

**Maria I. Diedrich and Jürgen Heinrichs, eds. *From Black to Schwarz: Cultural Crossovers between African America and Germany*. FORECAAST 18. Münster: LIT, 2010, 392 pp. € 39.90.**

*From Black to Schwarz: Cultural Crossovers between African America and Germany*, which emanated from the 2006 conference “Crossovers: African Americans and Germany” at the Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster, Germany, brings together 17 individual contributions including an introduction by the editors Maria I. Diedrich and Jürgen Heinrichs. The collection is published in the FORECAAST series of LIT Publishing House and stands out as a timely, topical, and scholarly up-to-date book at a time when academic attention directed towards black culture and Germany is just starting to proliferate. It is diligently edited and includes a range of innovative articles which cover an impressive scope of topics dealing with literature and visual arts ‘on the move’ and at the crossroads between African America and Germany.

*From Black to Schwarz* makes a significant contribution to an area of study which has only during the last decade received growing and systematic attention. While ample research already exists on black culture in France and Britain, for instance, Germany has only recently been added to the map of studies on black culture and the black diaspora. Scholarship has so far shed light on such diverse but, nonetheless, closely related topics as blacks under National Socialism,<sup>1</sup> black culture in Europe (or less frequently in Germany specifically),<sup>2</sup> cultural encounters between African Americans and Germans in postwar Germany,<sup>3</sup> and different aspects of Afro-German history and culture<sup>4</sup>. *From Black to Schwarz* is located in this growing field but, as Diedrich and Heinrichs convincingly argue in their introduction, expands it not only by paying special attention to the mutuality of cultural exchanges but, first and foremost, by making visual culture its main focus.

Diedrich and Heinrichs present their readers with a collection which offers a remarkable breadth and depth of inquiry into the multiple intersections of African American and German culture. The volume includes various perspectives as it convenes contributions by younger scholars as well as established researchers. Its authors come from a wide range of disciplines (including American Studies, German Studies, History, and Film Studies) and turn it into a truly interdisciplinary endeavor. The diversity of its contributions encompasses scholarly essays alongside contributions chronicling personal experiences in/with Germany by African American artists in the form of an interview with artist Benjamin Patterson (or actually an interview he conducted with himself and which was originally published 17 years ago) with an introduction by Valerie Cassel Oliver and an essay by poet and scholar Melba Joyce Boyd on her time in Germany. Ben Patterson, founding member of Fluxus and the only African American in this group, reflects on his experience in Germany and his philosophy as an artist. Melba Boyd’s first-person narrative which is part memoir, part analysis recounts her experiences in Germany and illuminates the fertile relations between the German movement of 1968 and African American culture. The case studies under scholarly scrutiny in *From Black to Schwarz* cover historical moments and periods from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to contemporary culture and various subjects such as literature, art, film, and music, and, finally, the volume is rounded off by several photographs, images, and illustrations (some in color).

The essays are arranged (roughly) in chronological order. Hanna Wallinger’s “The Africanist Presence in Nineteenth-Century German Writers” opens the volume and examines discourses on race in works by philosophers Immanuel Kant, Johann Gottfried Herder, and Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel as well as literary texts by Heinrich von Kleist (“Die Verlobung in St. Domingo”) and Theodor Storm (“Von Jenseits des Meeres”). By analyzing and contextualizing philosophical and literary investments in racialized discourses, Wallinger offers the reader profound insights into 19<sup>th</sup> century discourses on blackness. The following contributions by A. B. Christa Schwarz and Peter Schneck both deal with the Harlem

Renaissance. Schwarz examines the cultural crossovers in this era starting with W.E.B. Du Bois's and Alain Locke's connections to Germany. The essay focuses additionally on other 'New Negroes' in/and Germany such as Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, and Countee Cullen and examines the German re- and perception of the 'Neger-Renaissance.' Schneck also follows the transatlantic cultural reverberations during this era when he examines how German colonial art came to bear on the (visual) image of the New Negro. He draws attention to the work of painter Walter von Ruckteschell whose significance for the aesthetic of the Harlem Renaissance art (quite contrary to Winold Reiss's) has so far largely been ignored.

