

Bios

Sharon Dodua Otoo is a Black British mother, activist, actress, author and editor of the book series "Witnessed." Her first novella "the things i am thinking while smiling politely" was published in February 2012 (edition assemblage). In all aspects of Sharon's work, empowerment plays a key role. Following completion of her BA degree in German and Management Studies (Royal Holloway, University of London), Sharon worked in various consultancy roles in London and Brighton in the area of anti-racism, race equality and corporate social responsibility. She now lives, laughs and works in Berlin. www.edition-assemblage.de/witnessed

The painter and conceptual artist **Sandrine Micossé-Aikins** deals with questions concerning identity and belonging, exclusion and (self) empowerment. Starting from her experience as a Togolese-German artist, who studied and worked in Mauritius, among other places, she combines various art forms to question facets of identity, ascriptions and unequal power relations. In 2008/09 she co-curated and supervised the project Prêt-à-Partager for the German Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations. Sandrine Micossé-Aikins completed the Master program "Art in Context" at the University of Arts in Berlin. www.edition-assemblage.de/imagine

Daniele Daude holds a doctorate in Musicology and Theater Studies. She studied at the Université Paris 8 and at the Freie Universität Berlin where she completed her dissertation on opera analysis. Her research focuses on the history of opera production, the semiotics of theater, postcolonial opera analysis and the politics of musical historiography. Currently she is working on her postdoctorate project "(Musik)TheaterMachtIdeologie" and is teaching the class "body theories in theater" at the Humboldt Universität zu Berlin. www.danielegdaude.com

Azadeh Sharifi is an independent researcher and author. She works for the Balzan Prize Project "The Role of Independent Theatre in Contemporary European Theatre: Aesthetic and Structural Changes" organized by the German Centre of the International Theatre Institute, Berlin. Her project is about "Theatre and Migration. The impact of migration on the European Theatre". Her research focuses on post-migrant Theatre in Europe, Theatre and Migration, Interculturalism and Transculturalism. She received her Ph.D. in Cultural Studies and Cultural Policy at the University of Hildesheim. Her dissertation thesis "Theater für Alle? Partizipation von Postmigranten am Beispiel der Bühnen der Stadt Köln" was published in 2011. She holds a Magister Artium in German Literature, Philosophy and Law from the Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg. Recent publication: "Blackfacing, Kunstfreiheit und die Partizipation von Postmigrant_innen an den Stadttheatern" (www.migration-boell.de/web/integration/47_3281.asp).

Julia Lemmle, M.A. History and Literature, has focused on discourse analysis and gender issues and is currently teaching at the Freie Universität Berlin. In her artistic work for i.a. "Fräulein Bernd" she is doing research on the interdependency of masculinity, whiteness and class. Recent publication: "Kann es denn rassistisch sein, wenn ich es nicht rassistisch meine? Weißsein, Theater & die Normalität rassistischer Darstellung" (www.migration-boell.de/web/integration/47_3399.asp).

Oliver Kontny was born in Dortmund, Germany, and studied philosophy and history in Bremen and Iranian and Turkic studies in Berlin. He has lived and worked in Istanbul, London and Oxford. He has been working in the film industry and as a literary translator, co-operating with award-winning directors Fatih Akin and Semih Kaplanoglu. Between 2009 and 2011 he worked as dramaturge, programmer and project developer for the Ballhaus Naunynstraße. He co-authored "Snow" with Hakan Savas Mican, an adaptation of Orhan Pamuk's novel into a dystopic Germany, and the radio play "Mad People's Republic" broadcast by RBB and WDR as German contribution to the project "Iranian Voices". Following a lectureship at the Institute for Theatre Studies of the Freie Universität Berlin, he is now concentrating on his writing and his collaboration with filmmakers. www.iranianvoices.de/index.php?/bereiche/team

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Contact: Claudia Daseking
Phone: (030) 838 50 448
eMail: info@theaterkulturen.de
www.theaterkulturen.de

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VERFLECHTUNGEN INTERWEAVING VON THEATER PERFORMANCE KULTUREN CULTURES

