as a mode of spectatorship, but also as a theme: the title character (whose actual name is Samuel) is the mixed-race son of a white rancher and enjoys debasing himself socially and sexually before the members of his white family. At the prodding of his white prostitute girlfriend (Hanna Schygulla), he rebels and kills them all at the end, yet his ensuing flight into the desert renders his own survival uncertain. Whity is played by Günther Kaufmann, Fassbinder's love interest at that time. The film is set in the American West and crosses the genre of the patriarchal plantation melodrama (normally set in the Deep South) with those of the Spaghetti Western and Blaxploitation cinema.[23] Whity resembles the 'black studs' that populate Melvin van Peebles' films, including *Sweet Sweetback's Badaasssss Song* (also shot in 1970). The prowess of Blaxploitation protagonists was intended to contrast with the traditional infantilization/castration of black male characters in Hollywood cinema, like those played by Sydney Poitier.[24] At the same time, Whity is portrayed as a sexual bottom who can take all kinds of racist abuse, a veritable queer parody of the Uncle Tom stereotype associated with the nostalgic plantation melodrama. Moreover, his submissiveness, reluctant rebellion, and eventual demise clash with the revolutionary optimism of Black Nationalism and Blaxploitation fantasy, and fall far short of the Spaghetti Western celebration of the outcast's

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[21] In 2010 he participated in a group exhibition of Berlin-based artists at Kunstraum Kreuzberg.

[22] Siegel; Layne; Nagl and Blankenship.

[23] In her excellent, nuanced reading of *Whity*, Priscilla Layne notes the film's uneven concern with historical accuracy: on the one hand, the Southwest setting corrects Hollywoods confinement of slavery to the Deep South. On the other, the presence of two slaves (Whity and his mother Marpessa) after abolition of slavery is inconsistent, as is the use of the term *whity* to denote an "Uncle Tom" character, rather than as a racial slur against Caucasians popularized by the Black Power movement. Nagl and Blankenship likewise note the film's foregrounding of fantasy and disregard for social history.

[24] Black Nationalists like Eldridge Cleaver in *Soul on Ice* (1968) interpreted black hypermasculinity in more political terms. See Moritz Ege for a discussion of German leftist intellectuals' keen interest in the writings of Cleaver, and disregard for Cleaver's sexism (85-92). Nagl and Blankenship note how Fassbinder's early work with Kaufmann in the antitheater's productions of the late 1960s was informed by Cleaver's ideas (522-523).

revenge.[25] *Whity* is consistent with the neo-Marxist dramaturgy evident in *Katzelmacher*, which, as I have discussed above, is characterized by the intensification of contradictions that remain unresolved within the diegesis. Given that *Whity* was produced in the wake of the student and anti-war protests waged in major western and eastern European cities, Priscilla Layne's reading of the film as a historically and geographically displaced reflection on the possibility and failure of revolutionary change seems fully justified (Layne 263). Despite Fassbinder's interest in the Black Power movement, which he shared with the German left, Layne's observation that *Whity* is only secondarily interested in minority politics and concerned mainly with leftist post-revolutionary malaise, is well taken (Layne 263). Layne's essay has fundamentally informed my understanding of the film as a rigorous and formally challenging investigation of white spectators' investment in the racial myths encoded in cinematic genres. *Whity*'s unusual splicing of film genres, its reversal and exaggeration of familiar stereotypes, use of drag by most of the cast, and employment of Brechtian techniques such as interrupting the story through musical numbers that comment on the action, consistently attempt to defamiliarize whiteness and work through nostalgic longings for and paternalistic fantasies about a racist past.

