

Becoming-Black: Patterns and Politics of West-German Afro-Americanophilia in the late 1960s

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I.

‘Yippie! I was in the right place at the right time!’—reflecting on her years in Munich in the late 1960s and early 1970s, African American singer, actress and model Donna Summer exudes enthusiasm. Why, and in what sense, was this the right time? In her 2003 autobiography, Summer and her ghostwriter Marc Eliot make sense of her German experience by explaining to their international audience: ‘Liberal postwar generation Germans living in Munich wanted to make some personal kind of statement about the Civil Rights Movement in America. Frequently that statement took the form of friendship, support, and work for anyone of color who happened to be from the States’ (Summer 2003: 56).

Certainly, Summer was right when she noticed a peculiar interest, a peculiar predilection, in Munich and beyond. She located this within a specific milieu, and maybe, to use a much-maligned term, in the *Zeitgeist* more generally. Having arrived in 1968 as a singer for the musical *Hair*, Summer, the later ‘disco queen,’ stepped right into the contradictions of that famous ‘moment’ of cultural and political upheaval, that is, in its local, German version.¹ Questions of exoticism, guilt, otherness and

¹ The literature on that cultural moment is large and continues to grow; for an overview with a focus on genealogy and the intersection of discourses of youth, politics, and consumption, see Siegfried (2006).

‘becoming-minor’ (Deleuze & Guattari 1986) contributed significantly to the contradictions that characterize this historical moment in Germany. While straightforward anti-black racism remained a stark reality in large parts of society, gestures of appreciation as mentioned by Summer did reach beyond a few urban, bohemian circles. In West-German culture in the late 1960s and in the early 1970s, as I argue in this paper, there was indeed a significant and specific pattern of what can be termed Afro-Americanophilia, involving affirmative or even worshipful approaches to, and appropriations of, African American culture and politics, which often, although not always, included a desire for African Americans.² Such encounters were part of a flourishing ‘Black cultural traffic’ (Jackson 2005). Analytically speaking, German Afro-Americanophilia partook of a moment both postcolonial—a few years after formal decolonization of many African nations—and hegemonically US-American, yet its patterns and politics had a peculiar local tone.

When British cultural critic Kobena Mercer (1994) wrote that around 1968 in the USA and the UK many white rebels apparently wished to ‘become black,’ he could also have extended his analysis to the German context. Following Summer’s and Mercer’s lead, this paper focuses on two manifestations of Afro-Americanophilia: first, a radical countercultural group from Berlin, the so-called ‘Blues’; and second, the reception of soul music in the counterculture and the pop-cultural mainstream. In a particularly condensed form, the two case studies enable us to trace the cultural dynamics of Afro-Americanophilia and discuss their larger cultural significance in Germany around 1968. To many young (‘white’) Germans, African American culture and politics provided ‘lines of flight’ from outdated modes of subjectivity; ‘lines of flight’ which were ethically embedded and physically tangible. In different ways, these tendencies resonated with: (a) radical, anti-imperialist politics; (b) countercultural sensibilities, where Black American culture provided a radically contemporary critique of (white) European modernity; (c) the racialized, erotically charged logics of primitivism and romanticism in which ‘the repressed’ was to be brought back to the surface; and (d) a consumer-based economy and pop culture, which supported the incorporation, domestication and aestheticization of differences, desires and conflicts.

² The term is coined in slightly satirical reference to the 1920s concept of ‘Negrophilia.’ See the introduction to this journal issue for further reflections on the term, as well as Ege (2007) and Broeck (2010).

In Germany, one generation after the Holocaust and the collapse of National Socialism, blurring the lines between what was one's own and what was alien (*fremd*), reversing the aesthetic and moral hierarchy of anti-black racism, seemed like a particularly noble endeavour. However, this fed on a tradition of exoticism and as many—particularly Black intellectuals such as James Baldwin—already pointed out at the time, the politics of exoticism are ambivalent at best.³ Afro-Americanophilia could be highly paternalistic, fetishizing or controlling, good intentions notwithstanding. Taking up Donna Summer's brief observation cited at the beginning of this essay, the reader may have noticed that her wording also implied that people of colour from Germany and from places other than North America appeared to be excluded from this unexpected and undifferentiated love, as were most of the South European labour migrants who were arriving in the country in those years. In some cases, nonetheless, this selective, erotically charged exoticism also led to tangible solidarity and strong connections between white Germans and African Americans.

The point of this paper, then, is not to argue that Afro-Americanophilia offers the key to understanding the era, or that it was a good or a bad thing. I want to be careful to illuminate cultural texture, contexts, and normative ambiguities rather than deduce meanings from pre-given assumptions. Putting the phenomenon in analytical focus, (re)constructing it intellectually from various sources, from the ground up, as a subcultural style and a larger current, may help us understand important transformations in postwar German history—generational, cultural, and political—in a more nuanced way, by linking (sub-)cultural practices and identities, as well as consumer culture, which figure prominently in '1968' historiography, to questions of 'race,' whiteness and difference. Overall, I argue that in those years, the mode in which many 'white' Germans related to racial others and to otherness changed significantly: it foregrounded connectedness and symbolic incorporation, while maintaining (and libidinally charging) cultural distance and racialization. In doing so, it prefigured a more diverse, yet hardly post-racist or post-racial, present.

Another context needs to be borne in mind. At the time, West Germany was home to tens of tens of thousands, rather than millions, of people of various origins who would, in the language of the era, be classified as *schwarz* (black), *farbig* (coloured), or as

³ See Baldwin (1961: 217–221, 228–231).

Neger (negro) [sic].⁴ Black people in Germany, Black Germans and temporary residents, were neither particularly numerous nor particularly vocal as political agents on a larger scale.⁵ Furthermore, immigration was still widely considered under a *Gastarbeiter* (guest worker) paradigm, which reinforced the idea of an essentially white German nation, during the very moment when a large amount of labour migration from Southern Europe was taking place.

II.

Finding examples for Afro-Americanophilia in the late 1960s and 1970s is not difficult. Sociocultural analyses such as Eldrige Cleaver's *Soul on Ice* (1968; German translation, 1969) were reviewed enthusiastically among German intellectuals.⁶ Soul music, which is about African American experience and largely presented as an irreducibly Black form of popular musical expression, succeeded commercially and found its way into the hearts, minds and movements of millions on a nearly world-wide scale, including in Germany. The slogans and gestures of the Black Power Movement found imitators in demonstrations—where thousands of Germans were also heard chanting, 'We are all Black!'—and in night life. Voluminous hairstyles were approvingly referred to as *Afro-Frisuren* (Afro-haircuts). A radical left-wing author from Berlin, taking up a popular trope, termed his home district, Kreuzberg, 'Westberlins Harlem,' the Harlem of West

⁴ The term 'Afro-German' was popularized by a group of Black German writers in the 1980s. References are given in the second jointly authored survey essay by Andrew Hurley and me in this special issue.

⁵ By 'black'/'Black' (*schwarz/Schwarz*), I mean people who would be classified into a category such as 'of African descent' within the logics of racialized discourse. It would, for instance, include African American GIs, Afro-Germans, and Africans or African immigrants in Germany, irrespective of their actual skin tone (though not other people of colour such as Southern European immigrants). 'White' (*weiß*) designates Germans who are, in that same discourse, considered members of the racially unmarked category. Depending on context, in the usage of categories like 'African American' and 'Black,' 'Black German,' 'white' or 'white German,' national, political, cultural, physiological aspects may be foregrounded. The words 'Black' and 'white' could be put in quotation marks throughout this essay, as they refer to socially and historically mutable classificatory categories, not to biological fact, and reiterating the terms without linguistic markers of their constructedness may contribute to reproducing racialized categorizations one seeks to question and deconstruct. At the same time, these terms are also highly politicized and political, both at the time and now. For that reason, for instance, 'Black' is written with a capital 'B' when used in reference to political or cultural articulations that politicize an identity based on 'race' or racialization. I do not capitalize the first letter of 'white' because this aspect of identity politics does not apply in a symmetric way; but it should not be read as being a more self-evident category. Sociocultural asymmetry can hardly be put into coherent, symmetric terminology. In some instances, describing subjects as 'white German' (rather than merely 'German') is helpful here because not using the racializing attribute could be read to imply—wrongly—that all Germans are 'white.' For a critical account of the German-language terminology, see Arndt (2004).