Blackface, Whiteness and the Power of Definition in German Contemporary Theatre

A Symposium with *Bühnenwatch*
16 October 2012

Kunstquartier Bethanien – Studio 1
Mariannenplatz 2
10997 Berlin-Kreuzberg

Program

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| 11.00 a.m. | Introduction by Oliver Kontny |
| 11.30 a.m. | Sharon Otoo <i>Reclaiming Innocence: Unmasking Representations of Whiteness in German Theatre</i> |
| 12.00 noon | Sandrine Micossé-Aikins <i>Not Just a Blackened Face: the Back Stage of a Stereotype</i> |
| 12.30 p.m. | Dr. Daniele Daude <i>The (Un)Chosen Bodies of Myths. Performing Race on Opera Stage</i> |
| 1.00–1.30 p.m. | Discussion Lunch break |
| 3.00 p.m. | Dr. Azadeh Sharifi <i>Black Artists in German Theatre</i> |
| 3.30 p.m. | Julia Lemmle <i>"Ich bin kein Nazi!" The Blackface Debate in the German Mainstream Media</i> |
| 4.00–4.30 p.m. | Discussion |

Abstracts

Sharon Dodua Otoo

Reclaiming Innocence: Unmasking Representations of Whiteness in German Theatre

Berlin, February 2012: a group of 42 individuals stand up at the beginning of a theatre play and silently leave the auditorium. They time their exit to coincide with the appearance of a white German actor on stage playing the role of Elisio, a Black refugee. For the production of *Unschuld* (engl. "Innocence"), directed by Michael Thalheimer, the actor's face is covered in grotesque pitch-black make-up, his lips enlarged, in hideous red. The protest action prompted the *Unschuld* ensemble of the *Deutsches Theater* to embark on a process of self-reflection and self-criticism. Their central question: had they stretched the scope of artistic freedom too far by reproducing racist imagery in their own work? Immediately on the evening of the protest, a representative of the senior management of the *Deutsches Theater* sought dialogue with the members of *Bühnenwatch* (engl. Stage-watch), the group which had coordinated the protest. *Bühnenwatch* was also invited to – and agreed to attend – a joint meeting with the *Unschuld* ensemble in order for both sides to have more detailed discussions about the representations of "the other" in German theatre in general and the symbolism of "blackface" in particular.

Using a case study of the *Bühnenwatch* protest at the *Deutsches Theater*, it will be shown how claims of universality, constructions of whiteness and warped concepts of freedom of art form the actual key points of contention between the two sides. It is argued that within the current debate between *Bühnenwatch* and the *Deutsches Theater* lies a unique potential to successfully sketch out a map of how inclusive and truly anti-racist theatre could look in a Germany fit for the 21st century.

Sandrine Micossé-Aikins

Not Just a Blackened Face: the Back Stage of a Stereotype
Images have played a significant role in establishing ideas about race and racial hierarchies. The particular image of the "blackface" that has little to do with Black people and everything with white colonial imagination has been part of a global propaganda the aim and result of which was the dehumanization of Black people and People of Color.

One finds little difference between the images that emerged within the framework of colonialism and those that are still circulating in society today. Advertisement, painting, the performing arts, film and photography or even the public display of people of color continue to negatively impact ideas of race and identity and thus the everyday realities of Black people not only in the western world but beyond. In the act of performing and thus representing Blackness therefore lies a power that translates into economical and social privilege for white people.

The anti-racist initiative *Bühnenwatch* is using the practice of Blackface as a starting point to make visible the larger cohesions of race, power and representation in and beyond the performing arts. Repeatedly this

idea has been misunderstood by the German public, mostly due to a lack of education regarding everyday racism, Germany's colonial history and the way it is shaping our contemporary moment.

Racism is widely regarded as a phenomenon that is happening "elsewhere" namely the US or marginal realms such as the German neonazi scene. Thus theatrical blackfacing is seen as a practice that has no connection and therefore no impact on the everyday in Germany.

"Not just a blackened face" is geared to demarcate racism and white supremacy as global power structures by retracing the history of Black stereotypes commonly evoked through blackface, thereby making visible the historical, geographical, social, ideological and political connections between the realms in which those stereotypical images appear. Connections that are too often unknown and/or attempted to be explained away by the mainstream of white German cultural producers.