However, *Whity*'s effectiveness as a critique of whiteness was limited in several ways, some inherent in the film, others a result of the historical reception context. First, the Western setting was arguably intended as a distancing effect meant to shed light on "parallels between American slavery and contemporary West German discrimination against and exploitation of racial Others" (Layne 264). Its critique of a racial imaginary that Layne (along with Ege, Nagl, and Blankenship) characterizes as transnational, however, could too easily be subsumed under the common vilification of American racism and imperialism, which allowed Germans to avoid facing their own racial fantasies and practices.[26] Secondly, the well-known off-screen relationship between black star and white director led some critics to collapse the potential of masochism as a political allegory into a mimetic sign for personal and professional dependence. Page R. Laws, for instance, interprets Whity's enjoyment of racist humiliation and corporal punishment at the hand of white characters that include Fassbinder in a cameo appearance, as "an allegory of [*Whity*']s star and director's whole rocky, sexually charged relationship," which in turn is "symbolic of German race relations as a whole" (Laws 245). Laws sees the treatment of a black actor by a white director known for his mercurial temperament, abrasive tone, and demanding work habits as emblematic of an unbroken racial hegemony, rather than as Fassbinder and Kaufmann aligned in the project of parodying—and hence deflating—sexually charged racial stereotypes (Laws 246). Thirdly, *Whity*'s disregard for black subjects may not have provoked protests in 1970, when no Afro German movement existed yet to articulate black Germans' collective interests, but from a contemporary perspective, any critique of whiteness that positions black bodies merely as abstract symbols of revolutionary possibilities is clearly insufficient and requires reconsideration.

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[25] Its refusal to provide cathartic release from social contradictions already tackled by the Spaghetti western and Blaxploitation distinguishes Whity from Quentin Tarantino's *Django Unchained* (2012), which channels anti-racist rage into a violent conflagration, burning down the white plantation owner's home to provide closure.

[26] See Fehrenbach (2005), Poiger (2000), Höhn and Klimke (2010), and Eley (2009) for detailed accounts of how the terminology of 'race' was expunged from official discourse during the postwar period, except for African Americans and Afro Germans, and how the problem of racism became associated with U.S. social policies and culture.

In 2002 the organizers of the Werkleitz Biennial, a digital arts exhibition set in the eastern German village of Werkleitz, chose *Whity* as one of three 'prompts' for artists to engage with race and international relations, along with the 1973 International Festival of Youth and the interrogative phrase "open borders?" The modest hamlet of Werkleitz is only 40 km away from Dessau, where only one year earlier three neo-Nazi youth had attacked and killed Alberto Adriano, a Mozambican who had immigrated to the GDR and resided there for 20 years. The trial had recently concluded. The combination of prompts chosen by the West German curatorial collective seemed to imply that socialist internationalism had failed to inoculate East Germans against racism. Filmmaker Branwen Okpako responded to this invitation with a video installation titled *Do I see something you don't?* She set up her three-channel, sixteen-minute video installation in the emptied village church, where three video screens took the place of the altar.[27] Visitors of the biennial, many of whom were bused in from Berlin, took a seat in a rudimentary living room ensemble replete with a 1950s-era lamp, cheap oriental rug, and shabby sofa facing the digital triptych.

Figure 9: Branwen Okpako, *Seh ich was, was du nicht siehst*? At Werkleitz Biennial, 2002.

The center screen excerpted and looped subtitled clips from *Whity*, while the flanking screens showed the heads of Ernest Allan Hausmann, an Afro German actor, and of Okpako herself watching and commenting on Fassbinder's film. The excerpts on the center screen included the film's opening credit sequence, overlaid with a song; one scene shows the interaction between Whity and his mother in the kitchen, which ends with her calling him 'Whity!' and spitting in his face, after which he very slowly wipes off his face; in the next, he is assaulted by his white father in front of the

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[27] According to the Werkleitz website, Okpako's piece was awarded a special prize by the city of Halle.