⁶ Afro-German actor Charles Huber in his autobiography writes that Cleaver's book could be found in any upper-level high school student's book bag at the time (2004: 184), and he stresses that this coolness gave him a new self-confidence and a desire to join their cause—'mich *solidarisieren*,' or to solidarize himself (2004: 201).

Berlin, and he and his circle referred to themselves as, quote, *weiße Nigger* [white n*s, sic]. Magazines printed more or less explicit depictions of interracial sex and reflected on its significance. Some radical-left student groups, in their attempts at ‘organizing’ among GIs from the USA, exclusively approached African American soldiers. In urban gay subcultures, too, Black people were particularly desired partners. On the other hand, theorists like Jürgen Habermas, in quite a different tone, warned students not to overly identify with oppressed groups abroad, such as ‘negroes in urban slums’ (1968: 11f). It was apparent that he considered this a wide-spread problem. ‘One thing I know for sure,’ says a white German grandmother in Lothar Lambert and Wolfram Zobus’s 1975 underground film classic *1 Berlin Harlem*, ‘black is “in” today.’

These examples, some of which I will return to, cross a range of cultural fields/spheres: pop music, radical politics, sexuality, consumer culture, and, most of all, countercultural or underground scenes. Across the spheres there are common patterns, despite apparent tensions and enmities, in particular between the commercial and the countercultural. For the purpose of this analysis, the years between 1967 and 1972, and arguably up until 1975, can be considered a relatively cohesive cultural moment, a temporal ‘conjuncture of structural, cultural and biographical forces,’ a ‘historic instant in which different impulses come together and form a specific unity or *Gestalt*,’ as cultural analysis theorist Rolf Lindner writes, taking up the terminology of early cultural studies and cultural anthropology (2000: 11). Methodologically speaking, if dynamics within one cultural field—such as, say, advertising—are compared to those within others—such as political movements, popular music, or sociocultural theory, then specific ‘cross-field effects’ may become apparent (Lindner 2003: 182). Noting such patterns, the methodological challenge for cultural analysis is not only how to write a history of practices of appropriation and transfer processes across cultural spheres, but, as we will see, how to balance coherence and heterogeneity in constituting an object of study.

The Afro-Americanophile fascination itself certainly was not new. On the contrary, cultural historian Kaspar Maase, for instance, had the 1950s in mind when he wrote that for young Germans at the time, ‘Americanization’ really meant Afro-Americanization (1993; see also Partridge 2008). And, as my and Andrew Hurley’s joint survey essays in this journal issue point out, a particular fascination with Black popular culture in Germany reaches back well into the 19th century. Nonetheless, this historical moment

around 1968 is characterized by crucial transformations, both in Black diasporic politics, particularly in the USA, and in forms of representation, appropriation and interaction, within a local context. German Afro-Americanophilia of the late 1960s and early 1970s, as this paper lays out in greater detail, is characterized by a peculiar constellation of Black exclusivity and white desire.

III.

In the late 1960s, many people and some organized groups in West Germany wanted to support the contemporary African American freedom movement. On the German side, this included the Black Panther Solidarity Committees, groups within the so-called GI underground (which partly overlapped), and, later on, the Angela Davis solidarity network. As historians Maria Höhn and Martin Klimke (2010) have analyzed in great detail, most of these groups arose within the anti-imperialist radical left scene of the student movement (see also Klimke (2006; 2008); Siegfried (2006); Ege (2007); and Höhn (2008)).⁷ While these groups were not particularly large, they were highly visible, and some included leaders and protagonists of later developments, quite prominently K. D. Wolff, head of the Frankfurt chapter of *Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund* (Socialist German Student Association). Many more attended their demonstrations and conferences and read the literature they translated and published.

For the West German left, their US and German opponents were closely intertwined, yet not identical. One's own government was closely allied to the USA, and the country was a crucial staging ground for the US military and its war in Southeast Asia.

Exposing and incriminating the deep-seated racism of the USA and, to a lesser extent, Germany, represented a main concern of these groups. For them, a humanist commitment to anti-racism was a crucial lesson taken from National Socialism, however little experience they themselves might have had with that form of oppression. Strategically, leading activists were motivated to establish an anti-imperialist coalition that would include oppressed and disaffected populations within the capitalist metropolises (a 'second front'). In some cases, this solidarity work (*Solidaritätsarbeit*)

⁷ A few years before, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s visits to West and East Germany (Höhn & Klimke 2010: Chapter 5) already drew a large, more popular and politically centrist-liberal, much less subcultural crowd (20,000 people attended a sermon at West Berlin's Waldbühne, for instance). The developments of the late 1960s in Europe must also be seen in the context of a situation in which African American activists were broadening their movement's scope towards global Black populations (Joseph 2007; Finzsch, Horton & Horton 1999: 490–531; Van Deburg 1992: 112–191).

produced tangible results: Cooperation between African American GIs and predominantly white German supporters had a significant impact on the treatment of African Americans in the US military and on German public discourse (Höhn 2008: 142f). Overall, however, such connections primarily had the function of connecting young Germans to a wider world, cognitively, emotionally, and culturally. For them, conservative national culture, the West German state and conventional ways of life were tainted by their association with the Hitler regime.

Others, however, wanted to translate the tactics and images of radical African American groups into their own context in more immediate ways. In particular, this was true for the so-called 'Blues' in West-Berlin, less a formally organized group than a counter-cultural urban underground scene.⁸ Within the field of the German New Left, the 'Blues' stood out by virtue of the simultaneity and radicalism of their political and cultural opposition to mainstream society, by their efforts, in their own way, to collapse the political and the cultural sphere. In terms of self-fashioning, cultural practices, and political theory, this milieu bested all other activist groups (throughout German history) when it came to following African American idols.

The Berlin 'Blues' must be understood in relation to developments within the USA, both politically and culturally. In the mid-1960s, large segments of the African American Civil Rights movement radicalized in terms of ideology and strategy. As is widely known, the slogan 'Black Power' encapsulated a shift toward more militant, confrontational tactics and strategies. It implied affirming an African American identity, from 'coloured' or 'Negro' to 'Black' (which was, after all, 'beautiful'), and often also a move toward forms of Black Nationalism. In some prominent cases, this also meant that cooperation with 'white' supporters or members of interracial groups was rejected. Most famously, the African American organization the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) introduced such a policy in 1966.

A similar stance was taken by the most spectacular and media-savvy group of the time, the Black Panther Party (BPP) for Self-Defense, which was watched in awe and

⁸ Counterculture refers to a group that was defined by the simultaneity and radicalism of their political and cultural opposition to mainstream society (and conventional models of the political and the cultural sphere). What defined the counterculture in the USA and in Europe differed in some important ways. See Hall and Jefferson (1975) or Schwendter (1971) for contemporaneous analyses, and Siegfried (2006) for an historian's perspective.

admiration by ‘progressive’ young people, of colour and white, the world over. While the dominant factions within the BPP advocated anti-imperialist internationalism, interracial cooperation within their own groups was deemed undesirable. Spokespeople such as Stokely Carmichael insisted that white sympathizers should organize within their own communities and follow the BPP’s vanguard role. Furthermore, this nationalism was highly gendered, often equating leadership with a re-articulation of oppressed Black masculinity (Finzsch 2003). Other Black nationalist factions that gained visibility during those years rejected coalition-building with white groups altogether.

Nonetheless, in the USA, some predominantly white groups within the so-called underground modelled themselves after the most radical parts of the Black Power movement and claimed various types of proximity, especially those which aimed at uniting political activism and a countercultural way of life, such as the Yippies, the White Panther Party or, more (in)famously, the Weather Underground (Jacobs 1992).⁹ Such identifications could reach programmatic status; the Weather Underground, for instance, aimed at getting rid of reactionary whiteness: ‘Our political objective is the destruction of honkiness. We are going to wipe out the imperialist State and every vestige of honky consciousness in white people’ (Juchler 1996: 345). Others, like Yippie activist Jerry Rubin, felt they had already left their own whiteness behind altogether.

