

# Imagining Blackness in Germany and Austria



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Edited by

Charlotte Szilagyi, Sabrina K. Rahman  
and Michael Saman

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P U B L I S H I N G

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# INTRODUCTION

## WERNER SOLLORS

The employment of terms like *race* and *essentialism* has steadily increased in literary and cultural studies of the past decades. Whereas in German cultural contexts the “Aryan”-Jewish opposition became by far the most virulent racial fault line in the first half of the twentieth century, and English and continental race thinking was often preoccupied with the differentiation among various European races, in the United States the development and enforcement of a white-black contrast has been by far the most dominant racial endeavor from the times of racial slavery through the Jim Crow era. How does the German tradition look when the image of blackness in Germany is investigated—when, in other words, the German-speaking world is examined through what may be an American lens? Do German cultural expressions participate in a broader Euro-American discourse of whiteness and white supremacy? Do they offer alternative views and almost utopian modes of representation that would have been unthinkable in the United States at the same time? Or can the reader find both internationally shared features and nationally idiosyncratic strains in the ways Germans have been imagining blackness, for better or for worse?

Following Sander L. Gilman’s pioneering essays in his *On Blackness Without Blacks: Essays on the Image of Blacks in Germany* (1982), which included provocative comments on German notions of blackness in readings of the whole range of German literature, and May Opitz, Katharina Oguntoye, and Dagmar Schultz’s *Farbe bekennen: Afro-deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren der Geschichte* (1986), with its specific focus on twentieth-century history and the support for an Afro-German consciousness, numerous influential studies have offered freshly researched accounts of particular periods. Susanne Zantop studied German *Colonial Fantasies: Conquest, Family, and Nation in Precolonial Germany* (1997), Heike Paul wrote on *Kulturkontakt und “Racial Presences”: Afro-Amerikaner und die deutsche Amerika-Literatur, 1815–1914* (2005), Jonathan Otto Wipplinger’s dissertation examined “The Jazz Republic: Music, Race, and American Culture in Weimar Germany” (2006), and

Stefan Kühl investigated *The Nazi Connection: Eugenics, American Racism, and German National Socialism* (1994). Heide Fehrenbach's *Blackness After Hitler: Black Occupation Children in Postwar Germany* (2005) and Timothy L. Schroer's *Recasting Race After World War II: Germans and African Americans in American-Occupied Germany* (2007) argued that German notions of race after World War II shifted from the Jewish-Aryan to the black-white difference, partly as a consequence of the American occupation, while Maria Höhn's and Martin Klimke's *A Breath of Freedom: The Civil Rights Struggle, African American GIs, and Germany* (2010) traced some roots of the American Civil Rights Movement in the often comparatively positive experiences of black soldiers in postwar Germany. These new studies have been accompanied by new English translations of works that highlight and complicate German notions of American blackness. For example, Judith Ryan translated Theodor Storm's novella *Von jenseit des Meeres*, and Michael Kimmage rendered Wolfgang Koeppen's *Amerikareise* in English.

The publication of the essays collected in this book is thus a timely contribution to a flourishing field of study, and any reader who is interested in tracing to Aristotle the notion of *essence*—the term from which all essentialisms derive—and to Kant the concept of *race*, and in reading a variety of engaging essays on the topic of blackness in Germany (with some broader European and some American examples) will find the present volume valuable. The outcome of an in-depth inter-university conference organized by younger scholars, *Imagining Blackness in Germany and Austria* presents case studies of visible and invisible race in cultural productions extending over a broad span of time. It includes close readings of classic German literature (Heinrich von Kleist's *Die Verlobung in St. Domingo*), of little-known but weirdly fascinating books (the Austrian Hugo Bettauer's *Das blaue Mal* and the French Boris Vian's *J'irai cracher sur vos tombes*), of films (Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia*, Roberto Rossellini's *Paisà*, Douglas Sirk's *Imitation of Life*, and Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *Whity*), of opera (Ernst Krenek's *Jonny spielt auf*), and of sculpture (Gerhard Marcks's *Negertrompeter*). In addition, this volume deals with German missionary literature as well as with visual representations of black subjects by the Left in Weimar Germany, while there are also shorter comments on Heinrich Hoffmann's popular children's book *Struwwelpeter*, John Heartfield's political collage art, and the “degenerate” art and music exhibitions the Nazis staged in the 1930s.