assembled family, expecting to be whipped and groveling on the floor. Yet another focuses on Whity being propositioned by his adulterous stepmother, who wants him to kill his white brother. The ominously twisted mammy figure portrayed by Elaine Baker in blackface combine with the zombie-like appearance and blood lust of the white family to upturn any nostalgic vision of a kindly white patriarchy ruling over happy, childlike slaves.[28] In the final scene that Okpako excerpts, Whity visits his
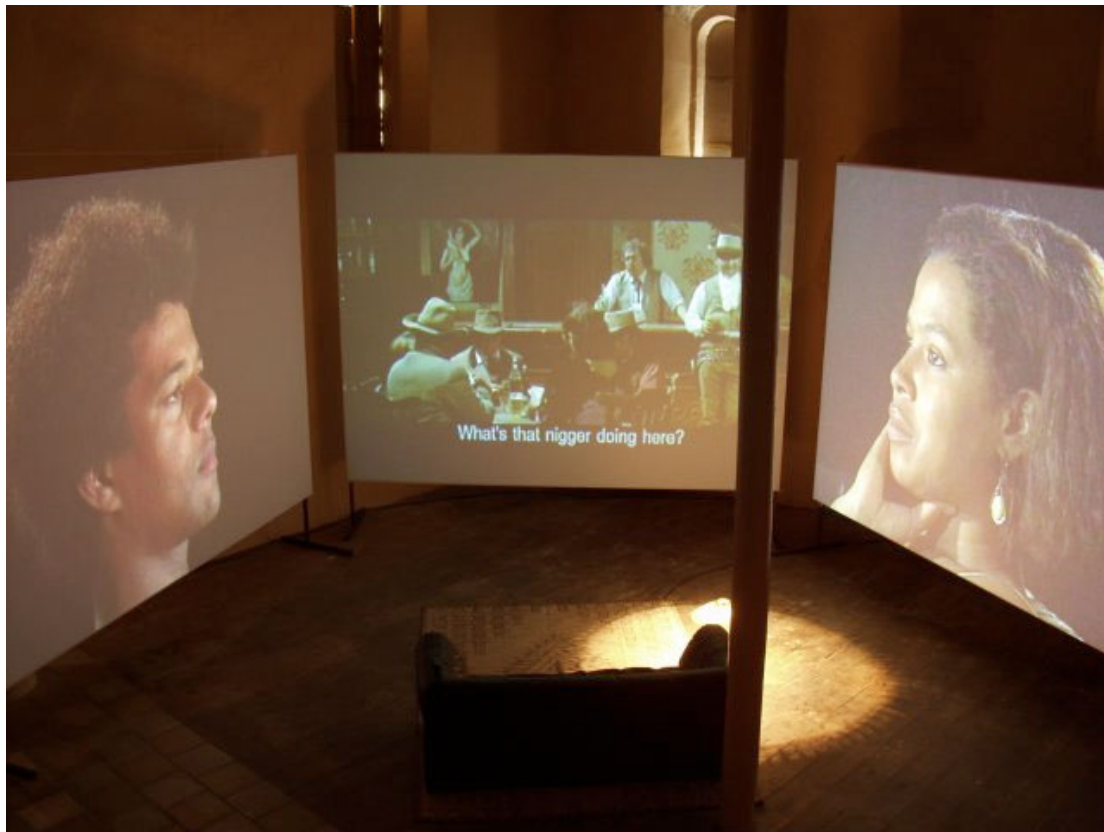

Figure 10: Branwen Okpako, *Seh ich was, was du nicht siehst?* At Werkleitz Biennial, 2002.

girlfriend in a saloon and gets beaten up by white cowboys, one of whom is played by Fassbinder. The video omits most of the film's narrative elements, including Whity's eventual murder of the entire family and subsequent flight to the desert with his girlfriend. What remains are five long, slow sequences, disconnected from each other. They capture Whity's positioning within white supremacist culture as framed respectively by the plantation melodrama (which inherited part of its black personnel from the minstrel show), the Western, and Blaxploitation cinema. How do black spectators watching *Whity* respond to these scenes and characters? And how in turn do their responses (re)frame the film for the viewers of Okpako's installation?