The Berlin ‘Blues’ followed in the footsteps of these North American groups. A loose network of young people, students, artists, apprentices, young workers, and unemployed slackers, the ‘Blues’ comprised, or spawned, groups such as the ‘Black Rats’ and the ‘Tupamaros Westberlin.’ Designations such as *Haschrebelln* (hash rebels) document the counter-cultural side of these groups. The self-styled urban guerrilla (*Stadtguerilla*) ‘2 June Movement’ grew out of the Berlin ‘Blues’ scene as well; it was responsible for several bombings and bank robberies, and also for the murder of the prominent judge Günter von Drenkmann, and the kidnapping of conservative mayoral candidate Peter Lorenz.¹⁰ The ‘Blues’ was anarchist-leaning, often less intellectual and more hedonistic

⁹ For a treatment of the internationalist and transnational aspects of the US Black Panther Party, see Angelo (2009).

¹⁰ On their involvement in the bombing of the Jewish community center in Berlin, one of the most crude expressions of ‘anti-imperialism’ as anti-semitic anti-zionism, and the importance of former situationist

than university-based groups and student movement factions, and its members were more likely to have a working-class background. In that context, the name ‘Blues’ thus connoted a hedonistic approach to radical politics. According to former ‘Blues’ member Ralf Reinders, the term was coined by Gudrun Ensslin, the later Red Army Faction member (and, previously, GI underground activist). According to this account, she used the term to suggest that, in her view, not enough political activism was being conducted in this crowd, because they spent too much time listening to music, consuming drugs and having sex (Ege 2007: 116–137).

A cultural and political history of the ‘Blues’ scene, which is yet to be written, would have to include a long chapter on practices of appropriation from radical Black politics and from African American culture. In that context, imitating African American language bridged everyday aesthetics and political intent. Rather harmless political phrases and slogans were taken up, creating implicit parallels or analogies, such as when, in reference to imprisoned friends and associates, ‘Free Huey’ became ‘Free Bommi’ or ‘Free Verena.’ Most infamously, the Berlin ‘Blues’ took up the iconography of the ‘pig,’ as epitomized by Black Panther Party illustrator Emory Douglas’s fat, pink-colored swine. Here, ‘pigs’ (the English-language term was used consistently) referred not only to the police, but to the judicial system as a whole, to capitalists and managers, to the enemy as such; as the Rastafarian reference goes, to all of ‘Babylon.’ One ‘Blues’ text, the ‘Aufruf gegen den Diebstahl en gros und en details der Pigs an der Menschheit’ [Call to arms against the pigs’ small- and large-scale theft from humanity] (*Der Blues*, n. d.: 23–35), summarizes the Manichaeic worldview that was supported by the image of the ‘pig’: ‘Besser jetzt ein paar Millionen rollende Schweinsköpfe, als in dieser faden Lebenshaltung, die uns letztlich doch zwei Milliarden Gefallene kosten wird, weiter zu vegetieren. Den unbewussten pigs solange vor die Köpfe knallen, bis sie wach werden oder tot umfallen’ [Better for a few million pigs heads to roll now than to keep vegetating within this tired attitude towards life which will cost us billions K.I.A. in the end. Smash the heads of the unconscious pigs until they wake up or drop dead].

Dieter Kunzelmann, see Kraushaar (2005). Tupamaros refers to the Uruguayan rebel group (named after the 18th century anticolonialist Túpac Amaru II). The name ‘Bewegung 2 Juni’ [2 June Movement] was chosen because on that day in 1967, unarmed student Benno Ohnesorg was shot in the head during a demonstration against the Shah of Persia by a West Berlin policeman, and a cover-up ensued, which led to a radicalization of the student movement. A collection of ‘Blues’ and ‘2 June Movement’ documents, often accompanied by illustrations by the American cartoonist, Robert Crumb, is presented in the book *Der Blues* [The Blues] (n. d.).

The verbal register was complemented by the physical. Bearing, posture, styles of walking and salutations reflected the African American influences that the scene's name so prominently displayed.¹¹ One 'Blues' activist, for example, remembers using the Black Panther salute, which had been popularized by athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City. For instance, upon meeting Black people in Berlin, he would raise his fist and arm, adding 'Attica!' in reference to the prison revolt and the ensuing massacre in upstate New York in 1971. He would not have used the same gesture with 'white' comrades, he reminisced, because in those situations, it would have seemed too close to the party-communist salute. More generally, he and his friends adopted so much African American slang that, as he has it, 'one wouldn't be able to understand our sentences today.' Instead of money (*Geld*), one spoke of 'bread,' instead of the government and the overall power structure, it was 'the man.' When he asked an African American friend about the fate of his girlfriend, the answer was, as he recalls, 'What the fuck, I don't know about my old lady,' and after that, everybody (that is, all the men) within his circle referred to their girlfriends, in German, as '*meine old lady*' [my old lady] (Kröcher 2004). In that instance, by playfully stepping into a male African American speaker's role, he adopted a dismissive attitude towards women, and articulated an understanding of masculinity as emotionally detached, cool, and in charge. Such articulations of gender, and, implicitly, sexuality, resonated with popular images of African American men as unselfconscious, heroic, suave revolutionaries, as evidenced in various illustrations where guns and militancy lead to the proverbial upright walk. 'Blues' activists, and many other Germans, often had problematically clear notions of what 'real' and authentic Black men, whom they so apparently admired, were like, and they did not hesitate to apply the notion of 'Uncle Tom' to those who did not meet their criteria.

Intellectually, connections between one's own position and African American experiences were made by means of parallels and analogies. Infamously, US yippie prankster Jerry Rubin had claimed that his long hair was like dark skin.¹² People in the

¹¹ For that reason, this scene's Afro-Americanophilia should be understood in the context of countercultural or subcultural style—along the lines established in classic analyses by Clarke (1975) and Hebdige (1979). That is, style figures as a structure of signs which is actualized in a variety of different forms of expression, including language, music and clothing, and, here, political attitude, rhetoric and ideals. Crucial semantic oppositions are derived from the relation to Black American sources.

¹² This quote circulated through various texts in the German counterculture, such as music writer Helmut Salzinger's *Rock Power* (1972: 169).

West German scene, too, insisted that they experienced discrimination and were being ‘treated like negroes’ [sic] because of their long hair and hippie looks. As long-haired, working-class Berlin rebel Michael ‘Bommi’ Baumann, the most well-known member of the ‘Blues,’ wrote in his early memoir, they got kicked out of bars or were spat upon in the streets, and employers discriminated against them. The distinction between chosen and racially ascribed markers of difference (long hair versus ‘black’ skin) seems obvious, as critics were quick to point out. Nonetheless, conflating them provided a subjective basis for claiming an oppressed perspective that, in the view of people like Baumann, necessarily led to a deeper understanding of African American culture and politics. However, the verbal articulation of one’s own supposed minority status was ultimately less important to one’s sense of empathy than the vague but nonetheless powerful notion of ‘feeling.’ ‘Feeling,’ of course, was closely tied to music and the experience of listening to it, producing it, dancing to it and having sex while listening to it. Music provided a form of experiential congruence between Black culture, or what people saw as such, on the one hand, and their sense of self and world on the other. A striking example can be found in Baumann’s memoir *How it all began*. Baumann affectionately remembers his 1950s childhood:

Ich kann mich zum Beispiel erinnern, da hab ich im Bett gelegen und habe immer Radio Luxemburg gehört, abends, wenn du nicht mehr runtergegangen bist, hast du denn in der Nacht immer noch Musik gehört und wie ich das erste Mal Chubby Checkers ‘Let’s Twist again’ gehört habe, bin ich aus dem Bett aufgestanden und habe Twist getanzt und habe es genauso getanzt, wie ich es später gesehen habe, also ich habe es intuitiv richtig verstanden wie der Mann das gemeint hatte. Zum Beispiel in Cleavers *Seele auf Eis*, Rekonvaleszenz, dieses Kapitel, da ist es ganz gut drin, da stimmt. Ich hab’s damals intuitiv richtig erlebt, also *feeling* gehabt. (1975: 16)

[For example, I remember I was lying in bed and I would always listen to Radio Luxemburg, at night, when you didn’t come out of your room again, then you would always listen to music at night, and when I heard Chubby Checker’s ‘Let’s Twist Again’ for the first time, I got out of bed and danced the twist and I danced it in exactly the way in which I saw it later, that is, I intuitively understood it in the correct way, what the man meant. For instance, in Cleaver’s *Soul on Ice*, the chapter ‘reconvalescence,’ that captures it, that fits. Intuitively, I experienced it the way it was meant, that is, I got *feeling*.]