The answers given by the essays to the question of whether there are more parallels or more differences between American and German notions of blackness are not uniform. Ingo Zechner shows internationally shared

aspects in the “White Negro” and “Negro White” films and texts he examines and in which visible and invisible differences matter, yet he also stresses the specific problem of an American conflation of race and ethnicity. Klaus Müller-Richter and Daniela Schmeiser place Kleist’s novella of the Haitian revolution, “a textual staging of a game of illusion and disillusionment,” into the context of Bernhard Waldenfels’s topography of the alien—an apt move in a story in which it is the Swiss Gustav von der Ried who is referred to more than eighty times as *der Fremde* (“the stranger”) whereas the native Toni’s epithet is *Mestize* (“mestiza”). Does this text then represent, or at least suggest, whiteness as the domain of the stranger? While the intrusion of the stranger gets the story going, it also leads to the tragic ending, in which Müller-Richter and Schmeiser still sense Kleist’s shedding “critical light on the attempt of progressive rationality to reach a more tolerant society.” Siegfried Mattl traces in Hugo Bettauer the new presence of American blackness that the jazz age brought to Vienna. Nearly invisible blackness turns out to be within the protagonist Carlo Zeller, too, who contradictorily provokes fear of hybridity though apparently also its promise. In New York, however, Zeller is treated as a nonwhite outsider. Cindy Patey Brewer highlights the motif of “whitewashing blackness” in missionary literature and art. Perhaps inspired by Jeremiah 13:23, this trope lent itself easily to racist readings in the Christian world, though Brewer also stresses that the missionary authors admonished their young readers to “think compassionately” about their “black brothers and sisters in Africa” and “to sacrifice on their behalf.” Werner Michael Schwarz interprets Rossellini’s *Paisà* as a translation of an American white-black dichotomy into an Italian fascist-antifascist analogue—though an equivalent process, he argues, was impossible to construct in postwar Germany or Austria. Krenek’s opera, briefly mentioned in Mattl’s essay, takes center stage in Wolfgang Fichna’s contribution that highlights the enormous popularity of *Jonny spielt auf* in interwar Europe and shows how Jonny may both symbolize progress and savagism. Georg Vasold later adds that the Nazis attacked Krenek’s opera for advocating “sexual relations with non-Aryans as the freedom of the New World.” Vasold reviews the ingrown art world of postwar Germany before 1960. This was illuminated by the first *documenta* show in Kassel which included only three American works among 670 exhibits, and two of the three American artists were German exiles. Vasold then focuses on Marcks’s *Negertrompeter*, an unusual work in Marcks’s oeuvre for which Vasold summons very rich historical-cultural contexts that make the work understandable in its opposition to commercial commodifications and trivializations of the black body. Gesa

Frömming isolates a motif in radical leftist Weimar art about America: both Gerd Arntz and Heartfield visualize a line of white chorus girls juxtaposed against an image of a lynched black man. A strange mix of class and gender demystifications of America, their radically internationalist art may have had the potential to weaken racial prejudices yet may have also tolerated a racist hierarchy within the proletariat. The volume ends with Chad Denton's careful frame-by-frame analysis of Riefenstahl's filming of colored athletes in sequences that she later invoked in an exculpatory context. Placing these scenes into an impressively fully contextualized understanding of the racial politics surrounding the Berlin Olympics, Denton arrives at a rather nuanced view of the Nazi appreciation for the "animal"-like qualities of black athletes whose victories, it could then be believed, constituted "unfair competition."

