Ethnic Drag

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CHAPTER 4

The Violent White Gaze: Drag and the Critique of Fascism

In the 1960s, postwar West Germans’ dedication to keeping silent about the Nazi past during the Adenauer era gave way to a younger generation’s inquisitive and confrontational insistence on coming to terms with the horrors of the Holocaust, as well as the parent generation’s “second guilt” of forgetting, denying, and repressing the past.¹ The trials of Adolf Eichmann, the main Nazi administrator of the “Final Solution,” in Jerusalem (1961–62), and the Auschwitz trial in Frankfurt (December 1963 to August 1965) drove home the point that the Nazi past was not past. They coincided with the return of Erwin Piscator, the director who in the 1920s had invented the techniques of epic theater that Brecht assembled into a political theory of the stage, to the West German stage. Piscator influenced a new generation of playwrights and directors and contributed to the rediscovery and ascendancy of the docudrama as a vehicle of coming to terms with the past. The detection of historical and ideological continuities with fascism, the commitment to remembering and redressing Nazi and contemporary injustice, and vigilance, protest, and opposition on behalf of the victims of oppression became central tenets of the student movement, the New Left, and the political theater associated with these movements.

The New Left’s opposition to the politics of the restoration period also entailed questioning Adenauer’s belief that Western democracies, especially the United States, would provide guidance in West Germany’s democratization process; the protests against the Vietnam War crystallized the widespread perception of the United States as an aggressive imperialist power that brutally enforced its economic interests in the Third

¹ Ralph Giordano coined these terms in his book Die zweite Schuld oder Von der Last Deutscher zu sein (1987).
World and violently squashed the Civil Rights movement at home. While the vigilance regarding fascist continuities in the FRG led young leftists to take over the Jewish community’s traditional watchdog role (Bodemann, 36–37), their break with the Adenauer era’s philosemitic consensus, according to Frank Stern, also “left a social-psychological void, which, under the circumstances of rising nationalism, could slowly be filled with antisemitic attitudes, both old and new” (1996, 96). Many Jews in West Germany perceived Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s play *The City, Garbage, and Death* (1981), which included the stereotypical figure of a “Rich Jew,” as such an indication of leftist anti-Semitism, and organized protests against the play in Frankfurt. Stern asserts that the New Left’s antifascism did not include a serious “effort to come to fundamental grips with the history of German antisemitism” (1996, 97), pointing to the neglect of “race” as analytical category and subject of historical research in the antifascist discourses of the New Left, but also arguably within feminist and gay antifascism.2 Whereas the Marxist Left, which was theoretically informed by the work of Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse, pointed to fascist continuities primarily through critiques of capitalism, the mass media, and First World imperialism, West German feminists in the 1970s and 1980s noted parallels between the Nazis’ treatment of women and the patriarchal ideology they diagnosed in contemporary gender arrangements. Women’s disempowerment under the Nazis could thus serve to ignite contemporary feminist resistance to women’s exclusion and marginalization in the realms of politics, work, and academia. Similarly, gay writers from the 1970s onward tied the project of gay liberation to a reconstruction of homosexual persecution and victimization by the Nazis, associating homophobia with fascist legacies and thereby challenging contemporary sexual mores and laws, including Section 175 of the Criminal Code, which punished homosexual acts. The texts examined in this chapter illustrate the multiple meanings and political traditions around the term “antifascist,” and exam-
ine how they addressed the question of racist continuities in postwar Germany. With the exception of the first play I discuss, *Andorra* (1961), which presented a schematic etiology of anti-Semitism through the formal devices of the docudrama, the texts I have selected, composed between 1969 and 1990, examine race and ethnicity through depictions of foreigners who have come to West Germany as workers and spouses. Although their authors relate the treatment of these figures to the Nazi discourse of eugenic racism, they want to demonstrate the adaptability of that discourse both to new groups of victims and to changed formations of German nationality, no longer primarily organized around ethnicity but around economic prowess (for which Jürgen Habermas has coined the term “DM-nationalism”). Fassbinder’s film *Katzelmacher* (1968),Gerhard Kromschröder’s journalistic report *Als ich ein Türke war* (When I was a Turk, 1983), and Kerstin Specht’s play *Lila* (1990) analyze and critique racial continuities in the respective historical contexts of the economic miracle and the rapid modernization processes associated with “globalization” that almost coincided with German reunification. These texts represent the treatment of foreigners and people of different races as evidence of the feebleness of West Germany’s democratization efforts, and the hollowness of its claims to have overcome Nazi legacies.

The closing of the Iron Curtain in August 1961, which marked the heating up of the Cold War, had the effect of halting the steady flow of cheap labor from Eastern Europe and East Germany and required the West German government to recruit workers abroad. So-called guest workers from Italy, Spain, Portugal, Turkey, and other southern European countries received one-year contracts and fueled the economic boom of the young republic. Housed in barracks, sometimes in former concentration and labor camps, and initially called *Fremdarbeiter*, like the slave and forced laborers the Nazis had imported into the Reich, these laborers were viewed as an expedient means of maintaining and increasing productivity and prosperity, until the economic crisis and subsequent recruitment stop of 1972. While West Germany established itself as one of the most affluent European countries, its noncitizen workforce enjoyed few of the privileges to which German citizens of a prosperous welfare state were entitled, such as worker protection, humane accommodations, mobility, or social benefits, much less political representation. Those who rebelled against their wretched living and working conditions, by forming or joining trade unions and organizing strikes, were subject to retribution and often swiftly deported. *Katzelmacher* dramatizes the eroding of workers’ rights among both Germans and guest workers and shows that the “economic miracle” benefited only a few. Similarly, *Lila* demonstrates the deepening class rifts in the new global economy, while also calling atten-
tion to the further marginalization and exploitation of women within it. In addition, *When I Was a Turk* points to the exclusion of those from the sphere of consumption who had largely made the joys of consumerism possible. The texts examined here unequivocally indict such racial continuities, siding squarely with their Greek, Filipina, and Turkish protagonists. As I will show, however, the leftist and feminist critiques of German racial discourse I discuss here require a more subtle historicization than this brief sketch of political identifications might suggest.

My argument focuses on those moments that betray a deep ambivalence within leftist and feminist antifascism (already indicated by Stern’s remark above); despite their advocacy for the underdog, some are also haunted by the fear of that underdog as violent and frightening. Perhaps the clearest sign of antifascist ambivalence is the way in which the critique of race is organized around Christian tropes of suffering and redemption, which arrogate the prerogative of converting abjection into spiritual triumph to the white body modeled on the crucified Jesus (see also my discussion of Christianity and whiteness in chapter 5). Antifascist drag, I argue, emblematizes the leftist/feminist identification with victimized, oppressed, and insurgent people, while also representing those people as devoid of subjectivity, mute, incapable of representing themselves, and potentially hostile. It is finally less about minority advocacy than it is about antifascist writers’ search for a revolutionary subject at precisely those historical moments when that revolutionary subject, whether constituted as the working class or as women, seemed more divided and resistant to intellectuals’ administrations than ever. Ethnic drag in the discourse of antifascism ventriloquizes the oppression and opposition of racialized and Third World subjects but contributes little to improved collaboration or solidarity with the exploitation of foreign workers or spouses; the substitutions I trace in *Katzelmacher, Lila,* and *When I Was a Turk* render literal the dynamic Gayatri Spivak has described in her seminal essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988). Spivak observes how the import of notions of desire (via the work of Wilhelm Reich on the mass psychology of fascism) into French poststructuralist theories of power figured a crisis in the role of the intellectual in social struggles, but also led to a loss of analytical nuance in understanding and combatting alienation, ideological mystification, and indoctrination through mass culture.3

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3. Spivak argued that the shift from a discourse of ideology and interest to one of desire signals a crisis in the role of the Western intellectual, who purports to transparently represent that desire. French theorists like Deleuze and Foucault assimilated desire into their theories of power via Reich, who in his study of fascism had contended that the German masses had wanted Hitler (rather than being duped by him), and that Nazism seized on that desire. This move constituted an important turn in the development of the post-Marxist critique, which,
The split between a discourse of coercion, oppression, and class interest, and a discourse of (an inherently masochistic) desire for subjection to the normative is mirrored by the two divergent dramaturgical patterns antifascists had available for their articulation of an antiracist critique in the theater but also in such “undercover performances” as Kromschröder’s one-week experiment of passing as a Turkish streetsweeper, a one-man “playing” that some readers of his book endeavored to duplicate collectively. Frisch’s Andorra, structured around the device of the tribunal, in which the murder of a Jew is investigated, typifies a Brechtian dramaturgy, which dominated leftist playwrights’ and directors’ efforts at confronting the Nazi past (e.g., Peter Weiss’s The Investigation and Rolf Hochhuth’s The Deputy), as well as issues of imperialism and race (e.g., Weiss’s Vietnam Discourse; see also my discussion Hubert Fichte’s Great Act for Saint Pedro Claver, 1980, in chapter 5). In contrast, Fassbinder’s Katzelmacher and Specht’s Lila adapt the tradition of the critical Volksstück created by Brecht’s contemporaries Ödön von Horvath and Marieluise Fleißer. As I will show, however, both plays incorporate elements from Brechtian dramaturgy in their presentation of the central figure of the foreigner, by either choosing a deliberate masquerade that sets that figure apart from the rest of the dramatic personnel and is readily recognizable by the spectators (Andorra, Katzelmacher), by textually foregrounding the masquerade (When I Was a Turk), or by making the character mute, thereby refusing to confirm other characters’ perceptions and prejudices and hence interrupting the expressive, mimetic logic of race. In antifascist drag, the lonely foreigners are marked as drag acts, stressing the disjunction of social role and racial essence. This technique might be seen to directly contradict the lamination of outer appearance to inner truth exemplified by Jew Süss (chap. 1). It also challenges the positioning of the German masses as dupes of Jewish masquerade and deception: from Andorra to Lila, the texts denounce the process of detecting and pronouncing racial difference in the body of the Other as a violent, collective process, debunking both the Nazi’s claim to pierce through the masquerade on behalf of the hapless Volk, and the later generation’s thesis that the German people had been seduced and coerced by a pernicious Nazi elite.
Instead, the assertion of Germans’ innocence and victimization is replaced with an analysis of violence and complicity. Yet I intend to show that the grafting of the Brechtian estrangement effect (discussed in chapter 1) onto the plot structure of the critical Volksstück also produced certain problems. The artists discussed here use ethnic drag to organize a dynamic of identification and distance that bars spectatorial empathy with the victim/outsider and denounces the German community that purports to read difference off of the outsider’s body. If “the Germans” appear primarily as racists, what alternative identification do these texts suggest?