However anecdotal it might be, this claim to immediate empathy through a cultural product, by way of physical intuition, touches on nothing less than the narrator’s sense of self, and his sense of difference from his own surroundings, to which it lends both cultural thickness (musically, physically) and a metaphoric frame.¹³ For people such as

¹³ In the relevant chapter, Cleaver also speaks of white youth dancing to Chubby Checker, which makes it plausible to speculate that Baumann’s memory was, as it were, creatively enhanced by the text. This, however, only confirms the relevance of *Soul on Ice* (Cleaver 1968), which apparently strengthened his wish to take on the position of the ‘white negro.’

Baumann, African American politics could be such an important reference point partly because they rested on identifications that had already been formed in the process of socialization through popular culture and everyday life in Allied-occupied West Germany.¹⁴ From then on, those politics provided a metaphor for both difference and for belonging, a metaphor that intimately connected politics and subjectivity.

‘Feeling,’ as Baumann (1980) has it, refers to a mode of intuition and empathy that guides the self into cultural forms outside of its given horizon of autochthonous traditions. The term implies a mode of experience that cannot really be verbalized. Furthermore, ‘feeling’ implicitly also serves as an argument against conspicuously cerebral factions of the left and, in Baumann’s view, their overly intellectual modes of apprehending the world: As working-class people, Baumann insists, he and his friends had never been as alienated from their bodies as their middle-class contemporaries, which made ‘earthy’ aspects of life such as sex and dancing, come to them much more naturally, just as they did to the African American world (1980: 16).

Within the ‘Blues,’ the valorization of ‘feeling’ was embedded in culture-revolutionary ideals of leading one’s life, of *Lebensführung*. Overall, there is a *holistic* character to the countercultural protagonists’ Afro-Americanophilia, or at least to their own interpretation thereof. Moreover, when it came to questioning the boundaries between the political, the aesthetic, and the mundane world of everyday existence, countercultural subjects tended to sense a cognate, lived utopia in the African American world in general and among the Black Panthers more specifically. Crucially, for instance, popular arts and politics did not seem entirely differentiated sub-systems of society in Black America, but rather, the sub-systems that differentiate in modern societies seemed to have merged again, or never to have been separated in the first place. In the African American world, political activism and organizing were an immediate expression of a popular, organic community in the state of collective revolt—or, anyway, that is how the situation could be read with at least some plausibility, especially when contrasted to the overall alienation between left-wing radicals and the majority of the West German population, including the working class.

¹⁴ There were, to be sure, other international and ethnically marked elements within the subcultural aesthetics of the Blues: from South America, most prominently, from the adherents of US hippie culture who themselves exhibited a plethora of ethnic, partly primitivist predilections. The general hybridity of cultural expressions should also be kept in mind here: the Black Panther Party’s iconic symbol, the beret, after all came from France.

Many white German leftists, men and women alike, conceived of inter-racial sexual relations as a form of practical anti-racism.¹⁵ In terms of the binaries that structure cultural semantics, blackness had, at least since the romantic era, been associated with physicality and unrestrained sexuality. During German colonialism, after World War I, during the Nazi regime and in its aftermath, Black male sexuality was figured as a threat to national purity, and interracial sexuality as ‘racial disgrace.’ During the US occupation, the stance had softened, but the basic cultural logics and binaries had remained intact, even if they were re-evaluated. Sometimes, in particular among those who wanted to rid themselves of traditional constraints, Black people were taken to embody one’s personal sexual liberation. One of the crudest testaments of a well-intended, yet deeply racist, sexualization of Blacks within the social world of the ‘Blues’ could be found on a sticker distributed by an ad-hoc group named ‘Frauenbefreiungsfront Valerie Solanas’ [Valerie Solanas Women’s Liberation Front], which—now somewhat infamously—contained the following rhyming couplets: ‘Der Neger kann gut vögeln / und auch die Pigs vermöbeln / Und dann noch ist der Neger / ein prima Bombenleger / Internationalismus hurra!’ [The Negro is good at screwing / and at beating up the pigs / and furthermore the Negro / is great at making bombs / hurray for internationalism!] Here, countercultural and feminist sensibilities proved very much in tune with mainstream representations, even though, in the protagonists’ own view, they brought to the surface and transvalorised what was otherwise repressed. We might speculate that they considered this over-the-top stereotyping to be subversive of cultural norms.¹⁶

‘Black Bars’ in Germany, which had emerged during post-war occupation, were the primary spatial sites for sexual encounters, similar to the ‘interzones’ in Kevin Mumford’s history of sex districts in the early-20th century USA. Occasionally, ‘Blues’ activists would venture there, as is represented in *Die Glücklichen* (The Happy Ones, 1979), a picaresque novel cum memoir written by Peter Paul Zahl. ‘Viele Panther hier?’ [Many Panthers here?], the protagonists, ‘Blues’ activists, ask an African American

¹⁵ This is discussed in greater detail in Ege (2007: ch. 3). Eldridge Cleaver’s theories of race and sex in *Soul on Ice* (1968) resonate with those of many countercultural whites. It must be stressed that because African American soldiers represented such an important and numerous group, there were many more Black men than women in the country. Hence, it was easier for white heterosexual women (and white gay men) to find Black partners than it was for white heterosexual men (and white lesbian women). Moral panics about this constellation occurred at various points after World Wars I and II.

¹⁶ On the importance of interracial sex in German 1970s feminist texts, see Broeck (2007; 2010).

acquaintance, before entering a Berlin night club called the International. ‘No, nur Sympathisanten. Viele hier. Ich auch’ [No, not many, just sympathizers like myself], the man says in slightly broken German (Zahl 1979: 146).

Night clubs such as the International, which were predominantly frequented by Black men, most of them temporary residents in the country, and by white German women, existed in many German (and other European) cities, and also in smaller towns with US army bases.¹⁷ In the following excerpt from Zahl’s book, the nightclub serves as a meeting point where GI underground activists are attempting to contact a potential African American deserter whom they plan to smuggle to Scandinavia. But for the ‘Blues’ protagonists, the club also provides exposure to a predominantly Black environment. One of Zahl’s narrators, Ilona, describes the visit in an ecstatic tone:

Da drinnen afrikanische Dunkelheit, Tabakqualm, Tänzer, über denen ein müder Casablanca-Ventilator. Dagmar geht an der Tanzfläche vorbei, wir folgen hintereinander. Bunte Lämpchen, Soul. Am besten, wir stellen uns hier hin, sage ich, und warten, bis ein Tisch frei wird.

Wir haben Mühe, unser Staunen zu verbergen: schwarze Männer, weiße Frauen, der Tanzstil schaukelnd, wiegend, mit drehenden Schultern, angedeuteten Schritten aus dem Kniegelenk heraus, brusthoch gehaltenen, zu Fäusten geballten Händen.