The rich empirical detail of these essays make the reader return to the question of how the black-white dichotomy—so prominent in the United States—relates to notions of race in Germany. Many international parallels notwithstanding, German (and European) racial ideas would seem to diverge considerably from those in America. Kleist's interracial plotline has a distinctly German flavor. Bettauer's mixed-race protagonist meets a different response in Vienna and in New York. Rossellini's, Kreněk's, Arntz's and Heartfield's leftist beliefs in proletarian internationalism and cosmopolitanism worked against the power of stereotypes they were also working with.

At the end of the medal ceremony for the 100-meter race at the Berlin Olympics of 1936, Jesse Owens stood on the high pedestal marked "1" for his gold medal victory; at the same time that the spectators in Adolf Speer's Olympic stadium rose and raised their hands in a Hitler salute, the band played "The Stars and Stripes." This strange, almost surreal moment—captured in a Bavarian *Wochenschau* newsreel—is not included in Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* film, for she prefers not to show victorious black athletes; instead, as Denton discusses, she uses a single shot of the raising of the winners' countries' flags, and then focuses surprisingly on the enthusiastic reaction of an excited white woman.

W. E. B. Du Bois spent several months in Nazi Germany at the time of the 1936 Olympics, and observed in reports he published in the *Pittsburgh Courier* that "[p]rejudice against Jews in Germany comes nearer being instinctive than color prejudice." He found the historical and economic reasons for this to be "not at all analogous to the white dislike of blacks in America." While he was horrified by the murderous exaggerations of anti-Semitic propaganda, he also noted that he was "treated with uniform courtesy and consideration" in Germany, and added: "It would have been



impossible for me to have spent a similarly long time in any part of the United States, without some, if not frequent cases of personal insult or discrimination. I cannot record a single instance here.” Perhaps there will one day appear a companion volume with an analysis of African American comments about Germany and Germans, *Imagining Germanness*?



**PART ONE:**  
**CONCEPTIONS OF BLACKNESS**



## CHAPTER ONE

### “WHITE NEGRO” AND “NEGRO WHITE”: FASSBINDER, SIRK, VIAN

INGO ZECHNER

*“The reason for assuming the Negroes  
and Whites to be fundamental races  
is self-evident.”<sup>1</sup>*

—Immanuel Kant, 1775

*“You don’t know what it is  
to look white and be black.”<sup>2</sup>*

—Peola in John M. Stahl’s *Imitation of Life*, 1934

### Introduction

Since the beginning of the 1990s, xenophobia has been a significant political factor in numerous countries throughout Europe—not only, but particularly in Austria, Switzerland, and the former East Germany. While its image of the stranger changed several times with the fall of the Iron Curtain, with the consequences of the collapse of the Soviet Union, with the enlargement of the European Union to the east and its continued integration process, as well as with the war on terror, one image of the stranger has remained suspiciously constant: that of the “Negro.” It is especially the “black” male who seems to embody like no other the very essence of the stranger. While the public debate beyond the xenophobic dream of completely sealing the country off to foreigners has fluctuated between the poles multi-culturalism and integration (a European euphemism for assimilation), it is faced with its own limits by the figure of the “Negro”: his supposed strangeness cannot be pinned to national, ethnic, or cultural differences because it continues to exist even after all of these factors have been neutralized.

The reemergence of nationalistic and ethnic conflicts in Southeast and Eastern Europe and the success of xenophobic politicking at home have

sounded alarms, prompting an examination of the Self and the Other in German-speaking academic discourse. This examination is still heavily influenced by individual comprehension of a post-structuralist philosophy of difference whose belated reception has taken place parallel to this political development in German philosophy, German language and literature studies, cultural studies and in other branches of the humanities and social sciences. Although the affirmation of the Other and his/her Otherness appeared to offer a radical alternative to xenophobia, at the same time it also brings with it the inherent danger of confirming differences in their significance that may be as irrelevant as they are obvious: What constitutes the Otherness of a “black” person? Is racism indeed nothing more than a particular form of xenophobia? Does the problem of racism begin with the essentialization of characteristics or rather with the insufficient differentiation between the essential and the non-essential of a difference?