The texts I discuss in this chapter adapt antifascist critiques and attendant dramaturgical models to the representation of interracial relations. While I mention or footnote several other texts that deploy similar techniques and display similar conceptual and political problems, I find the dearth of plays, films, and performances devoted to the critical conjunction of antifascism and race much more noteworthy. While I see these texts as representative of certain systematic blind-spots and failures in antifascist thought, their dedication to antiracism is also a rare endeavor that sets them apart from the overall neglect, marginalization, and subsumption of “race” in diverse antifascist discourses.

I begin my analysis of antifascist drag with a discussion of Max Frisch’s play Andorra, even though Frisch belongs to an earlier generation of leftists and deploys a purely Brechtian approach to his deconstruction of antisemitism. Nevertheless, I see this play as laying important dramaturgical foundations for antifascist critiques of race, from which later authors departed but which also, by comparison, highlight what is lost in later works that are formal composites between a Brechtian paradigm of estrangement and the critical Volksstück’s paradigm of empathy. In some ways, Andorra serves as the political yardstick by which the other texts are measured. The play, which premiered to great success in Zurich and soon after in several West German theaters in 1961, was the first systematic analysis of the social psychology of racism in the postwar German-speaking theater.4 It turned the fascist gaze, which had scrutinized the objects of racial violence, back against the perpetrators, exemplifying a new generation’s dedication to coming to terms with the past. Andorra is still regarded as “one of the most important plays of German postwar theater,” canonized, and securely ensconced in high-school curricula.5 It traces the fabri-

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4. Although there had been other plays that had represented the Holocaust naturalistically, the “model” Andorra was the first to schematically represent its cause on the postwar German-speaking stage (see note 11 below).

5. Thus the cover blurb on a 1984 anthology of materials about Andorra, edited by Wendt and Schmidt.
cation of a “Jewish character” through the story of the twenty-year-old Andri, whom everyone, including himself, believes to be Jewish. Since the audience early on becomes privy to Andri’s actual, non-Jewish identity, it is able to perceive the young man’s taking on of speech patterns, body language, and habits that the Andorrians perceive as “typically” Jewish, in terms of the coerced psychological and physical incorporation of predefined traits. The famous Judenschau scene at the end of the play, in which a trained “racial detective” sorts Andorrians from Jews, exposes race as performative, that is, as both false and real. The refusal of the expressive logic of race was undoubtedly a great achievement after the Holocaust and deservedly garnered critical accolades.

The play debunks the racial “truth” that legitimates Andri’s ostracization and murder and focuses instead on the community’s psychological need for ostracizing someone it perceives as different. Although the play is set in the minuscule Mediterranean state of Andorra, Andorrians also stand in for German audiences. Frisch, along with other leftist playwrights in the 1960s, broke with conservative explanations of fascism, which had rested on the demonization of Hitler and his circle. Frisch, along with other leftist playwrights in the 1960s, broke with conservative explanations of fascism, which had rested on the demonization of Hitler and his circle. Instead, he

6. The biblical exhortation that the priest speaks in the play, “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image of the Lord, thy God, nor of men who are his creatures” (46) is also Frisch’s “great theme,” which, according to legend, the young writer found through his work on Andorra. Some critics therefore charged Frisch with instrumentalizing the Holocaust for the fretful ponderings on the exigencies of identity that are his signature as a writer (Demetz, 146).

7. Literally, this invented term means “Jewish show.” Perhaps Frisch chose it to recall the ethnic shows discussed in chapter 3.

8. Some scholars and reviewers have also criticized the play, noting that its abstract, universalizing psychologism robs the Holocaust of its historical specificity and that its focus on the perpetrators elides Jewish history, cultural and religious traditions, and capacity for self-definition. Frisch defended his preference for an “abstract model” over historical specificity in an interview: “Ultimately, the play is not about antisemitism. Antisemitism only serves as an example. Why I used the ‘Jew’ as an example? His fate is closest to ours, underscores the theme of guilt. Moreover, it is high time to face things as they are, to start normalizing the word Jew. Tomorrow it can be somebody else who is persecuted” (quoted in Frühwald and Schmitz, 20). Critics debated the advantages of specificity versus abstraction also in relation to other texts. Adorno’s comment, after viewing the stage adaptation of The Diary of Anne Frank, is illuminating in this context. He remarked that “one spectator was moved to say, yes, but they should have saved that girl. Certainly that was good, a first step toward reconsideration. But the individual case, which is meant to illuminate the awful whole, at the same time became an alibi for the whole, which the spectator forgot over its individualization” (Frühwald and Schmitz, 28).

9. Andorra constructs a psychologized model of antisemitism, by portraying it as a process of projection: anything that threatens the ideal self-image is repressed in the self, split off, projected onto the Jew, and made into an object of derision and violence—or, in a philosemitic variant, of adoration. The soldier represses fear and derides the Jew’s cowardice (17); the doctor represses his own professional failure and hates the Jew’s ambition (29); the
invited audience identification with the “ordinary people,” who, he noted, “do not kill their Jew, they only turn him into a Jew in a world where that means the death sentence” (Schmitz and Wendt, 53). While the audience’s alignment with the perpetrators called them to historical responsibility, the play also allowed for distanced reflection by borrowing the docudrama-device of the tribunal: Andorran witnesses’ accounts of their participation in the events leading to Andri’s murder are presented in direct address to the audience. Identification and judgment alternate in a dialectic aiming at self-transformation. Contemporary spectators are thus expected to see through and unlearn the psychology of racism: most importantly, the play instructs them to question and resist the Andorrans’ perception that appearance, voice, behavior, dress, and so on, mimetically reflect a racial essence—a task that becomes increasingly difficult in the course of the play, as Andri is shown to adopt the very personality traits others have attributed to him on the basis of anti-Semitic prejudice. The Jew in Frisch’s play is only a symptom of the Andorrans’ psychic repressions and projections: he is the embodiment of their prejudices, which become the real object of critique. “Race” is thus defamiliarized; in addi-
tion, the geographical displacement of antisemitic violence to Andorra, along with the drama’s alternation between reenactment of and reflection on the past, clearly point to Brecht’s influence on the Swiss playwright, which Frisch readily acknowledged (Schmitz and Wendt, 18–19). He successfully historicized that which in Brecht’s theoretical essay on the defamiliarization effect eludes historicization (chap. 1); Andorra’s critique of racism thus fills an important gap in Brechtian theater.

Given the immense critical and popular success of Andorra, it is surprising that the play stands alone as a dramatization of the racial underpinnings of Nazism, even though in the 1960s the docudrama became a popular vehicle through which young German leftists endeavored to work through national guilt and responsibility for fascism and the Holocaust.12 Yet not all leftists shared the political optimism inherent in Brecht’s dramaturgy; some turned to the critical Volksstück for a much darker vision of racist continuities in postwar West Germany. This model of political theater stages the violent confrontation between outsider figures and communal norms, usually ending in the expulsion or subordination of the outsider. From its inception in the 1920s, playwrights used this model to investigate protofascist tendencies: Ödön von Horváth dissected the class mentality of the petite bourgeoisie, and Marieluise Fleißer focused on gender conformity as central to the formation of the fascist Volksgemeinschaft (folk community). This legacy made the genre a congenial vehicle for those writers who wanted to expose unacknowledged political continuities connecting West Germany with the Third Reich. While most of the play-

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12. In the 1960s, the uncovering of fascist continuities broke with prior assumptions about the German Sonderweg (path of aberration), which had allowed politicians, artists, and historians to represent Nazism and the Holocaust as unique and unprecedented. That paradigm also contained historical and ideological phenomena within a tightly circumscribed time and place and curtailed the analysis of lingering or latent fascist structures in democratic societies and in the present and was thus seen to facilitate political denial. Yet neither the docudramas about fascism nor the more lyrical drama that grew out of new subjectivity include race as a central dimension of life under Nazism.
wrights who rediscovered the critical *Volksstück* in the 1960s and 1970s defined their outsider figures in class or sexual terms, a few also dramatized the violent clash between a foreigner and the native German community. The confrontation unleashes racial discourses that had lain dormant in the social backwaters that are the preferred setting of the critical *Volksstück*. These plays intervene in the postwar generation’s myth of a “new beginning,” stressing instead that Nazi ideology was merely (and barely) submerged in the repressive restoration period. Significantly, the dramas show not only the full-blown recurrence of racial violence, but also trace the absorption of the foreigner and the reconfiguration of the fascist ideology s/he catalyzes into a new, “friendlier” regime of economic nationalism. The generic pessimism of the critical *Volksstück* marks that process as negative, rather than hopeful or progressive. By shifting xenophobic violence from the individual level, where its brutal physical enactment can still incite spectatorial outrage and the desire for change, to the systemic level of economic inequality, the texts register a threatening sense of dwindling political agency and resistance. Despite its pessimistic ending, critics have considered the critical *Volksstück*’s “politics of brutality” as a radical call for fundamental social change, even though the dramatic plot denies any hope for change (Cocalis; Hofmeister; Sieg 1994a).