Muhammad Ali Stil. Guck dir die Bewegungen an, sag das mal Peter, von wegen positiver Rassismus. Die GIs tragen alle Zivil, sind bunt, teils verwegen gekleidet. Wildlederstetsons, Wildlederflickenanzüge, Schals, Baskenmützen, Hosen zweifarbig und mit 80er Schlag. Schattenboxer. Seine Partnerin wippt, völlig ernst, mit dem Kopf, wirft Boxerhände vor die pralle Brust. Lederjacken, Sonnenbrillen, Barette. Grelle Sakkos, weite Hosen, abgesteppte Schuhe; Brusttücher groß und duftig (Schlagsahne) in vielen Pastellfarben; Kettchen um Handgelenke. Viele schließen die Augen, viele Frauen lassen die Augen weit offen und ahmen jeden Schritt, jedes Wiegen ihrer Tanzpartner nach. Ein gutaussehender, gutgebauter Schwarzer Mann mit Oberlippenbärtchen, in enger schwarzer Samthose mit Matrosenschlag, sackbetont, trägt ein Mikrofon in der Rechten, bewegt tänzerisch den Oberkörper, der sich unter dem hautengen, taillierten, mit Schillerkragen und weiten Ärmeln versehenen Hemd abzeichnet, singt Refrains mit, ruft in Gesang hinein, wechselt die Platten, schreit in Schwarzem Dialekt einige Sätze, wird unterbrochen, yeah mohn, yeah, kündigt die nächste Gesangsgruppe an, schnappt mit den Fingern, wirft den Oberkörper nach hinten, die Oberschenkel hoch, hat glänzende haselnußbraune Augen, strahlt gute Laune ab, trinkt einen Schluck aus der Bierflasche, die ihm ein Soulbrother hochreicht, auf das Podest neben der Box steigend, ein anderer stößt hinzu, der Jockey verläßt die Box, sie stehen nebeneinander, wippen im Takt, deuten Schritte an, yeah mohn, schließen die Augen, werfen Afrofrisuren nach hinten, abwechselnd die Linke, die rechte Schulter nach vorn, die Hände, schlängelnd wie Fische, schießen nach vorne und oben, Arme winkeln sich in Hüften.

James Brown! Sage ich begeistert. Tanzt du? ...

¹⁷ The segregation of US military social life and racism in German night clubs are discussed in some greater detail in the literature to which I referred earlier, and in other studies on the role of Allied military bases in West German cultural history. These matters were also discussed passionately in GI underground magazines.

Ilona hat Recht, der Typ ist ein As. So'n Discjockey hab ich noch nie erlebt. Verstehst Du sein Amerikanisch?

Nur zum Teil. Der spricht nen wüsten Dialekt.

Soulbrother halt.

Der hat mehr Pep in Fingerspitzen und Arsch als die ganze deutsche Schlagermafia zusammen. (1979: 146)¹⁸

[In there, African darkness. Tobacco smoke, dancers, above them: a tired Casablanca-style ventilator fan. Dagmar passes the dance floor, we follow one after another. Colourful little lights, Soul. We should stand here, I say, and wait until we can get a table. We find it difficult to hide our amazement: Black men, white women, a see-sawing style of dance, rocking movements, moving the shoulders, suggestions of kick-steps from the knees, the hands, turned into fists, held chest-high.

Muhammad Ali style. Look at those movements, and tell it to Peter: positive racism, as if. All the G.I.s are in civilian clothes and are dressed colourfully, some boldly. Suede Stetson hats, suede suits, shawls, berets, two-colour bellbottoms. Shadow boxer. His female partner, very earnestly, is bouncing her head in tune, and takes her boxing-hands up, in front of her large chest. Leather jackets, shades, berets. Outrageous sports coats, bell-bottom pants, quilted shoes; large, airy, pastel-coloured kerchiefs (cream), little chains around the wrists. Many are closing their eyes, many women have their eyes open and imitate every step, every rocking move of their dance partner. A good-looking, well-built Black man with a moustache, sailor-style black velvet bellbottoms, accentuating his package, is carrying a microphone in his right hand, he is moving his upper body in soft dancing moves, the torso shows under his skin-tight, fitted shirt with its wide, open collar and arms, he is singing along in the refrain, shouting into the singing, he changes the tunes, he shouts some phrases in Black dialect, becomes disrupted, yeah mohn, yeah, he is announcing the next act, snaps his fingers, throws back his upper body, lifts his thighs, he has shining, hazelnut eyes, he emits cheer and high spirits, takes a swig from a beer bottle which a soul brother has given to him, stepping onto the platform next to the DJ box, another one comes, they stand next to each other, they rock their bodies in tune, they only hint at their moves, yeah mohn, they close their eyes, throw back their Afros, move their shoulders, left and right, the hands, like fish, shoot to the fore and to the top, arms held at their hips.

James Brown!, I say, excitedly. You dance?

Ilona is right, the guy is amazing. I've never experienced a DJ like that. Can you follow his American English?

Only in parts. He's got an awful dialect.

Soulbrother, after all.

He's got more zip [*Pep*] in his fingertips and in his ass than the entire German *Schlager* mafia.]

This passage illustrates the baseline of subcultural Afro-Americanophilia's political passions. Zahl's narrators are filled with fascination, an enjoyment of something 'other' and with sympathy far beyond the necessities of the political. At the same time, the protagonists aren't primarily engaged in an exoticist excursion. Rather, as this passage also illustrates, their experience is embedded in a tangible political project, namely aiding desertion. In this case, the two approaches are not mutually exclusive, but mutually constitutive.

¹⁸ *Schlager* (literally 'hit') refers to a category of low-brow German popular music that the protagonists would most likely consider corny.

What is more, the author also makes sure to include dialogical reflections on ‘positive racism,’ ultimately dismissing the charge that racist projections form the basis of their fascination with Black Americans.¹⁹ Such charges, the ensuing dialogue shows, crumble in the face of actual experience and activism. The scene at the ‘International’ seems to confirm that African American worlds are, indeed, different and have more ‘*pep*’ than the ones the activists have been exposed to, and ethical debates over exoticism, the narrative suggests, prove irrelevant in this practical situation. Indeed, the protagonists and their African American acquaintances share a mutual ideological universe of left, anti-racist anti-capitalism, the contiguity of which is assured when they discuss James Brown: his music is good, they agree, but the man is a ‘pig,’ and ‘pigs aren’t always pink.’ Those who are pink, we may conclude, are not always ‘pigs,’ either.²⁰

IV.

There seemed to be a clear-cut alliance, then, between countercultural sensibilities and contemporary African American expressions. One might further argue that ‘feeling,’ meaning a type of relation toward music, dancing and sexuality, also points toward a mode of sociality, a projected ideal of intuitively harmonious relations between partners, between, more broadly speaking, the individual and the group.

However, when it came to contemporary Black popular music, things were more complicated, and these complications reveal further aspects of West Germans’ relationship to the African American world at this historical moment. While they were enthralled by much Black culture and Black politics, many within the counterculture, for instance, felt ambivalent about soul music, as another interviewee, a former friend of

¹⁹ In the narrative, before the nightclub scene, the protagonists discuss the problematics of ‘positive racism,’ which some members of the group criticize strongly. Nonetheless, after that visit, ‘positive racism’ appears to be a mostly academic problem. In talking to Jeff, the issue comes up again. ‘Ihr mögt schwarze Leute?’ [You like Black people?], Jeff asks. ‘Nicht mehr und nicht weniger als andere auch. Verstehst du, darüber haben wir uns auf der Fahrt hierher unterhalten, über Rassismus. “Rassismus?”’ [No more or less than others. You know, this is what we talked about while driving here, about racism. Racism?] ‘Ja, auch über positiven Rassismus. Wenn ich sagen würde, ich liebe nur schwarze Menschen, ist das das Gleiche, wie wenn ein weißer Rassist sagt, er haßt schwarze Menschen.’ [Yes, also about positive racism. If I were to say, I only love black people, that’s the same as when a white racist says he hates black people]. ‘Right, sagt Jeff. Habt ihr Papier bei?’ [Right, says Jeff. You have the papers?] Ilona, the ‘positive racist,’ is proven right in the scene, so she can ask, later on: ‘Na, habe ich Recht gehabt, ich—positiver Rassist? Haste.’ [So, was I right, I, the—positive racist? Yes, you were.] (Zahl 1979: 145).