In the spring of 1945, Germany and Austria were occupied by foreign troops, among them “black” soldiers. Regarded as “sub-human” by National-Socialist ideology—which remained buried in the ruins of destroyed cities—“blacks” were present as victors in Germany for the second time since 1918. For Austria, meanwhile, it was a first. Rainer Werner Fassbinder, born that very spring in Germany, has focused on this presence and its consequences for the reemergence of Germany several times in his movies. In his 1978 film *Die Ehe der Maria Braun* (*The Marriage of Maria Braun*)<sup>3</sup> he tells the story of Maria (played by Hanna Schygulla), a young woman who learns to accept herself to be a war widow, and whose supposedly dead husband catches her in bed with a “black” GI who got her pregnant. Her “black” lover is killed in a struggle with the German soldier when she hits him with a bottle, an act that the returning husband then takes responsibility for. These kinds of “interracial” relationships—with their economic, sexual and, in the case of “black” American GIs, cultural implications, as well as the “mixed-race” children generated by these relationships—were the permanent topic of local political debates from the immediate postwar period to the increased presence of “black” GIs in Germany during the Korean War and the withdrawal of the Allies from Austria in 1955, as well as into the late 1960s.<sup>4</sup>

It is impossible to examine the imagination of blackness in Germany and Austria without reference to Nazi racial ideology, which, although discredited already in the immediate postwar period, remains insufficiently analyzed today. It is equally impossible to examine it without reference to the new xenophobia or the new racism that emerged in the 1990s. Their

common link is the partially repressed awareness of the presence of the “black” victors, a situation that is complicated by the fact that the American troops, themselves still segregated in 1945, brought their own racism with them, replacing the Nazi racial ideology that had fallen into disrepute.

By taking the supposedly obvious difference between the races to the threshold of imperceptibility and at the same time focusing attention on the political, economic and sexual conditions of racism, Douglas Sirk, a German émigré to Hollywood, and Rainer Werner Fassbinder, the central filmmaker of the New German Cinema, brought the imagination of blackness back to its point of origin. This essay attempts to reconstruct the conditions of possibility for imagining blackness that precede any kind of racial discourse, by analyzing Fassbinder’s *Whity* (1971) and Sirk’s *Imitation of Life* (1959), comparing them to two novels written by the French author and jazz musician Boris Vian, and connecting the “mixed-race” characters in the films and novels with the figure of the “White Negro” introduced by Norman Mailer.

### Mailer’s “White Negro”

In his controversial essay “The White Negro,”<sup>5</sup> published in 1957, Norman Mailer enthusiastically welcomed a phenomenon that became a component of pop culture with the hipsters of the 1950s and joined the pop culture mainstream as a result of the commercialization of hip-hop in the 1980s: the usurping of “black” codes by “whites.”<sup>6</sup> Unlike the questions of “black” vs. “white” jazz, “black” vs. “white” blues, “black” R&B vs. “white” rock ’n’ roll, the focus in Mailer’s essay is on more than just the appropriation of musical forms of expression, but rather of day-to-day patterns of behavior. Mailer’s hymnic transvaluation of racist values presupposes as a matter of course that so-called “black” patterns of behavior—a particular gait, certain gestures, a certain manner of speaking—form, together with their “white” counterparts, a pair of opposites that are organized around the conceptual opposition of body and spirit, feeling and thinking, barbarism and civilization. Mailer affirms these presuppositions. Although he himself refers to “codes,”<sup>7</sup> he pinpoints the causes of the racial characteristics he refers to as originating in the depths of the “black” body:

Knowing in the cells of his existence that life was war, nothing but war, the Negro (all exceptions admitted) could rarely afford the sophisticated inhibitions of civilization, and so he kept for his survival the art of the

primitive, [. . .] relinquishing the pleasures of the mind for the more obligatory pleasures of the body.<sup>8</sup>