The playwrights whose critical *Volksstücke* I will examine in this chapter adopt the same racial estrangement techniques familiar from *Andorra* for the representation of their foreigner figures, grafting a Brechtian device onto a dramaturgical model commonly understood as anti-Brechtian. Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s *Katzelmacher* (1969), which he dedicated to Fleißer, stages the conflicts following the arrival of the Greek guest-worker Jorgos in a small Bavarian town, and Kerstin Specht’s more recent play *Lila* (1990) dramatizes the violence ensuing after a young villager in Upper Franconia brings home a Filipina bride. As I will show, the plays’ insertion of ethnic or racial Others into the generic formula of the critical *Volksstück* goes along with (or effects?) a shift of focus from the subjectivity of the outsider to the behavior and motivations of the community. Whereas other critical *Volksstücke* (but also Frisch’s *Andorra*) are centrally concerned with the outsider’s thoughts, feelings, and behavior, *Katzelmacher* and *Lila* leave the subjectivity of their foreigners blank. These figures scarcely speak, so that spectators find out nothing about the emotions or motivations that are otherwise so crucial to dramatizing the mental processes of the ostracized, who masochistically accept the social norms that contribute to their suffering. They are depicted as mysterious and opaque, offering the community nothing but a bodily surface on which the German mobs project their racial fears and desires. The defa-
miliarization of the social construction of race is applied exclusively to the
Germans’ ascription of racial difference onto the foreigners’ bodies.13

Jorgos and Lila thus mark a unique conjunction of Brechtian and
anti-Brechtian dramaturgies and their attendant politics. Brecht’s epic
theater sets up antagonistic forces moving through a dialectic toward
social change, whereas the critical Volksstück depicts the elision or absorp-
tion of oppositional impulses; epic dramaturgy invites analytical distance,
whereas the critical Volksstück disallows a spectatorial perspective outside
of dominant ideology; Brecht’s theater shows power to operate through
coercion, in contrast to the critical Volksstück’s Foucauldian understand-
ning of power as normative. While Brecht wants to make transparent the
ideologies mystifying economic exploitation, so that the poor may recog-
nize their true class interests and fight for social justice, the authors of crit-
ical Volksstücke see no easy way to dispel “false consciousness,” since
mass culture has powerfully wedded individual desires to social norms and
insidiously prevents consumer-subjects from extricating themselves from
its ideological reach. Fassbinder’s and Specht’s dramatic hybrids, by graft-
ing two dramaturgies many critics have described as incommensurable,
might be seen to recuperate the sense of social transformation otherwise
missing from the critical Volksstück. However, Brechtian theater predi-
cates political agency on the dialectic of identification and distanced analy-
sis, constructing a critical consciousness outside of the operations of dom-
inant ideology. Where then do the dramatic hybrids of Fassbinder and
Specht locate the spectator, and how do they imagine social change?

Ethnicity, Gender, and the Economic Miracle in
Fassbinder’s Katzelmacher

In 1968, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, then head of the infamous antitheater
in Munich, dedicated his film Katzelmacher to Marieluise Fleißer.14 The
filmmaker himself plays Jorgos, a Greek guest-worker who is recruited to
work in a small town in Bavaria, becomes sexually involved with one of
the local girls, and is beaten up by a pack of male youth. In the end, he
announces his decision to leave, but only because he doesn’t want to work
alongside a newly hired Turkish guest-worker. The film highlights the eth-
nic underpinnings of German nationality, by showing the construction of

14. Although the film was based on a play of the same title, I will focus on the former
in this discussion, because the author-filmmaker’s assumption of the title role provides an apt
illustration of ethnic drag. The film’s title is a derogatory Bavarian term for southern Euro-
peans.
Germanness in opposition to a foreign Other who is imagined as mythically potent, bestial, and immoral. The youth circulate rumors that Jorgos might be a communist, that he stinks, and that he is not a Christian, thus reproducing the fascist discourse of locating political, religious, and anatomical difference in the Greek’s body. This discourse becomes full-blown when the Germans brutally attack Jorgos in the marketplace. Rather than repeating the historical script of expelling the outsider from the community, however, the attack is followed by his integration—at least for a while. As I noted before, neither his integration nor his eventual departure (presumably for another job more to his liking) constitute a happy ending.

Katzelmacher contextualizes the confrontation between Jorgos and the village youth within the economic miracle as well as the change in gender roles. The town’s hierarchy of breadwinning men and dependent women is already in crisis before the guest worker’s arrival, because the unskilled and underemployed German males must compete with women on whose material and sexual dependency they can no longer count. The successful Elisabeth, Jorgos’s employer and one of the film’s main characters, is rumored to have acquired the necessary capital for establishing her own business through an affair with Burger, an “old man” and one of the local “bigwigs.” Her upward mobility and self-confidence elicit half-con-
temptuous, half-jealous remarks on the part of the other women. Another
young woman, Ingrid, prepares for a career as a singer, rather than opting
for marriage or love. Their peers accept as normal both women’s sexual
exploitation in their climb up the social ladder, but resent the women’s
choice to market their sexuality for their own career rather than that of a
husband or boyfriend. Elisabeth’s success, moreover, has put her into a
position where she no longer has to sell sexual services for advancement or
security but can command them from dependent men, including Jorgos,
but also her German employee Bruno. The female boss and the male sex-
ual servant thus embody an economic order turned upside down.

While women are shown to profit from sexual commodification, men
are shown to lose—both in terms of the value of their labor power and in
dignity. Bruno, Elisabeth’s employee and lover, is emasculated by his role.
He deploys a wheedling rhetoric of “love” that shows his plea for loyalty
to be inspired by economic dependence and fear of competition. Typical of
the critical Volksstück, Katzelmacher shows women scorning the possibil-
ity of greater equality between the sexes. They value Jorgos precisely for
possessing the “genuine” masculinity that the Germans only feign, and
several of them proposition the Greek after Jorgos is rumored to have
raped one of them. The German men’s macho posturing and their jealousy
of the hypersexualized Jorgos relate the production of Germanness to gen-
der reorganization and crisis. Fassbinder’s drag performance harnesses
the ascribed potency of a racialized, southern European sexuality to a
masculinity that is portrayed as jeopardized and failing due to female com-
petition and professionalization during a period of economic growth.

Jorgos’s economic and sexual integration into the group reveals an
integration of the category of race/ethnicity into the German economy
that both exacerbates and stabilizes social differences. The presence of an
underclass of foreign nationals and the emerging self-perception of the
youth as “German” and hence privileged, neutralizes the political volatil-
ity that might otherwise accompany the further impoverishment of the
already exploited. Jorgos embodies not only the stabilizing consequences
of racialized economic stratification; it is noteworthy that the film focuses
on his effects on the German community but omits the attendant harsh
effects of a modern capitalist economy on the Greek himself. While we see
the spartan room Jorgos shares with Bruno, there is no sense of a class dif-
ference between them; indeed, Bruno is portrayed as the suffering party,
since he must now share his accommodations with his new coworker and
is robbed of all privacy.

While the open brutality of the villagers is shaped by fascist notions of
ethnic purity and homogeneity, modern racism wears a feminine, friendly
face, inflicting bodily harm in the form of austere working conditions rather than through brass knuckles. Elisabeth, who profits most from Jorgos, is the one who rebukes the townspeople for their racist brutality, as well as their use of the Nazi term *Fremdarbeiter* (alien worker), and teaches them the more “hospitable” word *guest worker*. Jorgos’s acceptance by the group, which follows the mob attack against him, marks the threshold to the new racial order. Whereas the youth had earlier regarded both Jorgos and Elisabeth as outsiders and fantasized about expunging both, they come to admire her business savvy: “Not bad,” says Erich when he finds out how much she deducts from Jorgos’s salary for room and board, and Bruno agrees: “That’s what the man from the foreign labor department in Munich told her. You have to do it that way because then it’s more productive because they’re here and the money stays in the country. . . . It’s a trick. For Germany’s sake” (92). Even though he will probably not benefit personally from the windfall for the fatherland, Germany becomes available for positive identification to workers like Bruno through the ethnic stratification of the workforce. The fact that Jorgos earns even less reconciles the German workers with their own exploitation. Since Elisabeth’s calculating attitude becomes the accepted norm at the end of the film (accepted even by Jorgos himself), and that norm is coded feminine, the film associates the perjury of modern racism with the modern gender order that gives rise to it.

Jorgos’s function in the film is to highlight economic and social shifts in postwar Germany; he serves as a catalyst, rather than performing a role that is itself socially, psychologically, or sexually elaborated. We know nothing of the character’s motivations for taking this job, the work itself, his past, or his desires. His body provides little more than a blank screen on which communal tensions and antagonisms are played out. Significantly, Fassbinder chose not to represent Jorgos’s ethnicity visually (such as makeup, hairstyle, costume), but exclusively through his linguistic habits: Jorgos speaks broken German. Fassbinder’s performance

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16. Hans-Bernhard Schlumm points to the “sociotechnological” orientation of “guest worker” studies in the early 1960s, which recognized the difficulties that workers from predominantly traditional, agrarian societies experienced in highly industrialized countries. Social scientists studied the adjustment problems of southern European workers primarily as factors diminishing productivity, and aimed at providing employers with pragmatic strategies to enhance workers’ well-being and output. In 1964 one such study recommended: “It is important to meet the foreign worker with friendliness and encouraging facial expressions; you will win over the linguistically isolated southerner more easily with a smile than with regulations, objective explanations, or threats” (quoted in Schlumm, 15–16). The calculating smile, which first Elisabeth and later the village men flash at Jorgos, signals the changed mode and style of racism, which Fassbinder dramatizes in this text as well as the later film *Ali: Angst essen Seele auf* (1973).
estranges the social role from the body of the actor who is (extraperformatively) known to be German. He cites Jorgos, rather than realistically or mimetically representing him, because the actor resists vanishing into the role, instead holding the ongoing construction of that role up for inspection. That process poses particular challenges, because of the ambiguous status of Greek ethnicity: while contemporary Greek laborers were grouped with other “swarthy” southern Europeans, the association of Greece with classical antiquity, marble statues, and physical perfection in German culture also carries connotations of idealized whiteness. This special representational status of Greek nationality renders the German dupes’ attempts at reading a putative (racial? ethnic? national?) truth off of his body particularly ambivalent: Fassbinder’s infamously doughy body, pasty face, and greasy hair conform neither to the stereotype of the Latin lover nor of the athletic beauties depicted in Leni Riefenstahl’s film *Olympia*. Moreover, Fassbinder’s juxtaposition of his own white body with the Greek role uses the estrangement effect to mark whiteness as racialized in this film, eschewing the familiar presumption of universal performability.