Dr. Daniele Daude

The (Un)Chosen Bodies of Myths. Performing Race on Opera Stage

"The myth of the sexually available Black woman, the infantilized Black man, the oppressed Muslim woman, the aggressive Muslim man, as well as the myth of the emancipated white woman or the liberal white man, are examples of how gender and 'race' constructions interact" says philosopher Grada Kilomba. Myths cannot exist just as unperformed imagination or abstract constructions. To stay alive they need to be materialized (through painting, advertisement, TV, films etc.) and performed (street art, theater, dance, opera etc.). Myths just do not exist without bodies so they cannot be treated as a text that can be embodied. Bodies have been *chosen* to fabricate mythological narrations and characters. Thus when we talk about *race* in theater we have to also talk about the bodies that have been and still are chosen by *white* stage directors to create a mythical non-white character and even more so about the bodies that are thereby as unable to create a mythical white character. With the terms *chosen bodies* and *unchosen bodies* I intend to focus the attention on the performance processes of racialization on the opera stage. The questions I ask to understand how race is being made by performances are very simple: Which characters are connoted as *white* without being called so and which are not? Whose bodies are chosen to perform *white* characters and whose bodies remained unchosen? Whose bodies are chosen to perform characters of Color and whose are not?

In my lecture I will speak about the myth of the "Femme Fatale of Color" in opera of which the most popular characters are Alcina, Armida, Cleopatra, Carmen, Salome and Dalila. As example I will use *Salome* by Richard Strauß (1905) in the very popular production by Götz Friedrich (1974).

Dr. Azadeh Sharifi

Black Artists in German Theatre

The debate on using blackface as a common theatrical practice on German stages uncovered the fundamental still existing structural discrimination of non-white and foremost black artists in German theatre in the 21st Century. Racism and retaining power could clearly be

read between the lines of articles by (white) journalists and on public comments by (white) representatives of the venues, who are mostly white. One fourth of the German population has a so-called "migration background". On national level Cultural diversity is still seen as a problem which needs to be overcome by the magic word "integration". Integration in the cultural sector is mostly seen as the western-European *Kanon*. From this point of view it is obvious why German Theaters are almost represented by white artists, white staff and white audience. While Cultural Diversity – or in German Terms "Migration issues" – are mostly presented on stage through "social project". Young adults and amateurs with so called "migration background" showing "their authentic story" even if these Performers are black Germans without any experience in immigration in their close family. However black artists are neither present nor represented. On international level the UNESCO convention aims to protect and promote of the Cultural Diversity Expressions. Ballhaus Naunynstraße is the first German institutionalized "diverse" Theatre and "Label noir" the first collaboration of Afro-German artists. Both are focusing on making black artists visible as actors, playwrights, producers and directors for the German Theatre Scene.

In my lecture I will give a brief introduction on representation of black artists in German Theatre. I will focus on artists, staff (board) and audience. And I will look closer into the dynamics of who is represented on stage, whose perspective is shown on stage and for whom the arts is made for? My thesis is that Theatre is a place of Democracy where the question of "Quality vs E_quality" should not be raised but rather be redundant.

Julia Lemmler

"Ich bin kein Nazi!" The Blackface Debate in the German Mainstream Media

One of the most revealing aspects of the recent blackface debate is the "cooperation" between the media and the theatre business respectively the cultural producers. Strategies of denying and euphemizing have been used in the same time by white (artistic) directors, actors and dramaturges and white journalists. The similarity of argumentation and vocabulary can be analysed to show how a mainstream media discourse is created and how it reproduces colonial topoi. While doing so, it illustrates historical continuities of racism while speaking about the "anti-racist" objectives of either theatre plays or articles. This discourse maintains white supremacy and white power of definition as it claims the limited white perspective as "the" human perspective itself. Although this cooperation happened and happens seemingly unintentional it is an important strategy for white protagonists to stay in denial, to justify own privileges and "to keep white rooms white" (Ursula Wachendorfer).