The two heads of Okpako and Hausmann on the flanking screens are arranged in such a way as to give the impression that they are watching both the center screen and each other. Especially during the first half, they appear riveted by the film scenes. Hausmann, who is the more vocal of the two, several times verbalizes the through line of a character or subtext of a scene. For instance, he gives voice to Whity's thoughts, when Whity is shown peering through a window into the bar: "How nice that would be to be in there, to belong." Hausmann's seeming identification with Whity during

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[28] White characters wear a greenish-tinged make-up, and actors had their eyebrows and eyelashes bleached.

this moment elicits a look of mild surprise from Okpako. The pair's verbal and nonverbal responses thus provide clues about their (sometimes divergent) identification with characters and situations. They look absorbed, sometimes amused, other times skeptical. Both glance at each other and snicker, for instance, when Marpessa (Elaine Baker) starts to sing "Glory, Glory Hallelujah," responding derisively to this cliché of the pious slave who is resigned to her fate. "How can he sing when he's dead?" Hausmann comments during the opening sequence, which shows Whity lying motionless, while Kaufmann sings the title song, "I killed them" on the soundtrack. They read Marpessa's song as a parody, and the title sequence as a defamiliarization effect.[29] Hausmann's remark, "He's trying to please. Now he polishes his shoes," identifies what Brecht called the *gestus* of Whity's character. Okpako calls Hausmann's attention to the fact that Baker plays Marpessa in blackface, and points out Fassbinder's cameo in the saloon scene. Their reactions indicate that they are at least as drawn in by the craft of the actors and the filmmaker as they are by the characters and situations. In turn, their responses clarify (for the viewers of the installation) directorial choices and dramaturgical techniques that foreground the film's parodic, campy engagement with racialized cinematic codes. Their comments thus position them as astute viewers of the film's critique of racism. One reviewer, however, felt patronized by such modeling of proficient spectatorship, which illustrates the drawback of the Brechtian approach.[30]

The long duration of the scenes from *Whity* provides Hausmann and Okpako with opportunities to extend the discussion of acting and directing into the present, and away from the screen that prompts their reflections. Hausmann volunteers episodes from his own career in the theater, and speaks about his experience of being viewed— and cast—as an exotic Other. Okpako draws him out, by listening attentively as he confides how difficult it is to raise the subject of race when his white colleagues consider racism a *passé* issue. Beyond the theater, too, he relates moments when he felt like a projection screen for others' racial fears and desires, even as he admits that he is not free from racist stereotypes himself.[31] Whereas Hausmann earlier appeared to identify with the character Whity, his later commentary shows him identifying with Kaufmann as a fellow black German struggling to become a star, and illuminates the difficulty of being cast as a cipher of black desirability. His reflections work against the tendency of critics like Laws, who reduces Kaufmann's performance to an allegory of his troubled relationship with Fassbinder, and accords Kaufmann little agency. Instead, Hausmann's comments historicize Kaufmann's experience as a collective predicament both shared *and* contested by a younger generation of German theater professionals. Together, Kaufmann and Hausmann bring into view the vicissitudes of embodying others' racist and antiracist fantasies, and the professional and social costs of authenticating and contesting racial scripts.

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[29] Layne explains this defamiliarization effect as follows: "*Whity* […] begins with a green screen followed by the credits appearing over a medium close-up of Whity lying seemingly lifeless face-down in the dirt. In Brechtian fashion, this unusual opening eliminates all suspense; for Whity's disembodied voice is heard singing lyrics that foretell the film's violent ending. Here, music is used to break the connection between the devoted slave and the white master, in contrast to how slave spirituals are used in Hollywood plantation melodramas" (267).

[30] The reviewer for the leftist daily *Frankfurter Rundschau* bristled: "as a white spectator you sit on the sofa (church pew?) facing (the triptych) and are shown what 'correct' and somehow authoritative watching looks like" (Kohse). Many Werkleitz visitors, by contrast, found the installation insightful and compelling (it won a special prize). Among the positive reviews to which links are provided on the Werkleitz website, see for instance Hasenfuß.

[31] Kaufmann was still alive at the making of *Do I see something?* and Hausmann knew him.

Okpako's reworking of *Whity* therefore clarifies and revises problematic aspects of Fassbinder's film. Much as Okpako's appropriation highlights what is provocative and radical about *Whity*, her placement of the installation in the Werkleitz church also ironized Fassbinder's status as a deity in the firmament of leftist cinema. Her modest living-room arrangement aligned the pierced urbanites who were bused in to watch *Do I see something you don't?* with the local eastern German villagers who had been deemed in need of a cosmopolitan, anti-racist education through art. By placing the director's cinephile audience in a setting marked as both low-brow and sacral, Okpako invited a more irreverent look at Fassbinder's work.