²⁰ The narrator also terms James Brown a ‘schwarze Sau, wie sie im Buche steht, Kapitalist, Schwanzideologe, Onkel Tom’ [a black pig, capitalist, cock ideologue, Uncle Tom]. The concern is not limited to this narrative, either. In Berlin, a small demonstration against James Brown was held outside a concert, mostly because of his appearance on TV on behalf of President Nixon, calling for order at a time of urban riots. ‘Pigs aren’t always pink,’ is what the flyer, distributed by white ‘countercultural’ sympathizers of the Black Panther Party and some African American GIs, said.

the aforementioned Baumann, explains. The music was captivating enough, he recalls, but it obviously had a pop, rather than ‘earthy’ blues and hippie rock, sensibility about it: ‘Also ich hab’ auf Soul nicht so gestanden ..., weil die Typen alle so sauber angezogen waren. Die hatten alle so einen feinen bürgerlichen Charakter gehabt ... Von der Musik waren die meisten begeistert, aber nicht so von dem Äußeren der Leute, ... die waren ja alle mit Rüschenhemdchen und Gleichschritt auf der Bühne.’ [Well, I didn’t really dig soul music ... because these guys did so much dressing-up. They all had such a nice bourgeois character. I mean, most of us were into the music, but not so much into the appearance of these guys—after all, they all were up on stage in frilly shirts, dancing in lockstep!] (Reinders 2004). As such statements indicate, in male-dominated countercultural and ‘music expert’ circles, soul was dismissively referred to as ‘dancing music’ (*Tanzmusik*) and, consequently, ‘girls’ music’ (*Mädchenmusik*). (One may also wonder whether dancing to soul music required a physical ease that many either did not want or possess, or did not like to be seen not possessing.)

This dislike also surfaced in many record reviews that emerged from the countercultural sensibility. In such reviews, the prevailing semantics are strongly linked to the aesthetic tradition of 1920s primitivism. In US discourse, terms from a different semantic frame of appreciation abound, with many adjectives such as ‘refined,’ ‘smooth’ or ‘easy,’ which connote a particular modernity, as opposed to ‘unpolished’ blues and rock music (see, for instance, Keil 1966). Such words, however, are hard to find in the German rock and pop music press. Rather, in a left-leaning, generally countercultural magazine such as *Sounds*, we find positively-weighted adjectives like ‘earthy’ [*erdig*], ‘vital’ [*vital*], ‘physical’ [*physisch*], as well as negative terms like ‘without juice and force’ [*saft- und kraftlos*], ‘with-the-brakes-on’ [*gebremst*], ‘colourless’ [*farblos*], ‘shy and artificial’ [*geziert*], ‘watered-down’ [*verwässert*], ‘defused’ [*entschärft*], ‘smoothed-out’ [*glatt*], and, time and again, ‘sterile’ [*steril*]. These contrasting vocabularies of appreciation and condemnation document the reviewers’ cultural criticism: According to their logic, bad records were based on commercial calculations whereby artists anticipated a mass market’s prejudices, and hence let go of their uncensored, unfiltered, authentic expression—their unfiltered expression of Blackness, we might add, which to these critics had a lot to do with ‘letting go.’ While the mass market may have wanted smoothed-out, watered-down, and ultimately ‘whitened’ Black music, counter-cultural and anti-capitalist reviewers let us know they wanted the real thing in uncommodified

form. In this semiotic model, ‘authentic’ Black figures as soulful, deep, emotional, communal, sensual, authentic; whereas the commercial world (including that which is ‘inauthentically’ black) figures as white, shallow, rational, individualistic, alienated and calculated.²¹ However, this was not only a rather naïve approach to how popular music is produced, and a rather limited definition of African American musical modernism, it also had the effect of producing a ‘pop’ audience as ‘other,’ and gendering it as female.

At this point in the argument, it is important to locate the countercultural perspective within the cultural field. Soul certainly was not an underground phenomenon. The famous Atlantic Records compilation *That Is Soul* (Volume 1), sold about 120,000 copies in Germany in 1968. According to one contemporary estimate, more than ten percent of all record purchases in Germany at the time consisted of soul music. Moreover, at the level of cultural significance and contemporaneity—pop culture’s famous sense of ‘now’—soul had become, as German lifestyle magazine *twen* put it in February 1968, ‘the music that everybody knows everything about,’ the music that was ‘rotating on all progressive turntables’ (Bourbon 1968: 136). Here, too, Blackness was a relevant category, as, among other things, the rather fetishistic visual depictions of soul musicians in *twen* illustrate.

In that sense, an overall Afro-Americanophile sentiment was prevalent within large segments of the younger generation. At the time, aside from ‘holistic’ practices of enhanced Afro-Americanophilia within highly politicized and countercultural circles, there was also a developing pop culture—transported mainly via music and visual culture—that prominently featured Black glamour. Here, too, people dreamt of sexual and physical liberation, engaged in exoticist projections and reproduced binaries that they claimed to transcend, and in some ways widened their horizons. Here, too, some whites fantasized about being black. On the dancefloor and beyond, many transformed their styles of movement, and, in terms of their physicality, moved further away from the older German nationalist ideal of brisk, disciplined movement, *Zackigkeit* [snappiness] (Maase 1996). Most often, however, they did so without coming to any cultural-revolutionary conclusions.

²¹ This is not to uncritically deny the effects of the profit-oriented recording industry and of racist practices within it. But the blinders of the countercultural view are apparent. Such critics miss much of what is characteristic about the music, and universalize their own cultural codes (Guillory & Green 1998; Ege 2007: 46ff).

This lower degree of cultural meaningfulness and coherence marks ‘mainstream’ Afro-Americanophilia as an aspect of (post-)modern consumer culture. The pleasure of seeing images and listening to sounds marked as ‘other’—racialized exoticism—was being democratized, in contrast to such earlier elite phenomena as 18th century aristocratic Chinoiserie. These practices of appropriation also belonged to the realm of the everyday, as opposed to more traditional racialized carnival practices like ‘blacking up.’ The (white) self, rather than being conceived of as a rigidly bound entity concerned with purity and authenticity, functioned as a flexible consumer of difference.²²

Certainly, these popular forms of Afro-Americanophilia—and we must use the term in a much looser sense here—could also encompass anti-racist gestures and beliefs. The Civil Rights movement, and conservatives’ polemics against both Black music and (formal) racial equality, infused musical enjoyment with an ethical tone, even though the mode of engagement here was characterized by less *commitment* to a political project or to a holistic way of subcultural life than elsewhere. However, countercultural and anti-racist critics were right to point out that the logic of consumption and commodification remained linked to processes of exploitation—in material and symbolic terms.²³ At the micro-political level of movements, gestures and sensations, however, ‘mainstream’ Afro-Americanophilia did contribute to subtle forms of cultural change, and it did so outside of dissident urban scenes as well; changes to the way in which young Germans of the post-fascist generation felt about, moved and inhabited their bodies; changes to where their cultural imaginaries ended; changes to how they conceived the boundaries between self and other.

The political character of these processes became apparent in different ways, consciously or subconsciously. In a long feature article, teen magazine *BRAVO* spelled out the popular ‘white’ German passion for soul music, using a strangely inappropriate

²² It might be tempting to present a clear-cut dichotomy between a holistic model of solidarity, commitment and risk-taking on the one hand, and a more popular, less committed model that, through commodification and consumption, reproduces racism, on the other. However, solidarity workers weren’t disconnected from pop cultural imaginaries and, in their cultural criticism, sometimes held on to racialized imagery that would have been too explicit for much of the pop cultural world.

²³ This argument is developed further in Ege (2007), where I discuss Charles Wilp’s ‘Afri Cola’ advertising campaigns. Classic arguments against the ‘consumption of difference’ (as forms of ‘incorporation,’ of ‘eating the other’) have been made by hooks (1992) and others. German-American New Left theorist Herbert Marcuse (1969) termed phenomena like the so-called ‘sex wave’ in the mid-1960s, which pre-dated ‘sexual liberation,’ a form of ‘repressive desublimation.’ In the German discussion, the racial aspect of these sexual imaginaries has been widely neglected, even though interracial sex plays a very significant role in crucial textual and visual representations of the time.

metaphor: ‘Hätte ein Disk-jockey in einem Tanzschuppen die merkwürdige Idee, keine Soul-Platten zu spielen, er würde glatt gelyncht werden. Fazit: Deutschlands Teens sind soulverrückt. Jedenfalls abends in den Diskotheken. Warum? Soul fühlt man, Soul tanzt man, Soul lebt man’ [If a DJ in a dance club had the strange idea of not playing soul records, he would most likely get himself lynched ... Germany’s teens are soul-crazed. At least at night in the night clubs. Why? One feels soul, one dances soul, one lives soul.] (*BRAVO* 12 February 1968: 16).²⁴