Mailer's "Negro" is the embodiment of everything that the "square" (the hipster word for a person who is conventional or conservative in taste or way of life) prohibits, making the "Negro" appear to be the ideal vanishing point for hipster morality. Being what he is, however, the "Negro," according to Mailer, is less a product of nature than one of a "fallen" culture—of a civilization he rejects because it has rejected him, a civilization that is built on the hate of the other part of itself:

Hated from outside and therefore hating himself, the Negro was forced into the position of exploring all those moral wildernesses of civilized life which the Square automatically condemns as delinquent or evil or immature or morbid or self-destructive or corrupt.<sup>9</sup>

This characterization of the "Negro" goes right to the heart of the racial discourse that George L. Mosse in his book *Toward the Final Solution* sees in a certain alliance between morals and aesthetics: "All racists held to a certain concept of beauty—white and classical—to middle-class virtues of work, of moderation and honor, and thought that these were exemplified through outward appearance."<sup>10</sup> Without omitting as a rule the possibility of inverted racism, this historical analysis outlines the social conditions of a white racism that is disgusted by its object to the same degree to which it perceives the object's power to attract others as a permanent threat. Mailer puts the hipster in this category as well. Hipster morality affirms white racism in all its fears without sharing its value judgments: "[. . .] in the worst of perversion, promiscuity, pimping, drug addiction, rape, razor-slash, bottle break, what-have-you, the Negro discovered and elaborated a morality of the bottom."<sup>11</sup> The hipster meets the "Negro" in the rock bottom in order to savor life in its entirety. Hipster morality, which in the strictest sense is actually not morality at all, consists of the complete unfettering of one's desires bound only to their own rhythm: "The only Hip morality [. . .] is to do what one feels whenever and wherever it is possible."<sup>12</sup>

In becoming black, the hipster undergoes more than a simple act of imitation, rather, this is an existential transformation:<sup>13</sup> "The hipster had absorbed the existentialist synapses of the Negro, and for practical purposes could be considered a white Negro."<sup>14</sup>

Blackness for Mailer is not just an attitude. It requires a human body whose function is completely determined by blackness, a body whose skin can be either black or white, thereby differentiating itself from the bodies



charted by anthropology and phrenology. For that reason it is not sufficient to understand the concepts of “cells” and “synapses” in the metaphorical sense. Rather, these concepts point to a more complex operation that borrows less from rhetoric and linguistics and more from psychopathology. According to Mailer, it is literally about transforming one’s entire nervous system: “Generally we are obliged to act with a nervous system which has been formed from infancy, and which carries in the style of its circuits the very conditions of our parents and our early milieu.”<sup>15</sup>

The “psychopath” is different, says Mailer. All psychopaths or partial psychopaths are characterized by the fact that they attempt to create a new nervous system. This is the missing link between “whites” and “blacks”; the hipster’s becoming black goes through the psychopath: “the decision is to encourage the psychopath in oneself.”<sup>16</sup> However, Mailer warns against confusing the “psychopath” with the clinical “psychotic”: “The psychotic is legally insane, the psychopath is not.”<sup>17</sup>

Even after several readings, it is tempting to banish Mailer’s bizarre essay, with its jarring mixture of racism and sexism, to the realm of phantasmagoria. In a very careful attempt of contextualization, Andrea Levine has included the essay in a series of texts in which Jewish authors before and after World War II undertook a (re)masculinization of the Jewish body, also with an explicit reference to African-American masculinity. She developed the hypothesis that Mailer’s appropriation of a powerful, phallic blackness also took on, for the white hipster, the function of covering up the presence of another “racial body”— that of the Jewish victim of the Holocaust.<sup>18</sup>

By focusing on the figure of the “White Negro” and its counterpart “Negro White,” as they are depicted in Mailer, Fassbinder, Sirk, and Vian, the intention underlying the present essay is, however, not to investigate the psychological motivation of this phantasmagoria, but rather to pursue its logical conditions, which provide the framework for both racism and anti-racism.