Like Fassbinder, who carved out a space for himself in the history of cinema through the sophisticated reworking of genres, Okpako in turn reworks Fassbinder. But unlike Fassbinder, her interactions with Hausmann model a style of directing that combines the iconoclastic impulse often considered the hallmark of artistic originality with greater attention to the social and communicative conditions under which new stories can be told. Okpako's on-screen interactions with Hausmann are marked by a solidarity and empathy that cannot solely be explained by their shared position as racialized subjects and professional artists in Germany. The pair's performance of a trusting, equitable relationship allows for an Afro German perspective on the vicissitudes of representation to emerge, a perspective otherwise absent from *Whity*. At best, Fassbinder's cameo as one of Whity's white tormentors makes visible power relations that might otherwise have stayed invisible, in order to open them to critique. Okpako's emphasis on an egalitarian epistemological practice aligns her with the Afro German feminist writers and researchers of the 1980s, who shaped the identity politics of the movement.[32] As Fatima El-Tayeb and others have argued, these politics were sidelined by the masculinist bluster of Black German artists in the globalizing music industry during the 1990s.[33] One might thus regard *Do I see something?* as an intervention in the constellation around the turn of the century, when the situation of Afro Germans was marked by a widening gap between glamorous images of defiant minority men in popular culture on the one hand, and the intensification of racist violence experienced by black Germans like Alberto Adriano, on the other.[34] Okpako's attention to working conditions in cultural institutions, moreover, prefigured the public criticisms advanced in 2012 by Afro German artists and organizations by fully a decade.[35]

The editing supports the shift of focus away from *Whity*. At first, the two commentators' faces are shown in profile, turned towards both the center screen and each other. This symmetrical arrangement allows gallery visitors, who sit on a sofa equidistant to all three screens, to watch them from a central perspective. Later, a freeze-frame of Whity wearing the red uniform of a house slave hovers on the right-hand screen, from which he appears to watch Okpako and Hausmann's discussion of acting. The final sequence (before it loops back to the opening credits) frames a long

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[32] See the two anthologies documenting Afro German and women of color feminism in Germany that were published by the feminist publishing house Orlanda: Oguntoye, Opitz and Schultz (1986); and Hügel et al. (1999).

[33] Fatima El-Tayeb was among the first scholars to critically comment on the masculinist politics of Afro German hip-hop, which elided the feminist politics of the first generation of Afro German activists and writers. See also Aniko Imre on the gender politics of hip-hop performed by ethnic minorities in Europe.

[34] Okpako's documentary *Dreckfresser* already explored this constellation in the story of Sam Maffire.

[35] For a discussion of the debates concerning blackface and theatrical casting politics, the role of Afro German watchdog organizations to create a counterpublic, and related discussions about racist language in children's books, see Sieg 2015 (forthcoming).

shot of the saloon scene with the two spectators shown again on the side screen, but now turned outwards, away from the tiny figures crowded on the center screen. Interestingly, Okpako's camera defies the common grammar of over-the-shoulder shots that is otherwise fundamental to creating the illusion of a self-enclosed cinematic space and suturing the viewer to the camera's point of view (Silverman 138). As Okpako speaks and gestures on the right-hand screen, her face turns towards the right (at the offscreen actor), whereas his face, on the left screen, turns towards the left. The unseen interlocutors thus do not coincide with their screened images. The inconsistency of the screened space created by the camera angles and screen configurations make impossible a unified central perspective whose vanishing point is located in the center screen. The video installation's visual grammar, by obviating suture, amplifies *Whity*'s project to denounce and destroy the racist pleasures awarded by a number of cinematic genres. The spectators we see on the flanking screens of the triptych are not saddled with the painful, shattering "double consciousness" described by W.E.B. Du Bois as that of having to see oneself through the eyes of a white world. They may be emboldened by an avant-garde work such as *Whity*. But Okpako's evocation of unseen black bodies located in the off-screen space to the left and right of the audience, and, in one exhilarating moment, the 'ungrammatical' penetration of spectatorial space by an arm that appears simultaneously on the right and left screens, literally populates both the space where the spectators are seated, and the space surrounding them, with black bodies, seen and unseen.