Critics soon began to raise the question of who exactly this ‘one’ was, the ‘one’ who felt, danced, and lived soul: Could it be a white person? And what would that imply? Despite its pop aspect, and unlike many earlier Black or Black-inspired musical genres, especially Rhythm-and-Blues-derived ‘beat’ music, soul was difficult to read as anything but explicitly Black music, based on specific experiences and entangled in complex ways with contemporaneous African American struggles in the context of Civil Rights, Black Power, and the postcolonial scene internationally. This is how it was decoded by German critics. For instance, another article in *twen*, from December 1968, which was accompanied by page after page of photographs of Black people, stresses the notion of racial exclusivity: ‘Die Rückbesinnung auf die Ursprünge, auf die schwarze Seele des Jazz, der Rückzug auf Gefühlsinhalte und auf Ausdrucksformen, die für Weiße nicht nachvollziehbar erscheinen, entspringen dem Streben nach Exklusivität, nach einer wenigstens begrenzten Unnachahmlichkeit. Sie bedeuten: off limits für Weiße.’ [The return to the origins, to the black soul of jazz, the retreat into emotional content and toward forms of expression that seem inaccessible to whites are all derived from a pursuit of exclusivity, a non-imitability. They mean: off limits for whites] (*twen*, December 1968: 138). The ‘off limits’ issue may not have been recognized by every listener, but it did have practical aspects: in not being able to buy many of the records one had heard about, not really speaking the language, not quite getting the references, not knowing how to dance in just the right way. On a more discursive level, of course, the problem was categorical: If ‘soul’ referred to an essence of blackness, that essence might be completely inaccessible to whites. For that reason, contemporary critics often pointed out what they saw as an irony composed of the ethno-racial essentialism of soul music on the one hand, and its very popularity, its commercial, culture-industrial form

²⁴ Other references are provided in Ege (2007: 46–78).

on the other hand.²⁵ And while there was an abundance of rock 'n' roll, 'beat' and neo-blues bands throughout the 1960s in Germany, there were initially very few bands that tried their luck as 'soul' bands. Covers of U.S. soul hits recorded by mainstream *Schlager* stars mostly failed, both commercially as well as critically.²⁶

V.

Returning to the question of a broader pattern that runs through various forms of German Afro-Americanophilia in the late 1960s, these dynamics of exclusion, accessibility and inclusion are crucial. In this respect, the situation in the field of popular music was reminiscent of the situation in radical politics. In the latter, white German activists often went to considerable lengths to seek acceptance from Black Power activists, as the episode from the Berlin nightclub shows. Some sources drastically document such desires: 'Black GIs!', read an English-language flyer distributed outside a Mannheim army barracks by German SDS students:

We know there was a conclusion of black-power-leaders not to join any action organized by whities [sic]. But the part of German youth sympathizing with black power is much more radical as [sic] those at home in the States. We want to contact black men, friends or members of black power, that are ready to discuss and work with us.

Here, the intent to cooperate specifically and exclusively with African Americans—African American *men*—coincided with a desire to be recognized and accepted despite one's white skin. Appropriating a pejorative term from African American usage ('whities'), the authors of the flier apparently did not consider themselves white in the same sense as 'whities' in the United States, and in seeking *Zusammenarbeit* (cooperation), they were asking for confirmation of that self-image.²⁷

In widely disseminated cultural texts like those I discussed from *BRAVO* and *twen*, African Americans stressed the irreducible difference inherent in their culture, experience, and political identity. In the field of music, the book *Blues People* by Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones)—translated into German in 1969—presents one such argument.²⁸

²⁵ Intellectually, Adorno's critique of jazz as phony escapism from the cultural patterns of capitalist modernity seemed to provide the backdrop for such arguments.

²⁶ See, for example, the CD compilation *Soul in Germany* (2007), which features German-language songs by the Temptations, The Supremes, Marvin Gaye, Dionne Warwick, and German-language soul covers by *Schlager* singers, such as Jacob Sisters, Manuela, Gilla, and Michael Holm.

²⁷ Young Germans' contradictory relation to national guilt (in relation to World War II, the holocaust and anti-Semitism) and a more general Western 'white' guilt (in relation to colonialism, slavery and imperialism) is discussed in Ege (2007: 140ff).

²⁸ This is discussed in Andrew Hurley's and Detlef Siegfried's essays in this journal issue. The book was

In the Black Power movement, a very similar pattern surfaced in the rejection of direct cooperation with white sympathizers (which, from a sympathetic viewpoint, could be termed as self-reliance and self-organization). In discourses on sexuality, prominent African Americans stressed the attractiveness and beauty of other Black people, in opposition to the traditional prestige attributed to white (especially female) partners. In popular music, a similar pattern could be seen in the exclusiveness of soul and the general consensus about the impossibility of a white person's 'Black' voice.

However, in all these fields, symbolic exclusion only seemed to drive white attempts to gain membership and acceptance.²⁹ There were different strategies for reacting to this sense of exclusion, and in contrast to the USA, fewer African Americans were present to comment on them critically or intervene. Disarming irony represented one such path, which was applied to band names and song titles (the Average White Band from Scotland comes to mind), caricatures and wisecracks (such as the term *schwarzsingen* ['blacksinging']). And, of course, there were also serious intellectual arguments, especially within the context of radical politics, where Black nationalism was dismissed as 'petty-bourgeois' and counter-revolutionary.³⁰

Crucially, however, in settings where the textual, discursive mode of engagement did not take centre stage, the primary strategy for coping with the tendency toward racial exclusiveness in African American culture and politics consisted in relying on the evidence of experience and performance: Once one got the 'feeling' right, symbolic exclusion was replaced by imaginary belonging. For instance, in record reviews, articles, memoirs, and other narratives, there are vivid descriptions of immersion experiences, of temporary instances of *communitas* that take place in nightclubs, at concerts, or during travels. In such narratives, when one showed one's enthusiasm in the right manner, as a review of an Aretha Franklin concert in Frankfurt, attended mostly by African American GIs, put it, when one was ready to show that one was part of the 'magical circle of the enthusiasts' and not some arrogant outsider, when one joined in the call-

translated into German in 1969 after having been translated by a 'student collective,' which included Werner Sollors, who came to chair Harvard University's department of African American Studies at a later stage of his career.

²⁹ To be sure, the awareness of this predicament was unevenly developed. Those who merely felt enthused by Afri-Cola's advertisements, danced to soul music or, maybe, fantasized about sex with a Black partner most likely knew nothing about the arguments made by Baraka and probably wouldn't have cared either way.

³⁰ This case was made, for instance, in the introduction to the German translation of Baraka's (then Leroi Jones) *Blues People* (1969), written by the aforementioned 'Berlin student collective'.

and-response communication, ‘then one is accepted’ (*twen* October 1968: 140). Whilst, then, there may have been *rejection* at the level of content, *inclusion* was simultaneously enacted at the level of performance, and this fulfilled a deep-seated white desire. Sex, of course, was another form of togetherness that could be made to stand for a transgression of such boundaries.

VI

In this paper, I took a close look at forms, practices, patterns and—to some extent—the politics of Afro-Americanophilia in West Germany between 1967 and 1975. In doing so, going into detail was important, not so as to deduce cultural meanings and dynamics from pre-given assumptions and normative viewpoints, but, in the space permitted, to reconstruct them from the ground up. What, then, did this wave of Afro-Americanophilia, at that cultural moment, mean for the history of racism in Germany, and what other larger-scale cultural and social processes were connected with it?