When Jorgos’s girlfriend Maria (played by Hanna Schygulla) projects her desire for escaping from the suffocating narrowness of her hometown on the man from a—for her—mythically warm, sensual, and free South, her monologue both reveals the staleness of this cliché and hints at the acts, relations, and pleasures that are impossible under present conditions. Brecht had called this moment the “Not, But,” which requires the actor to not only show how specific behaviors are socially determined, but also to “discover, specify, imply” those that are presently not possible, but must be evoked and made available to the political imagination (Brecht 1964, 137). Put differently, the Not, But puts a political utopia under erasure. Fassbinder’s body thus serves as a screen for Maria’s deprivations and longings; Jorgos stands for that which a German subject must excise to qualify for proper national membership—a process of splitting off and projection that *Andorra* had diagnosed as the hallmark of racialization. Jorgos allows Maria to reveal the price German nationality exacts on its subjects, not just on the outsiders excluded from it. That moment also summons spectators to imagine German nationality differently than in its current ethnoeconomic formation, as a place that might welcome less competitive, alienating, and violent relations between people.

The Brechtian moment of the “Not, But” reveals Maria’s racial alienation, not Jorgos’s. Does *Katelmacher* duplicate Brecht’s ethnic bias in marking the defamiliarization effect as the prerogative of the German spectator who reads it off of the Other’s body? Then why does the film caricature the ethnic German spectator as misreading, violent dupe? By
reversing the focus of the masquerade for the purpose of national self-inspection, the film insists that racial difference does not reside in the body of the Other but is produced in the psyche of the German collective, where it must be uncovered, indicted, and undone. It thus assigned the problem of racism and the obligation to change to the majority culture. Unlike Frisch, however, who in the early 1960s addressed spectators as both like and unlike Andorrans and thereby expressed confidence in people’s capacity for historical and ideological progress, Fassbinder’s refusal to permit German viewers to distance themselves from the pack’s violence registers his despair over fascist continuities at the end of the decade. Indeed, his depiction of economic nationalism suggests that things have gotten worse. Typical of the critical Volksstück, Katzelmacher condenses and accelerates racial discourse, a technique that Donna Hofmeister credits with the genre’s ability to force spectators to “ask the largest possible questions” about social justice. In contrast to other critical Volksstücke, which concentrate the horror of normativity and the impossibility of resistance in the figure of the outsider, however, Katzelmacher establishes Jorgos’s own ethnic chauvinism by his disparaging remarks about a prospective Turkish coworker, but otherwise excludes his subjectivity from representation. While he catalyzes a critique of race and nationalism, an alternative vision of social justice is not organized around his perspective, as if it did not really concern him. The question of nationality and race is thus severed from that of immigration and interracial relations. The story is not really about him at all.

The film owes its sense of political urgency not only to the economic changes of the boom years, which were drawing to a close when Fassbinder made his film, but arguably points to the sense of stasis faced by leftist intellectuals in the late 1960s, when the two large political parties had entered into a “Great Coalition” that drove oppositional voices outside of the parliamentary system (in the Außerpolitische Opposition, APO), and when the student movement itself fragmented into a myriad in-fighting factions. At the same time, German leftists perceived a stark contrast between their own powerlessness and marginalization, and the epochal First and Third World conflicts that had first unified the student movement in the Vietnam War protests. Katzelmacher’s Brechtian citation might be seen to import an optimistic sense of social dialectic otherwise absent from the critical Volksstück’s suffocatingly closed universe. Fassbinder’s assumption of Jorgos’s role figures the intellectual’s “real” experi-
ence of oppression as opposed to the people’s false consciousness. One could thus see Jorgos as reinstating the vanguardism that some radical factions of the Left adopted at that time, which presumed that revolutionary desire must be instilled in people through agitation. Yet Frisch’s play underscores that the reenactment of racism in its diverse manifestations can only be made productive for self-critique and transformation by providing a space for analysis and reflection—a space that is absent from *Katzelmacher*. The foreigner, who marks the conjunction of two antagonistic dramaturgical and political models, thus figures race as the most frightening aspect of Nazi continuities, and the most promising way of reigniting a social dialectic young leftists believed to be stalled by the power of modern capitalism to manufacture consent. Moreover, Fassbinder’s choice of a Greek man as the object of impersonation, while owing to his ostensible concern with guest workers (Greeks constituted the fourth largest national group among the two million foreign workers residing in Germany at that time)\(^{18}\) is interesting in terms of the sexual connotations of Greek nationality. Since “Greek love,” the bone of contention in the story, also connotes homosexuality, the film might be seen to reveal the gay filmmaker’s personal stakes in this exploration of Germans’ construction of difference. By inserting a homosexual body into a racialized role, Fassbinder plays on the denotative and connotative meanings of the Greek body in German culture and highlights the structurally similar function of racial and sexual difference in the fascist imagination (see Marshall).

Fassbinder’s ethnic drag act illustrates his political and erotic investment in the role of outsider and might be seen to perform an alliance between racial and sexual outsiders in the context of antifascism, an alliance he further explored in his later work, from the films *Whity* (1969) and *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* (1973) to the controversial play *The City, Garbage, and Death*, 1981. His artistic control as scriptwriter, director, and main character in *Katzelmacher* ensured that what could be seen as the film’s flaw, its barring of identification with either the victims or the per-

\(^{18}\) Greece was one of West Germany’s earliest treaty partners providing short-term laborers. Formalized recruitment contracts were signed with eight Mediterranean countries, including Italy (1955), Spain and Greece (1960), Turkey (1961), Portugal (1964) and Yugoslavia (1968), as well as Tunisia (1965) and Morocco (1963) (McRae, 11). At the time the play was set, about two million migrants lived in West Germany, 12.4 percent of whom came from Greece. Greek laborers constituted the fourth largest group of foreign workers, outranked by Yugoslavs, Italians, and Turks. These lived mainly in the FRG’s urban centers. Until 1960, the proportion of foreign workers from all six recruitment countries was below 1 percent of the West German population. Recruitment (initially for one-year contracts) only began to increase in the 1960s, when the Iron Curtain cut off the flow of labor from Eastern Europe.
petrators of violence, holds out a direct challenge to the German spectator. Repelled by violent and chauvinistic Germans on the one side, and an inscrutable yet faintly opportunistic guest-worker on the other, audiences are implicitly asked not to accept racist processes such as those shown on screen; yet they are also denied the analytical distance required to work through racism according to the Brechtian model. That impasse clearly cannot be resolved within the terms of the film but issued a political provocation at a time when the Left was marginalized and dispersed.

The Impasse of Agency and the Resurrection of the Exceptional German

Kerstin Specht’s play *Lila* was written during the tumultuous period 1989–90 and first produced at the Nuremberg Municipal Theater in 1991. Like Fassbinder, Specht (born in 1956) lives in Munich and has worked both in film and in theater, as a playwright and a director. *Lila* was her first play. Like her better-known drama, *Das Glühend Männla* (The red hot little man, 1988), which secured her reputation as a noteworthy new playwright in Germany, it uses elements of the critical Volksstück and is set in Upper Franconia, where Specht grew up.19 That remote forest region provides not only a congenial provincial backdrop for Specht’s explorations of patriarchal gender arrangements recalling Fleißer’s Ingolstadt plays, but proves particularly apposite for an investigation of racial continuities and reconfigurations in the tradition of Fassbinder. Franconia, located in the southern German state of Bavaria and known as a stronghold of völkisch-nationalist ideologies since 1871, caught the attention of political analysts again in the late 1980s, when the far-right Republican party, which centered its campaign around xenophobic demands like the “repatriation” of foreigners, gained around 60 percent of the vote.20 By drama-

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19. I have analyzed *The Red-Hot Little Man* in *Exiles, Eccentrics, Activists* (1994a, 45–49) and discussed Specht in the context of a feminist tradition of critical *Volksstücke* inaugurated by Marieluise Fleißer.

20. In their book *Rechtsruck: Rassismus im neuen Deutschland*, which early on addressed racism and right-wing extremism as the most pressing social problem in reunified Germany, leftist journalists Klaus Farin and Eberhard Seidel-Pielen, both of whom are active in immigration politics, narrate a “journey through the German hinterland” that begins in rural Franconia. Their report seeks to balance the depiction of the new German states as especially prone to racist violence in the popular news media by pointing to the ubiquity of racist sentiments and violence East and West, as well as demonstrating the continuity of fascist thought in the far-right party programs of the Nationale Partei Deutschlands (NPD) in the 1960s, and the Republikaner in the 1980s and 1990s. The Republikaner, or Reps, campaigned not only for foreigner’s repatriation, but also for curtailing women’s access to positions of authority and power, and for the restitution of the German borders of 1937, and a rejection of German national guilt.
tizing an interracial marriage, *Lila* offers a critique of quasi-fascist gender and race relations. It investigates the reconfiguration of fascist discourses of race around German reunification and the accelerated modernization that followed it. Upper Franconia’s proximity to the former East German border compounded geographical with social and economic marginality. The play shows how after reunification, the region’s proximity to the new capital, Berlin, suddenly conferred on the Franconian forest the function of tourist destination for Berlin day-trippers, contributing to the rapid transformation of an archaic, rural world into the cosmopolitan metropolis’s hinterland. Moreover, these upheavals coincide with capitalism’s epochal shift into the information age. As a data processor, the Filipina wife brings into view the division of feminized and racialized labor and masculinized leisure pursuits generated by new communication technologies. Her position is appropriated for a critical perspective from which these changes are thrown into stark relief, and from which the possibility of opposition is considered most emphatically and threateningly.