## **The Logic behind the Racial Discourse: Aristotle and Kant**

Whenever *Kulturwissenschaft* and cultural studies are confronted with outdated characterizations of race and gender, the charge of “essentialism” is quickly at hand. For the most part, however, criticism is limited to simply rejecting every kind of “essentialization” or “ontologization” of the predicated characteristics, which implies two aspects: the identification of categories of epistemology with categories of being, and the dissociation of these categories from their respective historical context, allowing them

thereby to be regarded as natural and immutable. Many overlook the fact that the question of essence, frowned upon as unscholarly, is the key question for any kind of categorization.

The philosophical concept of *essence* originated in the Latin translations of Aristotelian writings. In the *Topics*, the first textbook on logic handed down to us in the history of philosophy,<sup>19</sup> Aristotle uses examples taken from everyday language to attempt the correct formation of concepts. He begins by differentiating between the *definition*, the *property*, the *accident*, the *species* and the *genus*—termed *predicables*—of a thing. While the question of the way in which predicables exist has been the subject of much discussion in traditional academic philosophy—from the dispute about universals in the Middle Ages to contemporary debates centering on “realism” and “nominalism”—the differentiation of species and genera by intuitively applying definitions, properties, and accidents remains the largely unreflected basis of everyday language usage upon which *Kulturwissenschaft* and Cultural Studies are built.

According to Aristotle, “[a] ‘definition’ is a phrase signifying a thing’s essence.”<sup>20</sup> And “essence” is nothing more than the English translation of the Latin word *essentia*. “A ‘property’ is a predicate which does not indicate the essence of a thing, yet belongs to that thing alone.”<sup>21</sup> Aristotle cites, for example, as the essential property of humans the capability of learning grammar—including the ability to learn to read and write. The property of being two-footed is, on the other hand, neither the essence of a human nor in the strict sense his property. As a definition it may be used as a rule to distinguish a human from a horse or dog, etc., but not, however, from other living creatures, such as birds. The differentiation between species and genera takes place along specific characteristics which are always specific differences. An “accident is something which, though it is none of the foregoing—i.e. neither a definition nor a property nor a genus yet belongs to the thing: something which may possibly either belong or not belong to any one and the self-same thing, as (e.g.) the ‘sitting posture’ may belong or not belong to some self-same thing.”<sup>22</sup> As an aside, Aristotle added a comment with far-reaching consequences for the definition of any concept of race: “Likewise also ‘whiteness’, for there is nothing to prevent the same thing being at one time white, and at another not white.” The treacherous aspect of accidents is, however, that they may appear to be properties in certain circumstances:

Thus the sitting posture is an accident, but will be a temporary property, whenever a man is the only person sitting, while if he be not the only one sitting, it is still a property relatively to those who are not sitting. So then,

there is nothing to prevent an accident from becoming both a relative and a temporary property; but a property absolutely it will never be.<sup>23</sup>

With the help of Aristotle, two hypotheses can be drawn on the logical conditions of the racial discourse. Firstly, racism distinguishes within the genus “human” between different species in terms of essence by raising the accident of skin color to the status of a property, and by gathering additional pseudo-properties—properties of the genus of human (e.g. body/spirit) or accidents (e.g. sexual potency/impotence)—around his or her supposedly specific difference. The second hypothesis is that anti-racism becomes entangled in Aristotelian logic if it contents itself with combating what is commonly called essentialism. Many a concept of race suffers from too much essentialism; however, all concepts of race suffer from a lack of essence.