Quite different things have been labelled here as instances of Afro-Americanophilia. Given an object of study so heterogeneous, we must avoid fallacious reifications and generalizations. Still, scientific surveys and personal accounts by Black Germans document that Germany, on the whole, did not suddenly become a less racist place toward people of African descent. Certainly, as illustrated in Donna Summer’s case, some Blacks were able to manoeuvre through Germany in ways that straightforward anti-Black racism would have made less likely or even impossible.³¹ In some cases, more thoughtful forms of anti-racist practice took hold, and racial categories were rethought. Solidarity work was real enough, and it inspired serious debates. However, overall, racism was not challenged, nor was the presumption of Germany’s generic whiteness really questioned. Rather, white rebels and consumers alike empowered themselves to live out their racialized fantasies, and constrained Blacks to very specific roles—instrumentalizing them, defining their supposed essence, making them subservient, even while putting them on pedestals. The Manichean worldview of

³¹ Illuminating Black people’s experiences with Afro-Americanophilia is an important task that could not be accomplished in this paper. Notes on the post-WW II era can be found in Partridge 2008 (where, for example, Hans-Jürgen Massaquoi’s memories of exoticist erotic interest in the 1950s are cited and interpreted); see also the articles by Ege and Hurley in this issue of *PORTAL* and the comment by Huber in Footnote 6. Baum et al. (1992 [1986]) give insights into their experiences with ‘white’ projections and desires toward Afro-German women like themselves, highlighting occasional moments of empowerment, but mostly the alienating effects of ambiguous compliments and intrusive questions. However, this concerns a slightly later time, the early and mid-1980s, when the ‘alternative’ [alternative] and ‘Öko’ [eco-activist] milieus had grown.

modern primitivism, in which Blacks and Whites were taken to embody essentially different, complementary principles (most basically, intellectuality versus emotionality and physicality), structured the stereotypes of Black America that were widespread among white German Afro-Americanophiles, and motivated many of them. Certainly, these logics *did* become modified and questioned, and new imaginations of cultural-political equivalence emerged.³² More often than not, however, the celebration of a cultural subconsciousness, of the formerly repressed (such as ideas about Black sexuality), remained within the parameters of a racialized semantics.

Metaphor and equivalence are crucial concepts for understanding 1960s Afro-Americanophilia as symbolic practice. In popular culture, among whites, ‘feeling black’ and ‘becoming black’ were tropes and wide-spread fantasies. When countercultural activists claimed to have been treated ‘like Blacks,’ and created chains of equivalence between their own life and that of African Americans, they took such tropes the furthest. For countercultural subjects, Blackness provided a metaphorical frame for imagining and, in a largely imaginary way, experiencing difference from the conservative cultural and political norms they rejected, which was not only a cognitive, but also an affective and corporeal matter. Of course, in terms of actual social position and experience of oppression, these claims of equivalence were grossly inaccurate. Additionally, the difference between dynamics of German guilt after the Holocaust and white guilt in the United States led to curious displacements. In many ways, though, at the time, at least within cultural revolutionary thought and practice, realism was suspended anyway: exuberance, fantasy, myth were seen to be more than merely misrecognitions of reality, as Jerry Rubin wrote, and German counterculturals soon translated: ‘Marx ist ein Mythos. Mao ist ein Mythos. Die Black Panther sind ein Mythos. / Die Menschen versuchen, dem Mythos zu entsprechen, er holt das beste aus ihnen heraus’ [Marx is a myth. Mao is a myth. The Black Panthers are a myth. People try to live up to the myth, it helps them be the best they can] in *Fizz* No. 3, 1971, unpaginated).³³

³² Within the context of Afro-Americanophilia, for instance, people began reading authors such as Frantz Fanon. Furthermore, there are, of course, many more complex and more interesting models of African American popular aesthetics, some of which also circulated at the time within smaller circles of enthusiasts. Historian George Lipsitz’s (1994) suggestions focus on Black popular aesthetics as articulating a contradictory, rather than primitivist, positionality half within, half external to Western modernity and the displacements of modern capitalism. See also the discussion in Ege (2007: 154–164). Generally, at the time, practices (listening to music, dancing, connecting in various forms) may have been ahead—in the sense of more complex, less stereotypical—of the rhetoric that tried to explicate them.

³³ My translation.

British cultural critic Kobena Mercer observed that around 1968, in the USA and in the UK, but also on a global scale, the predominantly white counter culture and Black liberation movements were united by a common goal ‘to decolonize inherited models of subjectivity’ (1994: 304). Of course, this meant quite different things under very different circumstances, but there also were significant alliances, crossovers and resonances.

Playful, empathetic and, one may argue, ethically and politically irresponsible approaches to personal and collective identity were hotly debated at the time, particularly in Germany. In the realm of social theory, new processes of subject formation were discussed, for instance, in Herbert Marcuse’s optimistic diagnosis of a ‘new sensibility,’ which took experimental forms of life and subjectivity as a prefiguration of post-revolutionary times, or, in quite a different way, in Jürgen Habermas’s charge against ‘irrational’ and ‘romantic’ tendencies within the student movement and their ‘emotional identifications’ with subaltern groups, including the Vietcong and the Black Panther Party. Significantly, German SDS spokesman and psychoanalyst Reimut Reiche (1968), reflecting the mood of large parts of his constituency, defended such identifications, stressing the lack of credible objects of young people’s left-wing identification in post-fascist Germany. Furthermore, very much in line with Marcuse, he designated such practices as a testing ground for ‘a new form of psychological relation to one’s surroundings’ in which emotions and the imagination were to play a bigger role.

In a different theoretical language, French radical theorists Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari argued at the time that hegemonic forms of subjectivity needed to be and were being overcome. They viewed the ‘becoming-minor’ of dominant groups as an integral and necessary part thereof, that is the forming ‘blocs of becoming’ with subaltern movements, hoping that such processes would blur the line between what was considered one’s own and what was alien and ‘other’ (1987 [1980]: 291–298).³⁴ In their view, affect, movement, gestures, quanta of energy, rhythm and pace are where ‘molecular’ processes of sociocultural change take place. In that sense, the enjoyment, appropriation and imitation of practices based in African American culture were indeed

³⁴ On the concept of a ‘bloc of becoming’ (and its shortcomings) see Ege (2007: 147–153). The authors explicitly took ‘becoming black,’ drawing partly on Amiri Baraka’s work, and quipped that, according to the Black Panthers, even blacks had to become Black, or ‘minoritarian’ in an emphatic sense.

part of a process of change on this ‘molecular’ level, which Deleuze and Guattari opposed to the ‘molar’ level of institutional and movement politics, and was where they put their hopes for the emergence of new ‘blocs of becoming.’ This molecular level encompasses the history of lived corporeality and imagined selves which, in complex and non-linear ways, feed back into representations of the body politic.

Some of my findings correspond to such arguments: There is indeed no clear line between political solidarity and the realm of the imagination. Political passions sometimes derive from popular cultural sensibilities and exoticist fantasies, or from a desire to leave behind one’s whiteness, one’s world-historical guilt, Nazi associations, or one’s German provinciality. Despite such entanglements, they can produce tangible results. Connections are made, people find ‘lines of flight.’ What happens on a molecular level is irreducible to racial attributions or political discourse. Of course, actual practices in many ways lagged behind utopian expectations, whether they were focussed on anti-imperialist solidarity or on a-subjective, molecular forms of becoming. The awareness of the problem of exoticism, for instance, remained limited, partly because of irrationalism. The politics of appropriation could not so easily be disentangled from structures of inequality, from the politics of race, gender, and sexuality. And, crucially, the de-contextualization and commodification of specific elements of African American cultural production, such as music, contributed to their integration into conventional, if updated, modes of (mainly white, German) subjectivity. Here, Deleuze and Guattari’s disinterest in reflecting conventional power relations, and their enthusiasm for processes of becoming and movement below the level of discursive representations, are very much a reflection of their times; on the level of sophisticated theory, they speak to a desire for *communitas* that the counterculturals exhibited on the level of practice.

In retrospect and leaving ethical questions to one side, something which seemed like liberation to many appears to many critics like a mere episode in processes of modernization and individualization. As historian Detlef Siegfried writes in his study on youth, protest and consumer culture in 1950s and 1960s West Germany (2006), racial masquerades, and other experiments with identity, started as sub- and countercultural practice, and then became integrated into the cultural industries, where they contributed to an overall de-homogenization of life styles, to informalization (Norbert Elias, Cas

Wouters) and to a ‘pluralization of the spectrum of norms,’ which was, ironically, much more consonant with the emerging post-Fordist social order. On that reading, and in stark contrast to the intentions of many protagonists, late 1960s Afro-Americanophilia, in concert with other forms of exoticism, contributed significantly to the modernization of consumer capitalism with its aestheticized modes of experience, less rigid national boundaries, and more fluid, performative identities and identifications. Convincing as such sweeping historical narratives are, in trying to do justice to the complexity of cultural practice, I believe it is important to also remember the contradictory nature of 1960s and 1970s Afro-Americanophilia and allow for a more ambiguous conclusion.

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