Like *Katzelmacher*’s Jorgos, the Filipina Lila who gives the play its title is mute and therefore unknowable, even though she nonverbally (and somewhat ambiguously) expresses emotions like fear, anger, and happiness. Whereas Jorgos’s terseness had contributed to a stylized depiction of his character and facilitated the defamiliarization of ethnicity, Lila’s lack of speech appears in more naturalistic terms as an aspect of her lack of proficiency in German. The Nuremberg production supported this naturalistic interpretation of Lila by casting an actor of color in the role. I will show how the choice of “ethnically correct” casting exacerbates the split I have already noted in *Katzelmacher* between the critique of German whiteness and the critique of interracial relations. In addition, the play duplicates the political impasse between a Brechtian dialectic and the critical *Volksstück*’s vision of systemic violence. As we shall see, Specht transcends this impasse by invoking a universal notion of humanism that erases rather than includes marginalized voices.

Lila’s arrival in the Franconian village elicits two seemingly incompatible responses: while some villagers revile Siegfried’s bride Lila and equate foreign origin with a disease threatening to infect the healthy social body, others pragmatically note the material and sexual advantages the German husband will reap from his marriage, the infusion of “fresh blood” into the family, and Lila’s perceived submissiveness. In this remote forest region, racist attitudes have survived apparently unchanged from the fascist past; unbridled hostility is tinged with lust, racial difference is figured as sexual difference. While Jorgos had possessed hypermasculine allure, Lila is perceived as hyperfeminine by male and female villagers, arousing their desire as well as their jealousy.

Sex tourism to Southeast Asian destinations such as Bangkok and
Manila has long been available to middle-class, West German men, and more recently, the business of mail-order brides, as well as recruitment of Southeast Asian women into sex work, has profited from the desperate poverty of large postcolonial populations, creating an international sexual traffic in women who are prized in Germany for their beauty and putative demureness. The play stages the international sexual traffic as a clash between patriarchal and racist discourses: despite their macho posturing at the inn, the village farmers know that with their small parcels of land, they are not attractive marriage partners for German women: “with an Aussiedlerhof . . . no future. I hear they [Asian mail-order brides] cost 4,000 Deutschmark, and if you don’t like them you can return them,” says one savvy customer (11). If they hope to continue the patriarchal farming families that depend on hardworking, obedient, and child-bearing wives, these men must, for economic reasons but also because German women have other life options available to them, curb their racist rejection of foreign wives. Given the physical hardships as well as low social esteem such a life entails for women (in the opening scene, one farmer describes his wife as a brood-mare [9]), it is not surprising that some young German women would rather strike out for the city and material independence. Despite the men’s initial taunts that Siegfried’s Filipina bride comes from the “jungle” (10), that she might be a prostitute because she worked as a maid in a port city (11), and that all foreigners are “bad people” and carry diseases (11), their racist objections to the marriage are mitigated by economic prerogatives and the primacy of patriarchal needs: “[The women] from around here don’t want to become farmers,” concedes one villager, and another adds, “and you can’t return them either” (11). From a patriarchal-misogynist perspective, a Filipina wife is simply preferable to no wife at all.

To the married women in the village, Lila means sexual competition and commodification, and the disintegration of a social fabric that had accorded them inferior status but also security and a modest outcome. Sex in this rural community is reserved for premarital techniques of procuring a husband and for professionals in the big city, while the married woman is “merely” expected to procreate. The village women regard Lila as a foreigner who with her youth, beauty, and legal dependency “undersells” them in the marriage market and simultaneously ups the ante in regard to sexual services. The collapse of the separation of sexual activity and

21. Aussiedler (resettlers) were ethnic German refugees from the former eastern provinces migrating to West Germany after the war, where they received small parcels of farmland from the government. The point here is not only that the inferiority of the land impedes the men in procuring German wives, but that they themselves were not born in the geographic region they now want to protect against newcomers.
respectability between married and unmarried women culminates in the marital quarrel at the end of the first act, which precipitates the symbolic destruction of the village’s archaic sexual order. The mother’s jealous accusation that the father had indecently touched Lila, and his retort that he would now visit the Frankfurt bordellos rather than stay faithful to her, signals the erosion of the division of sexual labor between “decent” and “indecent” women, and heralds the mother’s transformation from protector to destroyer of the home.

Where Katzelmacher had used femininity as metaphor for the perfidious “friendly racism” operating in modern capitalism, Lila depicts women as marshaling the fascist discourse of racial purity and foreign contamination in order to bolster their dwindling gender privileges. In contrast, men of all classes are shown to be the proponents and beneficiaries of a new world order characterized by a racialized, global sexual market. Like the Italian espresso-maker the couple received as a wedding gift and the Scottish milk cows the farmers now prefer over their Holsteins, Lila is a commodity that men value for its exoticism as well as its higher quality and productivity.

The Filipina represents to the villagers the epochal changes brought on by the opening of the borders and the subsequent, dizzying rearrangement of the German map, as well as the country’s positioning in the global market. While their previously peripheral location had translated into economic atrophy and social backwardness, their now central location not too far from the new capital, Berlin, suddenly catapults them into modernity, confronting them with international travel and trade, women’s professionalization, and economic competition with technologically advanced, as well as Third World nations. Siegfried’s mother balks at these changes, preferring the familiar horrors of tradition that afford her a modicum of authority to the unfamiliar ones she associates with Lila. To the mother, tolerance and integration into the family and community are predicated on Lila’s unconditional surrender to a rigid regime of local German customs, including housework. The compound of German culture and female subservience is epitomized by a scene in which the mother teaches Lila to cook traditional potato dumplings. While her handicapped daughter Hannah points out that Siegfried, who is a cook by profession, could probably prepare his own food, the mother scoffs at her and proceeds to instruct Lila:

Remember how it goes? Now you boil them. She pours boiling water over the dumpling dough. Steam shoots up. Lila jumps back in fear. And now make dump-ling-s, litt-le balls. She quickly forms a dumpling. Now it’s your turn! She takes Lila’s hands and submerges them in the
The mother’s response to Lila illustrates one of the critical Volkstück’s central tenets, that those most oppressed within an ideological system nevertheless have strong subjective investments in it. Despite the mother’s brutal attempts to “Germanize” her daughter-in-law, Lila also represents that which the mother lost in her own gendered and national socialization. Listening to Lila sing, the mother remembers her own father’s refusal to let her play the guitar, because “this won’t do for a girl” (24), and for a moment her bitterness and her longing create a connection between them. When she realizes, however, that her daughter Hannah is growing fond of Lila and threatens to slip out of her control, she furiously reasserts her authority by telling Lila that “all of Asia is a whorehouse” (24). The mother invokes race to reinstall hierarchy where gender identification and solidarity would have thrown the mother’s habitual dedication to protecting men’s interests into question. However, this strategy backfires as her continued harassment of Lila prompts the young couple to move to the city. Aggrieved, the father announces his decision to sell the house and move away, because he no longer sees the point of working. The disintegration of her family, in turn, drives the mother into madness, leading her to set fire to the house and causing her daughter’s death.

Of the play’s four female characters, only two survive the first act. The play’s division into two parts underscores the profound changes reunification has brought: where the first act shows the villagers’ world to be as yet unaffected by the recent opening of the border, the second act opens in an utterly changed landscape. The ragged, derelict father guards the field of ashes where his house once stood, a desolate island untouched by the wave of modernization and prosperity that has swept over the village. Its location in the Berlin hinterland has offered profitable opportunities for many, and a supermarket chain is interested in buying up the father’s land. The male villagers are shown to have profited from reunification in various ways: the local rifle club can afford a trip to the Munich Oktoberfest, a realtor is showing off his newly buffed and surgically improved body as well as his expensive leisure equipment, and another man boasts about his affluence since renting out rooms to Berlin tourists. The play seems to celebrate the arrival of modernity by indicating a linear progression from poverty and stagnation toward affluence, leisure, and instant gratification. A look at gender relations in this paradise belies this pretty picture, however. Gender is dramatized as the bat-
tlefield on which class and racial conflicts are fought and on which the epochal antagonisms are inscribed most violently. One rifle club member refers to his “daily war with his old woman” (36), a visitor tells the father of one woman’s setting fire to her husband when he cheated on her, and Lila physically attacks Siegfried. Moreover, after the first part focused on relationships among women, their near absence in the second part of the play is all the more noticeable. The field of ashes that the father watches over serves as a memorial for his dead daughter, and through his binoculars he can see the sanitarium where the mad mother is first kept and later taken away to be buried.

Specht’s play portrays women as paying the price for modernization in the wake of reunification, with their lives, their health, and their moral integrity. On their backs, German men achieve upward mobility, affluence, and First World status. Written in 1989–90, Specht’s play illustrates a feminist critique of reunification that, in pointing out that women were the “losers of the Wende,” obscures the ways in which women in a “multicultural” Germany are divided along multiple axes. According to Specht, gender differences replaced the East-West dichotomy as the main social fault-line in unified Germany. Lila dramatizes the sexual division of labor and deploys race as a metaphor for the underclassing of all women, whose internal differences are blurred. Whereas the first act emphasizes the division of unpaid workhorse-wives, whose reproductive labor is desexualized, from the paid providers of recreational sex in faraway, urban Frankfurt, the second act dramatizes a new sexual economy marked by the suburbanization of prostitution and the sexualization of the modern marriage.

Siegfried’s previous girlfriend Vroni, a former barmaid and now self-employed prostitute, embodies the sexual effects of reunification. Through this character, Specht ironizes the notion of progress and liberation for women. Vroni’s hopes for marriage, the reward for services already rendered, were destroyed by Lila’s arrival. Like other rural women before her, Vroni had walked the perilous path of meting out sexual favors to attract a husband without compromising her respectability and hence marriageability.23 In the second act, Vroni comes to visit the father regularly, leaving him money for food but also using him as a confessor. The young woman, described in the stage directions as “plumper and more done up” than in the first act, now markets the commodity she had formerly been expected to provide free of charge: her sexuality. Vroni, who scoffs at love or marriage, is now an emancipated woman, business owner, holder of a

23. The precariousness of this balancing act is illustrated by the mother’s sister, who had a child out of wedlock and had been shamed and sent away (23).
driver’s license, and tourist on her way to Lake Garda in northern Italy—far surpassing everything that her mother, a poor farmer’s wife, had ever achieved or desired: “I’ve had it as a barmaid. They paw me, as usual. But now my name is Veronique and anyone who touches me pays for it. That’s much more decent” (39). Her (reasonable) definition of decency as based on fair, consensual trade, however, is belied by an apparent sense of shame about her work, which manifests in the need to confess (her sin?) to the father, even as she professes to resent his “sermons.” In a feminist text, the moralistic condemnation of sex work, which allows it to function as a negative metaphor of human commodification, is troublesome. Guilt-plagued Vroni, who discreetly slips the old man food and money, veers dangerously close to the cliché of the whore with the golden heart. And Lila?