Christian Rogowski and Jonathan Wipplinger turn towards jazz and its ambiguous reception in Weimar Germany. Rogowski scrutinizes Ernst Krenek's 'jazz opera' *Jonny spielt auf* (1927) and situates its reception in contemporaneous contexts of discourses on race and a fascination with things American ("Amerikanismus") revealing the wide range of responses the opera generated amongst audiences, critics and journalists, and protesters. Wipplinger also zooms in on the year 1927 and the founding of the Frankfurt *Jazzklasse* which similarly caused a scandal. While some welcomed the program, it was faced with strong hostilities as it implied challenges to established racial, cultural, and class boundaries. Taken together these two essays allow for a nuanced view on German attitudes towards jazz and sketch a vivid picture of the tensions between attraction and revulsion fuelling the debates on jazz in the late 1920s.

In "Pictures of 'US'? Blackness, Diaspora and the Afro-German Subject," Tina M. Campt analyzes a rare photographic archive of black German family photography. Examining pictures from the 1920s to 1945, Campt illuminates early articulations of Afro-German belonging which "urges us to consider the imbrications of race, gender and nation in constituting diasporic subjects" (157). Michelle M. Wright takes up related questions in her essay "In a Nation or a Diaspora? Gender, Sexuality and Afro-German Subject Formation" featured later in the volume. She specifically deals with the autobiographies of Hans J. Massaquoi and Ika Hügel-Marshall which both display the struggle to locate the black German subject in the nation and/or the diaspora. In both essays, attention is drawn to the difficulties and efforts of negotiating Afro-German subject status given that German national identity is (still) frequently defined by whiteness.

Gundolf Graml's analysis of Luis Trenker's film *Der verlorene Sohn* (*The Prodigal Son*) (1934) focuses on the representation of exactly this (re)construction of Germanness as white. He reads the film as reaffirming (German) whiteness through a promotion of patriotism, patriarchal heterosexual love, and traditional artistic perspective and demonstrates how the cultural text is embedded in a conservative discourse and re-establishes racial hierarchies. In the two other contributions dealing with cinematic texts, the dynamics of race and racial(ized) discourses play an equally decisive role. Angelica Fenner establishes a transnational and transhistorical dialogue between two films: Robert Stemmle's family melodrama *Toxi* (1952) and David W. Griffith's historical epic *The Birth of a Nation* (1915). Both, she argues, testify to the "influence of racialization processes upon the national imaginary under construction" (227) and show striking structural parallelisms regarding the representation of racial difference, national identity, and mechanisms of belonging and exclusion. Fenner relies on Wolfgang Schivelbusch's notion of the "culture of defeat" to connect the two contexts (the post-Civil War South and post-World War II West Germany) and reveals how the filmic texts are enmeshed in racialized discourses which are not bound to a specific historical period, medium, or nation. The personal and professional relationship between (white) director Rainer Fassbinder and (Afro-German) actor Günther Kaufmann stands at the center of Page R. Laws's essay. She explores Fassbinder's film and Kaufmann's 2004 memoir *Der weiße Neger vom Hasenberg* to illuminate the complex and ambiguous relationship which she reads as a German racial allegory. Thus, Fassbinder and Kaufmann

appear to embody the highly ambivalent relationship white Germany has towards black culture and the black 'Other' as source of both fascination and repulsion.

Two contributions in the volume analyze John A. Williams's *Clifford's Blues* (1999). While his novel is without doubt an important and innovative work in this context, it seems somewhat overrepresented in a collection which otherwise apparently emphasizes variety and breadth of its subject matters. However, Christina Oppel and Mark A. Reid offer quite different approaches to the novel in their respective articles. Oppel argues that *Clifford's Blues* creates a new genre: the African American Holocaust novel. It merges characteristics of the Holocaust novel with that of postmodern neo-slave narratives and places its negotiation of chattel slavery in a European context. In "Reading *Clifford's Blues* and Blacks in Nazi Germany in PostNegritude Time," Reid turns towards Williams's portrayal of black prisoners in German concentration camps and "the triple transgression of being black, gay, and a jazz musician" under the Nazi regime (213). He reads the polyphony of voices in *Clifford's Blues* as a "postNegritude blues" and convincingly maintains that Williams expands the concentration camp narrative to include the neglected history of black prisoners.