It is one of the ironies of the Enlightenment that Immanuel Kant, of all people, formulated a modern concept of race that paves the way for racism by providing a genealogical-genetic basis for this pseudo-essence. Kant’s sleight of hand consisted in differentiating between two ways of classifying genera and species:

Conventional taxonomy is broken down into ‘classes’ which are based on ‘similarities’, whereas natural taxonomy is broken down into phyla [*Stämme*] which group animals according to ‘relationships’ with regard to their lineage. [. . .] According to this terminology all people throughout the world belong to one and the same natural genus because they universally produce fertile children among themselves, no matter how great the variations are that may be seen in their physical appearance.<sup>24</sup>

In natural taxonomy, the specific difference between genera is a genealogical one. So as to avoid relativizing the principle of origin, Kant rejects any attempt to further subclassify the genera thus established in species (“for these mean *diversity* of origin [*Abstammung*]”<sup>25</sup>), regardless of the other differences and commonalities of the members of a phylum: “their mutual differences are called ‘varieties’ [*Abartungen*] if they are hereditary.”<sup>26</sup> As an aside, let it be stated here that the principle of origin already bears the characteristics of the kind of standardization that is so typical for racism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries:

The hereditary characteristics of origin, if they agree with those of their ancestors, are called ‘resemblances’ [*Nachartungen*]; but if the variety [*Abartung*] is such that the original composition of the phylum [*Stamm-bildung*] cannot be restored, it may be called an ‘ex-speciation’ [*Ausartung*].<sup>27</sup>

The National Socialist regime later spoke of “degeneration” (*Entartung*).

Like Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, Jean-Baptiste de Lamarck, and other contemporaries, Kant, in formulating his theory on race, dealt extensively with questions of the conditioning of a race by environmental factors, among which the climate plays a particular role. However, Kant was just as persuaded by the constancy and inalterability of the conditioning once it had taken place as of the fact that there was only one racial characteristic, namely skin color.

Among us Whites there are many hereditary traits that do not come under the heading of genus and distinguish families, or even peoples, from each other; however, none of these are inevitably passed on, but rather those persons manifesting a specific trait also produce with others of the class of the Whites children who are lacking in that distinguishing trait.<sup>28</sup>

That is the reason why Kant’s concept of race paves the way for racism, yet at the same time gives it no leg to stand on. “The concept of race is, therefore: ‘the class difference of animals of one and the same phylum [*Stamm*], provided that this difference is inevitably hereditary.’”<sup>29</sup> The differences in skin color (Kant names four: that of “the whites,” the “yellow” Indians, the “Negroes” and the “copper-red” Americans)<sup>30</sup> are, however, “among all the possible hereditary traits, the only ones that are inevitably passed on.”<sup>31</sup>

Kant tries to define the concept of race via the concept of variety defined also in this manner—however, only if variety demonstrates an additional peculiarity:

Among the varieties, i.e. the hereditary variations of animals belonging to a single phylum—those which, both when transplanted (displaced to other areas), are consistent over generations and when mixed with other varieties of the same phylum, produce every time cross-bred offspring, are called *races*.<sup>32</sup>

According to Kant, skin color is the specific difference that allows us to distinguish between the races, inasmuch as this implies that two individuals of different skin color necessarily can together produce only “blendings” or “bastards.” Should this specific difference be lacking, Kant speaks at best of “variations” (*Spielarten*), “varieties” (*Varietäten*) or a “special strain” (*ein besonderer Schlag*).

Aristotelian logic has always been confronted with the problem that horses and donkeys can interbreed, thereby mixing the species. Ever since

Kant, however, the production of “crossbreeds” has offered evidence not to counter the distinguishability of varieties, but rather to confirm it. Ideas of, and measures for, racial segregation—from the segregation of living quarters to prohibitions on intermarriage or sexual contact—belong to the repertoire of all kinds of racism, although the vision of racial purity only exists thanks to the much-feared specter of the “crossbreed.” The functioning of Aristotelian logic that provides the basis for the racial discourse, is in any case not endangered by the “crossbreed,” but rather by the fact that there are no longer any characteristics that can be discerned as being common to all members of a race. Still, individualization is not a reliable recourse, on the one hand because racism tends to allow deviations from the rule—“All exceptions admitted,” is the qualification used by Mailer when talking about the inability of the “Negro” to be civilized—and on the other hand because racism is dispelled all the less by empirical findings as it differentiates between *manifest* and *latent* characteristics. What isn’t apparent can yet become so.