When she reappears near the end of the second act, she still doesn’t speak, but apparently she has learned to comprehend German, since she can follow the orders Siegfried issues. She wears glasses, because her work as data processor has taken its toll on her eyes. Her job, which she performs at home, allows her to simultaneously care for their rambunctious son Oliver. The home cum workplace collapses the traditional divisions between public and private spheres, paid and unpaid work, labor and leisure that have served to protect recreative, regenerative zones still available to both male workers and to German women like Vroni who can leave to go on vacation. Lila, however, serves her husband and her son even on the day trip that brings them back to the father, as she helps Siegfried to feed the boy and change the tire.

While women who are old or handicapped (like Siegfried’s deaf sister Hannah) have no place at all in late capitalism, and entrepreneurs like Vroni are still plagued by guilt about the way in which they earn money, Lila is the ideal woman-worker within that system: a sexual commodity and married, mother and worker, with no downtime or leisure requirements and little deterioration or wear; her productivity resembles that of the computer with which she works. While her situation is certainly evocative of many poor women’s working conditions around the globe, Lila’s ethnic marking is used merely as metaphor for all women’s subaltern position in transnational capitalism, which is indicted from a feminist perspective. By comparing the different yet somehow “equally” damaging careers of Vroni and Lila, the play elides ethnic, national, class, and other differences among women, victims all in the “new world order.”

Siegfried’s visit to his father, after many years of absence, is motivated by his wish to sell his father’s land so that he can send the boy to a boarding school and treat Lila to a vacation: “you know how women are,” he winks at the old man (48). At that moment, in a singular, insurgent act, Lila kills Siegfried by bashing in his head with a rock. She refuses to be
spoken for or to justify Siegfried’s ruthlessness and greed. The odd threesome that camps out on the field of ashes—the derelict father, Lila, and her son—embodies the refuse of modernization, those who will not or cannot participate in global capitalism’s promise of affluence and happiness. The end of the play slips into a melodramatic sentimentality, with the saintly father and insurgent Filipina drowning in the din of technological progress.24

The second act revolves around old father Kratzke as its moral center. He is an innocent whose authority rests on his suffering, sincerity, and social abjection. These traits mirror those of the title figure, but in comparison to Lila, who mainly appears as silent observer if she is not absent entirely, the father’s guileless if verbose self-expressions take center stage. His gray hair unkempt and long, his clothes dirty and full of holes, begging unabashedly for money and food, he provides the visual counterpoint to the glitzy world of consumption in which the villagers partake. He memorializes the past everyone would like to forget but also cherishes a vision of the future beyond the accumulation of expensive objects: when he sees his brown-skinned grandson Oliver, he happily exclaims that the boy “carries two worlds within himself, he will understand the world better than we have. He will put things right” (47). The entire last scene consists of his dying monologue, his head resting on Lila’s breast. The multicultural pietà places questions of modernization, race, and gender squarely in the terms of Christian morality. The image also fixes woman in the role of sacrificial motherhood. In her one-dimensionality, the beautiful Filipina struck one reviewer as being “as noble, pure and dark-skinned as Winnetou’s sister, not a very gratifying role for the actor Trixy Mahalia-Zänger” (D. Bruckner, 12). How is it possible that the play presents a Western stereotype of primitive and noble goodness as a feminist icon?

In having her react violently against Siegfried’s speaking for her, Lila embodies a feminist revolutionary fantasy; her name (which means “purple” or “lavender” in German) is, after all, the color symbolizing the modern women’s liberation movement. The name of her slain husband evokes the youthful hero of the Nibelung epic, which Richard Wagner’s Ring Cycle elevated into a founding national myth. The dialect pronunciation “Siechfried,” however, substitutes the adjective siech (ailing, withering away) for the noun Sieg (victory), suggesting that the nationalist vision of virile, militaristic vigor is already sick and debased. In killing Siegfried (from behind, as in the Nibelung epic), Lila stands in for all women oppressed, marginalized, and misrepresented by the masculinist ideal of

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24. The father’s final monologue is drowned out by traffic noises and the sound of approaching threshers (50).
German nationality. Whereas in the epic, Siegfried is killed by his false friend Hagen in order to avenge a woman Siegfried had wronged, Lila’s action could be interpreted as an act of female empowerment: by putting the degenerate, moribund state of German masculinity out of its misery, she might be seen to usher in a syncretist utopia embodied by Lila’s mixed-race son, Oliver. Yet her assault also perpetuates the paranoid myth of German victimization by false friends and vengeful females (who hides behind the mask of the seemingly docile and grateful immigrant wife), which has served to recast misogynist and racist aggression as national self-preservation. While this scene appears to rewrite Germanness as feminist and transnational, it also points to the presence of racial paranoia within certain parts of German feminism. Whereas the first act reflects the insights of feminist critiques of fascism after Claudia Koonz, namely that Nazism’s racial practices interpellated the majority of German women in a misogynist regime, the second act, perhaps unwittingly, reveals Specht’s allegiance to a white, Eurocentric order she imagines as masculine yet benign and whose passing she bemoans.

The play contains the very ambiguity and threat of Lila’s action by a peculiar transferal of political agency from the insurgent woman to the father. The prerogative of speech, of remembering the past and anticipating a better future, falls to the old man whose ruminations close the play, a figure curiously untouched by the historical forces to which the playwright otherwise pays such meticulous attention. In his disinterested love for Lila, his belief in a harmonious future encompassing many cultures, and his respect for a vanishing past, his voice seems to come from outside of ideology or history but is tinged with the overtones of Christian martyrdom. The unironic, uncritical use of Christian imagery in the final scene shows that this substitution mobilizes religious notions of sacrifice, martyrdom, and redemption. This is all the more peculiar given the play’s earlier attention to the way in which the villagers’ racism is articulated in the language of religion (villagers call Lila a “witch” and refuse to share wine and bread during the wedding service for fear of contamination).

25. Reviewer Manuel Brug calls him a “hermit doing penance” (37), and nearly all reviewers point to the biblical overtones: to Kai Voigtländer, the father mutated into a “Shakespeare-Beckett-Fassbinder-esque Christ figure”; F. J. Bröde notes that the character bears “apocalyptic traits”; Cornelia Ueding-Waehner sees him “herald a new Deluge”; and Annemarie Buschmann calls him a latter-day Job.

26. Gail Wise also calls attention to the Christian rhetoric operating in Wallraff’s At the Bottom. In her excellent chapter on the book she writes: “Wallraff’s willingness to bear the physical injury resulting from this confrontation and his voluntary association with members of a marginalized minority helped create a new persona for him: Wallraff as modern-day Christ. . . . Wallraff’s two years undercover took on the significance of a martyrdom, his injuries, the stigmata. The text explicitly encourages associations with Christ in an epigraph...
The text reconstitutes the very discourse it purports to challenge. The father approximates the universalized, humanist subject that is empowered to articulate a critique of race, class, and gender in a manner that renders Lila, a disquietingly unpredictable, confoundingly unruly, and alarmingly violent Other, obsolete. A Western wish-fantasy of representing the dispossessed, which Gayatri Spivak has diagnosed in regard to European leftist intellectuals, is here shown to be shared by a West German feminist.

The allegorical figure of Lila thus serves to dramatize the predicament of Western feminists rather than that faced by South Asian wives. Reunification did not merely precipitate a crisis among German leftist intellectuals, as Andreas Huyssen argued in his well-known essay, but also followed on the heels of a crisis among German feminists. As the Orlanda anthology *Entfernte Verbindungen* (1993) documents, white feminist activists since the mid-1980s faced increasing criticism by immigrant, Afro-German, and Jewish women, who called on their white allies to acknowledge class, sexual, and ethnic privileges dividing women, and to share scarce feminist resources. In academic circles, the dismantling of the woman-as-victim paradigm had been precipitated by the historical scholarship on fascism (e.g., Koonz, Schoppmann) and colonialism (e.g., Mamozai). Lila can thus be seen to reflect a moment in German feminism when the confrontations around racial oppression and of white women’s complicity with it produced not just adjusted notions of positionality, but also a kind of envy of “real” oppression to which white women no longer had full access. Reunification provided feminists like Specht with a brief opportunity to recenter gender again; the production team retained dark skin as the mark of oppression, but detached it from the Filipina’s body to shore up white nostalgia and abjection.

The first production of the play took place in 1991 at the Nuremberg municipal theater; it was subsequently staged at the Pfalztheater Kaiserslautern and the Viennese Volkstheater. While the first two cast an actor of color in the role of Lila, the last one had a white ensemble member play the Filipina. The last one fits most obviously my definition of ethnic drag, yet the Nuremberg production under the direction of Hansjörg Utzerath illustrated the episode in which Ali/Wallraff tries to convert to Catholicism: ‘Whatever you do the least of my brothers, that you do unto me.’ . . . . Wallraff, as the German who is present yet not present, becomes aligned with Christ, whereas ‘Ali’ is equated with the ‘least’ of his brothers. In this way, this episode also serves to reinforce the hierarchy between Germans and foreigners” (194).