Leesa Rittelmann's contribution entitled "Winold Reiss to Kara Walker: The Silhouette in Black American Art" lays out how the silhouette became a powerful cultural metaphor for the historical treatment of African American during the Harlem Renaissance. Starting in the 1990s, the silhouette is again employed in the work of artists such as Kara Walker, Lorna Simpson, Kerry James Marshall, and Laylah Ali in order to "investigate the ways in which the Black American body has been literally and metaphorically reduced to a mere shadow of its physical and historical referent" (289). Rittelmann explores the implications and consequences of the possibility that the European (aristocratic) form of the silhouette was introduced to Aaron Douglas by German émigré Winold Reiss. In his article "Mixed Media, Mixed Identities: the Universal Aesthetics of Marc Brandenburg," Jürgen Heinrichs examines the works of contemporary Black German artist Marc Brandenburg of the 1990s. Heinrichs analyzes not only the autobiographical dimensions of Brandenburg's paintings, drawings, sculptures, and mixed-media installations but also points out the aesthetic universality of his art practice.

In total, *From Black to Schwarz* is highly recommendable reading for everyone interested in the crossovers of African American and German culture. Readers who are new to the field will gain a useful overview and numerous impulses for further explorations while those who are already familiar with contemporary studies of black culture and Germany will still find original thoughts and new insights in many of the essays. Taken together, the articles in *From Black to Schwarz* definitely contribute to the development of studies on black culture in/and Germany which I regard a highly urgent and relevant field that will hopefully continue to be explored with the academic rigor and high ambitions set forth by this essay collection.

Düsseldorf, Katharina Gerund

<sup>1</sup> Recent examples include: Raffael Scheck's *Hitler's African Victims: The German Army Massacres of Black French Soldiers in 1940* (2006), Christine Alonzo's and Peter Martin's edited volume *Zwischen Charleston und Stechschritt. Schwarze im Nationalsozialismus* (2004), and Clarence Lusane's. *Hitler's Black Victims: The Historical Experience of Afro-Germans, European Blacks, Africans, and African Americans in the Nazi Era* (2002).

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, Moritz Ege's *Schwarz werden: „Afro-Amerikanophilie“ in den 1960er und 1970er Jahren* (2007), Heike Raphael-Hernandez (ed.) *Blackening Europe: The African American Presence* (2004) or *Crosscurrents: African Americans, Africa, and Germany in the Modern World* (1998) edited by David McBride, Leroy Hopkins, and C. Aisha Blackshire-Belay.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Heide Fehrenbach's *Race after Hitler: Black Occupation Children in Postwar Germany and America* (2005), Timothy Schroer's *Recasting Race after World War II: Germans and African Americans in American-Occupied Germany* (2007), and Maria Höhn and Martin Klimke's *A Breath of Freedom: The Civil Rights Struggle, African American GIs, and Germany* (2010).

<sup>4</sup> Early examples include Reiner Pommerin's *Sterilisierung der Rheinlandbastarde: Das Schicksal einer farbigen deutschen Minderheit 1918–1937* (1979), Katharina Oguntoye, May Opitz, and Dagmar Schultz, eds. *Farbe bekennen: Afro-deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte* (1986) and, more recently, Fatima El-Tayeb' *Schwarze Deutsche: Der Diskurs um "Rasse" und nationale Identität 1890-1933* (2001), Yara-Colette Lemke Muniz de Faria's. *Zwischen Fürsorge und Ausgrenzung: Afrodeutsche „Besatzungskinder“ im Nachkriegsdeutschland* (2002), and Tina M. Camp's *Other Germans: Black Germans and the Politics of Race, Gender, and Memory in the Third Reich* (2004).