The installation thus conjures up new demographic realities, as well as new ways of looking at and speaking back to the screen. The two spectators' comments help to relate the racial mythology on screen to the here and now, thereby forestalling any misreading of racism as either an American or an East German problem. Moreover, the installation contextualizes the masochistic figure of Whity with a discussion of black actors' working conditions. It thereby complements the parodic subversion of white fantasies with a consideration of racialized subjects' agency in contending with racial difference in the art world and in so-called post-racial societies more generally. Since then, Okpako's video installation has been mounted in contexts quite different from that for which it was originally conceived: in May 2013, it was shown at the Ballhaus Naunynstrasse, a postmigrant theater and exhibition space in Berlin, as part of be.bop (Black European Body Politics), an international symposium/festival organized by a consortium of Afro European and postcolonial scholars. In March 2014, it was exhibited at the Goethe Institute in Washington, DC, as part of a conference on performing race in the transatlantic world. Both events drew ethnically mixed audiences interested in the politics of race and representation; at both, *Do I see something?* was surrounded by other artworks by Afro Europeans, African Americans, and Africans. Okpako's attention to the predicament of black artists working in German cultural institutions continues to speak to settings like the Goethe Institute. While *Seh ich was?* appears less able to grapple with the shifting problematic of racial representation at venues like the Ballhaus, which has specialized in new works capturing postmigrant diasporic worlds, Okpako's engagement with the past supports the sense of a history of representation, and archives memories of multiracial sociability and interracial desire.

The installation also exists as a split-screen variant on Okpako's website.[36] The home screen displays the historic brick façade of an industrial building. Visitors can click on samples of Okpako's work, mostly early and short pieces, displayed in the

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[36] http://www.logentheater.de/fassade/frontend/logentheater.php?jumpTo=artist02

window frames. While spectators are usually seated in a static box from where they view actors moving on stage, here they can scroll through boxes. The website thus reverses, multiplies, and mobilizes the theatrical gaze. Moreover, *Seh ich was?* calls attention to the digital architecture of nested, hyperlinked windows: the three screens of *Seh ich was?* open within a brick 'window' within *Box Theater*, which opens in a browser window on the computer screen.[37] Okpako's examination of Fassbinder's work is here situated next to reflections on multicultural Germany in a variety of genres, media, and moods, ranging from a drama rehearsal and a children's story to a TV quiz show, a professional headshot, a family quest, a slide show, and a romance movie. In this environment, *Seh ich was?* comes across as one of many possible ways of making diasporic experience visible, some against more medium-specific resistance than others. In Bolter and Grusin's terms, Box Theater invites visitors to the site to both look *at* and *through* representation (333), and ultimately enables them to negotiate distance and proximity to media and (re)mediations.

Similarly, Wong's *Learn German* and *Eat Fear* have not only been exhibited in diverse locations, but exist in different formats: as both three-dimensional installations and as single-channel and split-screen videos available on his website,[38] where they are accompanied by short explanatory texts and a list of sites where they have been shown. They are also posted on YouTube, where such contextual information is largely missing. In addition, users searching Fassbinder's films by title on the web will find excerpts from Wong's videos; *Eat Fear* currently shows up in fourth position on YouTube when *Angst essen Seele auf* is entered into the search field.[39] Viewers who encounter Wong's work via this route may understand the videos as fan re-enactments of famous films. Those intrigued enough by the clips, however, might follow the hyperlink to Wong's channel, where his two works on Fassbinder jostle against his many other remakes of acclaimed *auteurs*. On this channel, and on Wong's website, users may also discover works of his celebrating the cultural diversity, multilingualism, and dynamic mixing of forms and styles in Singapore cinema of the 1950s and 1960s.[40] Wong's website and online channel reanimate the work of cultural appropriation and local adaptation of globally circulating forms otherwise lost amidst the decline of this regional cinema. His project to wedge open and rework global art cinema's racial fantasies is grounded in a particular moment of Southeast Asian cultural productivity. If the video installations remedy specific ideological problems in the work of historic *auteurs*, the digital medium in this instance potentially remedies the loss of a regional institution that dynamically engaged with international cultural forms and styles. While the decontextualized posts on YouTube could reinforce stereotypical perceptions of an imitative Asian fan, Wong's remakes, when grasped as part of a consistent and cumulative aesthetic project with a regionally specific resonance, can help open up questions about medium-specific conditions of imagining multiracial worlds.