27. The title figure’s name also cites Alice Walker’s well-known novel *The Color Purple*, which appeared in German under the title *Die Farbe Lila* in 1984. Its black protagonist is sexually victimized and racially oppressed. Lila might be seen to appropriate the sense of multiple oppressions into an abject and abstract image of Woman that had been debunked by the feminist discourse of coalition.
trates with particular poignancy the peculiar displacement of an ethnically marked outsider-position from Lila to the old father Kratzke. In contrast to the stage directions, which note his ragged cardigan, the production had him appear “naked, his body covered with color as brown as the soil” on the field of ashes, as one reviewer described the scene (Brug, 38). Specht’s focus on the economic, social, and psychological deformations of white Germans leads her to deflect attention from Lila, yet the urgency of articulating a critique from the position of profound oppression, emblematized by brown skin, produces the visual transferal of Lila’s perspective to that of the father, who has been carefully set up as her German equivalent, a social outcast, someone without blame, suffering, and innocent. Unlike Lila, who finally erupts in a violent act, he is supremely merciful and forgiving of his tormentors. This transferal is not only prepared by the father’s depiction as an “exceptional German,” at odds with his materialistic and heartless countrymen, but also by the withholding of a racialized subjectivity from the Filipina character. The father’s “browning-up” in the Nuremberg staging symbolizes his abjection but contains the attendant fear of insurgence by the visual citation of Christian martyrdom and redemption. Ironically, this feminist text resurrects the figure of the exceptional German, typical of the fantasy of restitution that Ruth Klüger analyzed in postwar German literature about the Holocaust, assigning him the mission of providing a way out of the racist impasse of drag. The very racism that is being combatted comes back to haunt this production through the racial coding/coating of the father.

Lila’s murderous attack on the ailing embodiment of the German nation signals both a feminist wish for revolt against the patriarchal order and a white fear of the toppling of the new world order. The book I will turn to now, produced for a mass audience and proposing ethnic drag as a national pedagogy, exhibits even greater ambivalence vis-à-vis the foreigner. I have argued that the split between the antifascist critique of whiteness catalyzed by the foreigner, and the project of imagining social justice as multiracial and transnational, is predicated largely on the elision of the foreigner’s subjectivity in two of the plays. The journalistic report I will address below also promises privileged insights into the German racial psyche, but it does so from a first-person, Turkish perspective.

**Impersonation as National Pedagogy**

That guy you’re looking at, black moustache and all—
What if that Turk’s no real Turk at all?!
Don’t be too sure of who that person really is
Maybe he is, as in my song, a German journalist.

Ekkes Frank, “Der getürkte Türke,” 1983
In German, to call something *getürkt* means it’s fake(d), forged, or fabricated. The participle references the stereotype of the lying, cheating Oriental, yet transforms the subject into an object (that which is turked).\(^{28}\) Within this grammatical logic, the Turk may be both the one who conjures such tricks and the outcome of trickery: the phony image, fakeness incarnate. To meet the Turk is to be deceived; so it might seem surprising that in the mid-1980s the dramatized encounters with fake Turks, like the one described in Ekkes Frank’s song, became a spectacular, national pedagogy, through which West Germans could learn “what’s really going on” in the FRG.\(^{29}\) The mask of the Turk allowed German investigators like Gerhard Kromschröder, Günter Wallraff, and Marlene Schulz to learn and disseminate privileged insights into Germans’ mentality. Journalist Günter Wallraff, who lived as a Turkish laborer for a year, formulated his purpose as a paradox: “One must put on a disguise in order to unmask society, one must dissimulate and deceive in order to find the truth” (12). Is that because the doubled falseness, the turked Turk, makes one truth?

In 1982, Gerhard Kromschröder published a report in the popular news magazine *Stern* under the headline “Als ich ein Türke war” (When I was a Turk), which predated Günter Wallraff’s best-seller *Ganz Unten* (At the bottom, 1985).\(^{30}\) The Brechtian reference in the subtitle “A Teaching Play about Xenophobia” embedded the author’s adventure of passing as a Turk in a didactic project of considerable scope.\(^{31}\) A subsequent book that appeared in 1983 under the same title as the original magazine article supplements the seven pages of text, in which Kromschröder somberly docu-

\(^{28}\) Note the near absence of subjects in the first stanza, the pervasive and excessive use of the passive voice: yes, there is a German who experiences “what’s really going on,” but nobody seems to purposefully commit the acts he witnesses helplessly.

\(^{29}\) Frank reportedly composed the lyrics for “Der getürkte Türke” immediately after reading Kromschröder’s report in the magazine *Stern*.

\(^{30}\) Kromschröder modeled his investigative method on Günter Wallraff’s earlier controversial work, who had gathered the material for his critical exposés by going undercover. However, one might also trace the genealogy of Kromschröder’s essay back to John Howard Griffin’s *Black Like Me* (1961), a long-time best-seller and still in print in a special thirty-fifth anniversary edition. That book was similarly premised on a white man’s cross-racial masquerade and was followed by Grace Halsell’s *Soul Sister* (1969), the female complement to *Black Like Me*. In Germany, the “woman’s view” of migrants’ existence was furnished by Marlene Schulz, whose impersonation of a Turkish woman informed her book *Mein Name Keskin* (1984; see Wise, 163–64). It would also be interesting to analyze novels like Alfred Andersch’s *Efraim*, which created a Jewish narrative voice to absolve Germans from guilt of the Holocaust, but also the more recent novels *Kismet* (1992), *Feran* (1993), and *Fatum* (1993) by Michael Mamitza (who writes from the perspective of a Turkish woman), as literary analogues to the more literal use of drag in the genre of the investigative report. For an excellent discussion of *Efraim*, see Klüger.

\(^{31}\) Although Brecht’s term *Lehrstück* has commonly been translated as “learning play,” the more accurate rendering is, or course, “teaching play.”
ments his one-week experiment of living as a Turkish guest-worker in Germany, with twenty-three pages of photographs, as well as three additional chapters that track political and pedagogical “echoes and impulses” provided by the journalist’s essay, offer “materials and documents” on the history and sociology of guest workers and political refugees in the FRG, and present a one-week chronicle of xenophobic violence. In When I Was a Turk, the contradictions inherent in the well-meaning intention to give voice to the supposedly voiceless become glaringly apparent. Professing sympathy with the “foreign fellow-citizens” (the common euphemism for
migrants), Kromschröder’s narrative is nevertheless riddled with paranoia, fear, and suspicion. Attempting to convey their experience, he puts words in the Turk’s mouth. An ostensibly selfless and self-endangering undertaking, it is redolent with heroic, self-aggrandizing gestures. A supposedly sincere contribution to Vergangenheitsbewältigung (coming to terms with the past), the burdens of that past are facilely assigned to villains, short-circuiting any responsible confrontation with his own exercise of German nationality and ethnic privilege. While indicting social injustice, the book exhibits a strong class bias by singling out workers in the sales and service sector, but also prostitutes and homeless people as the worst racist offenders. Rather than improving communication between Germans and foreign residents, his teaching play forecloses it.

Kromschröder’s report immediately launches into a first-person account that conflates his own vantage point with the experience of the oppressed Turk, blithely ventriloquizing his voice. Sitting in an outdoor café in Frankfurt and waiting in vain to be served, he notes his physical responses to the waiters’ studied indifference: “My heart beats in my throat, I breathe fast. I tremble. ‘Me no coffee because Turk,’ I say loudly” (13). For twenty minutes, the waiters continue to ignore him and other customers look away, until his pain and rage boil over in the following internal monologue:

I am a man of glass. One that everybody sees through. The invisible man. The seat on which I sit is empty. I don’t exist, I’m air. And I register in me the wish to prove my existence. To shout, to hurl a chair against the mirrored walls, to topple the table in front of me. (14)

These twenty minutes are enough to align the narrator with the “invisible man,” whom Ralph Ellison described in his 1952 novel of the same title, conflating the nameless Turk with oppressed African Americans. The passage equates the anger of the spurned customer with the rage provoked by profound and long-lasting historical disempowerment and consumer advocacy with rioting or revolution—the overthrow of the social order foreshadowed by the imagined toppling of the bistro table. By imagining the Turk as potentially violent, this ventriloquy betrays its paranoid underpinning in the affluent customer’s fear of looting and destruction—spontaneous eruptions of pent-up frustration which Ellison had portrayed with compassion but also deep despair.32 To his invisible man, looting

32. Ellison’s novel describes scenes of destruction and looting after an African American uprising in Harlem, recording the narrator’s distress at the looting in which severe humiliation and deprivation vents itself rather than bringing about long-term social and political change.
meant that the uprising he had hoped and worked for had failed, foreclosing the possibility of fundamental social and economic change. The fantasy of the violent, looting insurgent that surfaces in Kromschröder’s coffeehouse scene blames “society” for the Turk’s imagined aggression, yet implicitly confirms the need for control and regimentation.

The coffee shop melodrama of the frustrated customer develops over several sections: the introduction sets the scene with a strongly phrased exposition (see above); a double-page photograph depicts the first obstacle: the hero’s defeat at the hands of the bigoted villain Udo, head waiter at the Operncafé (subsequently shown to eagerly serve Kromschröder after the author has shed his disguise [32–33]); and two double-page photographs in the chapter “echoes and impulses” that show the dramatic climax in a “Go-in” staged by Turks and their friends at the Operncafé (56–57), and the tragic end when evil Udo triumphs, throwing out the protesters with the help of the police (58–59). The melodramatic plot provokes the impression that if only Udo were punished, poetic/social justice would be restored.

By representing the author as a “good” (nonracist) German, the book poses the ethical problem of legitimacy and the danger of substituting, falsifying, and instrumentalizing the Turkish perspective it constructs. Kromschröder is therefore at pains to demonstrate his friendship and solidarity with Turkish colleagues in the form of group photographs sans drag (76–79) and to solicit written testimony to his integrity on the part of a “real Turk.” His book includes a short article by journalist Ali Sirmen, called “An Important Guest.” Sirmen is the only other named contributor to When I Was a Turk. His piece is placed in the section “When I Was a Guest of State,” preceded by a short piece by Kromschröder and several pages of photographs depicting his interactions with officials and dissidents in Turkey. The German’s new status as Turkish advocate garnered him an invitation to travel to Turkey and uncover the truth of oppression, torture, censorship, and fear in the military dictatorship there. Describing his experience, Kromschröder reports that in the streets, Turks recognize, congratulate, and hug him; in shops, they do not permit him to pay and shower him with presents. Occasionally, they call him a “national hero” (75). Curiously written in the third person, the piece, saturated with sentimental affect, reads as an exaggerated, blatant wish-fulfilling fantasy. Sirmen’s piece, which follows this piece, continues in this vein by asserting: “Our friend, the journalist Kromschröder, has won our affection and friendship by courageously confronting our countrymen’s problems and taking care of them with great consideration and love” (85). Sirmen’s essay (a note in the margin declares that this article was the first Sirmen published after his seven-month imprisonment under the fascist regime in Turkey) functions to affirm the verisimilitude of Kromschröder’s self-
aggrandizing description of his visit, by offering an “insider’s” perspective on Kromschröder’s heroism. Sirmen thus gives credence to Kromschröder’s (hallucinated?) status as avenger of and spokesperson for the oppressed in quasi-fascist West Germany and fascist Turkey, although the extravagance of his language suggests a portion of irony.