Unlike the “crossbreed,” the distinguishing trait in the figure of the “White Negro” and the “Negro White” is that their manifest and latent characteristics are just as lacking in self-evidence as the ability to classify them as belonging to one of the two or both of the supposedly fundamental races. Instead of being able to be determined objectively, these characteristics cannot be disconnected from self-perception or perception by others. Contrary to Mailer’s suggestion, they are still not freely at one’s disposal, but rather a part of a complex relationship of reciprocal desire—as Fassbinder, Sirk, and Vian have shown. Their figures of the “White Negro” and “Negro White” exemplify the status of race as being not only epistemologically defined, but also determined by social power structures that take on a political, economic and sexual dimension.

### Fassbinder’s “Negro White”

At the center of Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s hybrid western melodrama *Whity*,<sup>33</sup> which takes place in 1878 in an unspecified town in the United States, is the dark-skinned Samuel King (played by Günther Kaufman), who lives as a servant in the manor home of the Nicholson family, and whom everyone calls “Whity.” From the very first scene in the movie it is clear that the epithet is meant in a derogatory way. When he enters the kitchen dressed in his bright red livery and barks at his mother to stop singing those “black songs” while cooking, she spits in his face, calling him “Whity” in disgust. With his white-gloved hand he wipes the symbol of her scorn from his cheek.<sup>34</sup>

The power structures in the household are revealed already in the film's second scene. Sitting at a long table in the dining room, and looking as pale and inert as zombies, are Ben Nicholson, the coarse head of the household, his two twin sons from his first marriage, Frank and Davy—one decadent and perverse, the other mentally retarded—and their young stepmother Kathrin, who wants to have Davy euthanized and who is waiting in vain for her husband's intestines to be eaten through by disease so that she can finally inherit his wealthy estate. The door slowly opens, as if by its own power; Kathrin gives a high-pitched cry of horror; and Whity, entering the room, drops the tray at the threshold. "I . . . beg your pardon, Massa," Whity exclaims. Ben Nicholson then whips him brutally. Lying on the floor, Whity through his pain manages to say only a single sentence: "I . . . thank you, Massa."<sup>35</sup>

It isn't until later in the movie that we learn Whity is the illegitimate son of the "white" Ben Nicholson and his "black" housekeeper. The scene in which this is revealed is set once again in the kitchen. Davy is busy peeling potatoes, and Whity enters and stops him. "You must be crazy," says Whity to his mother, "letting a Nicholson peel potatoes." "He likes doing it" responds his mother; "Don't forget . . . you are a Nicholson, too." "I'm a nigger," replies Whity.<sup>36</sup>

The world that Whity lives in is full of violence, and he finds himself being not the only, but the preferred target of this, because he is seen by the "whites" as being "black", and by his "black" mother as being "white". It is furthermore a world in which desire is closely connected with violence. Among the bodies of the frail family members (the twins), of the supposedly diseased (Ben), and the "white" body consumed by prurience (Kathrin), Whity's "black" body is the only one that is intact, attracting the desire of every single member of the family. Filmed in the manner of a station drama, the movie, in its precisely lit, drawn-out scenes, shows a series of sexually explicit scenes in which Whity fulfills the perverse desires of the family members: Davy and Whity in the stables, where both are caressing the horses before Whity starts to gently slap his retarded half-brother in the face and kiss him;<sup>37</sup> Ben and Whity in the yard, where the son lets his father whip him and exposes his black upper torso to his father's desirous gaze;<sup>38</sup> Kathrin and Whity on the bed, when his stepmother begins to gently lick her stepson's open wounds;<sup>39</sup> Frank and Whity in Frank's bedroom, where Frank is lying on the bed wearing a garter belt and awaiting his stepbrother—here, for once, Whity refuses to participate.<sup>40</sup>

These unhealthy family relationships end in a massacre in which Whity eradicates the entire Nicholson family before fleeing the city with the