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[37] Okpako's site is itself nested within the larger, web-based Logentheater.de project.

[38] http://www.mingwong.org

[39] https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=ali+angst+essen+seele+auf, accessed July 3, 2014.

[40] Wong discusses his interest in Singapore cinema in the interview by Jeppesen.

Conclusion

Fassbinder's art films wrestle with the persistence of race in a postwar society otherwise perceived as having overcome racism. They experiment with different styles, dramaturgical models, and acting techniques in order to work through the cinema's abilities to suture spectators to racist visual pleasures encoded in specific genres. The video installations discussed above highlight the political radicalism and aesthetic inventiveness of Fassbinder's films. In addition, they use the shortcomings of his works, and changes in the context of reception, as opportunities for imaginative appropriations and creative openings. Wong's shot-by-shot remakes of *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant* and *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* enact his longing to enter the scene of post-fascist fantasy from a queer, migrant position, even as they flag the racist gaze that makes identifying with this fantasy risky and painful. Okpako appreciates Fassbinder's project to render whiteness grotesque, but her three-channel installation evinces her comparatively greater distance to Fassbinder, as two of the three screens confront *Whity* with new spectators not anticipated by the original. Key to these spectators' engagement is their grasp of the theatrical craft required to defamiliarize racial mythologies, and their ability to historicize the agency of black subjects in German cultural institutions. The artists' respective stances of identification and confrontation extend to the audiences of their work as well.

Both Wong and Okpako turn to Fassbinder not only to test the usefulness of dramaturgical models and cinematic techniques, but also to appropriate by-now canonical icons and tropes to intervene in very contemporary dilemmas. In *Eat Fear*, Wong aligns queer and anti-racist critiques of difference that were previously blocked by Fassbinder's racial fetishization and narrative upstaging of *Ali*. This alignment is important in the current situation, when gay Germans accusing Muslim men of color of homophobia have positioned themselves at the forefront of discursive battles over claims to western, democratic identity. Okpako's engagement with *Whity*, meanwhile, invites a critical look at the working conditions of black actors in cultural institutions. Its emphasis on an egalitarian epistemological practice harks back to the feminist ethos of the early Afro German movement and works against the contemporary celebration of masculine bravado disconnected from racialized social practices.

Although Wong and Okpako's installations prompted me to ask how far German culture has come in dismantling those racial mythologies Fassbinder had grappled with already forty years earlier, the videos' placement in windowed, digital environments eschews the kind of linear narrative favored by classical cinema and film history. Instead of framing the difference between Fassbinder and these contemporary installation artists in terms of progress or obsolescence, we might understand their remediations not as a shift but as a multiplication of intellectual and artistic paradigms. Fassbinder's focus on the critique of whiteness arguably perpetuated whiteness's narcissistic preoccupation with itself.[41] Set amongst and against the more diverse cultural landscape with which Box Theater and Wong's website and YouTube channel are in conversation, these contemporary artists' remediations bring into view diasporic subjects as well as histories of interactivity, mixing, and adaptation. If the physical installations involve spectators' bodies in their decentering of the white gaze, the digital media and platforms that Wong and Okpako use embed Fassbinder's figures and scenarios in lively multiracial imaginaries that users may enter in the mode of contestation as well as absorption.

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[41] Robyn Wiegman has raised a similar charge against the field of critical whiteness studies.

Acknowledgements

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