The didactic centerpiece of the book is a photo-essay about one high school class’s collective cross-dressing as Turkish children. According to the preface, this was one of several attempts to re-create Kromschröder’s “teaching play.”33 In Cologne, where the annual carnival has spawned a long and rich history of ethnic drag, seventh-graders who had “long talked about the problems of foreigners in Germany,” decided to follow theory with practice. Although the class of thirty included six foreign nationals, “none of the [German] children,” the caption to one photograph explains, “could quite imagine how it really is to live as a stranger (Fremder) among Germans” (63). The six students (four Turks, one Italian, and one Yugoslavian) were apparently unable to convey their experiences to their classmates, nor could they provide the necessary information for the successful masquerade: the class wrote to Kromschröder to ask him for costume and makeup tips in order to impersonate Turks.34

Their letter, allegedly one of many addressed to Kromschröder (72), raises a number of issues worth considering. The students’ wish to “test the Germans’ behavior toward the Turks” (72) begs the question of their own national identification. Although in a multinational class only the German students participated in the masquerade, “Germanness” is something they

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33. The preface states that the book is intended as an “activist handbook for citizens’ initiatives and schools and for anyone wanting to work toward overcoming xenophobia” (8).
34. This was Kromschröder’s response to their request:

About the language: the German that Germans identify as the German spoken by Turks consists of sentences whose nouns are in the nominative case with infinitive verbs. Stress on the wrong syllables, for instance add an e to the Ich. Don’t say: “Ich bin ein Türke,” but “Ich türe Türk.” With some practice you’ll get the hang of it soon. About your demeanor: don’t jump around noisily as one might when going out during carnival as a pirate or a cowboy. About your appearance: Turks have black hair, of course. First tint eyebrows and lashes with the usual products. It’s more difficult when it comes to the hair on your head. Normal hair-dyes are permanent and will take a long time to grow out. But there are dyes you can rinse out when you’re done. These are theater or carnival dyes, which are applied with a sponge.

About your clothes: If you face Germans as a Turk, the main thing is to fulfill the cliché Germans have of a “typical” Turk—they are people who wear old clothes without fashionable accessories. Therefore: take old rags, wide pants, long coats in garish colors. It’s easiest for the girls. Keep in mind: tie the scarf tightly across the forehead, right above the eyebrows, pull it back sharply and fold it down at the temples, then tie the end of the scarf under the chin. You have to practice a few times until you’ve got the knack, but the effect is astonishing, because such a headscarf is seen as “typically Turkish.” (73)
wish to uncover in the salespeople they encounter but which is ostensibly inaccessible to or in themselves; like Kromschröder, the students seem to be at once German and not German.

Impersonation, marketed as a pedagogical tool, displaces not only suspect “abstract” forms of gaining knowledge, such as the interview, but also the interview-partner. It is therefore not surprising that “real Turks” only figure as a potential problem and threat to the masqueraders: “Will there be problems if we meet Turks while in Turkish disguise?” (72), the students anxiously inquire. Kromschröder never answers that question. While the students’ investigation of ethnic/national privilege and discrimination is certainly valuable, the unreflected positionality from which they undertake their investigation renders the analytical benefits of their performance doubtful. “The Germans” whom they intend to unmask are, like Udo, storybook villains whose actions are triumphantly indicted but not contextualized within the economic frame of the sales and service sector, personnel training, and customer management and manipulation. The continued vilification of petit bourgeois and Lumpenproletariat antagonists (homeless men and sex workers are decried as bigoted tyrants), articulates a critique of racism at the expense of class. The separation of these categories, along with the book’s focus on the sphere of consumption (in contrast to Günter Wallraff’s investigation of racialized production processes), obscures the imbrication of race and class in the economy of the mid-1980s. Kromschröder portrays racism exclusively in terms of denied consumption: in Turkish drag, the author is refused by sex workers, insulted by homeless drunks, isolated in a beer garden, denied admission to bars, restaurants, and discotheques, and physically attacked at a bus stop. The possibility that a streetcleaner (the nameless Turk’s supposed occupation) might actually not be able to afford any of the services he is here shown to request, is completely elided by such an approach. The facile outcome of his analysis is not only that “the Germans” (who are only ever the “other Germans” that do not include Kromschröder, his acolytes, or his readers) are flatly racist because of unreconstructed Nazi attitudes, as the “materials” chapter hints. Such a view also insinuates that consumer advocacy is the privileged locus of antiracist activism, which is questionable as long as the limited access of foreign workers to the sphere of consumption is elided and the commodification of “exotic” subjects in the sphere of consumption is left unexamined—from dark-skinned models and television talk show hosts to “multicultural” ads in fashion magazines.

The texts I have examined here build on the antifascist traditions of Brechtian theater and the critical Volksstück, and their attendant critiques of power and strategies of envisioning change. They deconstruct
current formations of German whiteness—identified with the ascendency of economic nationalism during the 1960s and again after 1990—by excavating the latent racial/ethnic traces of modern production and consumption processes, and by portraying racial continuities in a critical light. The figure of the foreigner catalyzes both the manifestation of a submerged Nazi ideology of whiteness and its modern reconfiguration. Yet the texts’ focus on the pack mentality (derived from the critical Volksstück), along with its “blanking out” of the foreigner figure (to produce a Brechtian estrangement effect), reifies a sense of ethnic antagonism. The adding on of “race” to other categories of social difference, such as class and gender, does not move toward a social dialectic, but stalls it.

The theater artists defamiliarize race and nationality as constructed by the native community’s violent gaze. In contrast to Frisch’s Andorra, the dramatic hybrids of Fassbinder and Specht turn their attention from the racialization of the outsider to the violent racial ascription performed by the Germans. They defamiliarize modern German whiteness, but fail to connect that critique with the project of considering interracial and cross-cultural relations. While Fassbinder and Specht mark their personal and political investment in the outsider figure, they also instrumentalize race to reinstate nostalgic, vanguard notions of political activism. The “blankness” of the foreigner’s subjectivity facilitates that instrumentalization and casts the foreigner as at best unrepresentable and irrelevant within antifascist, leftist, or feminist concerns, at worst as threatening to them. The specter of the dark-skinned insurgent haunts Specht’s text, and Kromschröder’s progeny indeed perceive real Turks as a threat to their project of national self-inspection. Despite the reference to the teaching play, Kromschröder’s drag show falls short of the Brechtian imperative of collective transformation, by imagining racism as a melodrama of bigoted villains and heroic victims/avengers.

These texts indict older and current formations of whiteness by exposing its Nazi legacy of associating the foreign with disease and contamination, conflating racial with sexual difference, and “purifying” the national body through violence. Germans ascribe racial difference to the foreigner’s body, and thereby constitute themselves as Germans. Frisch underscores the performativity of race, including that of the Andorrans, in his famous “Jew show”; yet subsequent artists tend to again confine the analysis of race to those whom white Germans perceive as different, and elide the way in which whiteness is constructed as well. Fassbinder’s masquerade foregrounds the juxtaposition of white body and foreign ethnicity to produce the estrangement effect, but the production team of Lila, who browned up the old German father to symbolize his abjection, resorted to the uncritical, unmarked notion of whiteness that I have earlier called uni-
versal performability (chap. 1). While Frisch, Fassbinder, and Specht tied the process of reading racial difference mimetically off the body to a critique of ethnic nationalism, and thereby positioned readers as both like and unlike the mimetic readers whose violence on stage and screen they indict, Kromschröder and his pupils depict those who read masquerade as mimesis as evil, obscuring the social determinants of their violence. With the exception of Frisch’s play, the texts discussed here infuse the masqueraded outsider with the urgency of their authors’ own sense of marginalization in political contexts they perceive as quasi-fascist; yet they tend to conflate different discourses of power into an abject, dominated victim and fail to account for their own national and racial positioning. Moreover, many migrants were very well able to publicly and militantly articulate their interests, calling into question their stereotypical depiction as mute. Gail Wise’s remark about Wallraf applies to them as well, who “assumed the position of spokesperson for ‘speechless’ foreigners at a time when many were expressing themselves clearly” (163). These authors’ fantasy of serving as spokespersons for the oppressed, their lack of reflection on their access to the subaltern position, and their indifference to immigrants’ self-expression or political objectives register not so much the living conditions of foreign residents in Germany as the self-perception of some West German leftists as marginalized, silenced, and stalled.

I do not want to dismiss leftist and feminist antifascism as racist; nor do I want to presume that racism cannot be present in a feminist or leftist text because of its “good intentions.” The evacuation of the racialized subject position, while importing an otherwise lacking sense of a social dialectic, cements ethnic conflict and denies political agency to the foreigner. Although I would attribute the authors’ refusal to ascribe any psychological truth or depth to racial/ethnic subjects to their rejection of scientific racism and its close mapping of character and appearance, the silence of the foreigner figures begs the question of how to argue for minority rights. The fairly recent success of some of these texts (Lila in 1991; the theatrical revival of Katzelmacher in 1998) suggests that some German artistic directors and critics still regard plays that use antifascist drag as apposite vehicles for addressing the problem of racism today. One might also see these attempts at imagining foreign residents as silent “subalterns”—so evidently out of touch with minority culture and activism—as attempts by some German artists to shore up political significance as advocates of the oppressed at a time when the end of the Cold War, the wholesale discrediting of socialism, and social democratic politicians’ turn away from labor rights and the welfare system insistently raise the question, “What’s left?”