THE ETHNOGRAPHIC POLITICS AND POETICS OF PHOTOGRAPHY, SKIN AND RACE IN THE WORKS OF YOKO TAWADA

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a literary studies analysis of select German-language prose, poetry and essays by the contemporary Japanese author Yoko Tawada. In this study I utilize and expand upon Tawada’s own concept of ‘fictive ethnology’ as a highly critical and self-reflexive literary approach that can be located throughout her texts. I argue that this fictive ethnological or counter-ethnographic literary technique is what directs the political charge behind Tawada’s poetics. My focus then is on how Tawada’s texts as cultural critiques undermine binary distinctions of ‘otherness’, destabilize the position and authority of the author/narrator representing the other, and reveal the ideology and power structures behind representing, constructing and classifying difference. Unlike the descriptive and textual model of ‘writing culture’ that engraves and freezes culture into words, Tawada’s fictive ethnological texts stress the fluid and performative dimension of culture and identity. Therefore, I also demonstrate how these texts are much more about inventing, rather than finding, the self, and about denaturalizing taken-for-granted assumptions about cultural, ethnic and racial differences that are anchored in essentialist, biological and binary logics, than they are an indictment of ethnography or ethnology as research disciplines.

The core chapters of this study braid together representations of photography, skin and race and their variegated deployments in Tawada’s texts, and then explicate their ideological underpinnings. Photography, skin and race, as textual and visual representations, metaphors and themes, are fundamental to how Tawada’s protagonists are commodified and racialized as ethnographic objects; how they self-identify and are read by others according to restrictive cultural literacies; and how they are classified and made meaningful according to their bodies, especially when these bodies are seen as racially and ethnically marked. Yet, Tawada’s texts do not simply represent bodies and identities as they already are, but rather the processes, rituals,
discourses and social practices that make them intelligible as raced, gendered, or ethnically marked beings. Each chapter therefore highlights, in connection to theories of gender and racial performativity, how Tawada’s texts convey the quotidian, repetitive and ritualistic performance of gendered, racial and ethnic identities, but also how these identities are transgressively (mis)performed against the script.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 GOAL AND METHOD

The following is a study of the self-reflexive, deconstructive and defamiliarizing literary techniques employed in select German language texts by the Japanese-born contemporary author Yoko Tawada, and how these techniques reveal the ideological investments and relations of power underpinning constructions of the self and representations of the ‘other’ in Tawada’s writing. In order to accomplish this I am focusing on Tawada’s numerous and multifarious textual depictions and problematizations of photography, skin and race, how these three literary tropes are approached from a kind of ‘fictive ethnological’ narratorial perspective, and how they intersect and affect one another in Tawada’s texts. I also analyze how, through their codification as natural, self-evident and common sense reflections of reality, Tawada interrogates the role photography, skin and race serve in the constitution, perception, classification and crystallization of identities in a western context.

The de-mythifying and de-essentializing post-structural cultural criticism in select writings by Roland Barthes is significant in Tawada’s texts and so too will it be in my analyses, as already in the opening lines of Barthes’s Empire of Signs do we witness core thematic and theoretical impulses informing and directing Yoko Tawada’s literary technique. The lines read:

If I want to imagine a fictive nation, I can give it an invented name, treat it declaratively as a novelistic object, create a new Garabagne, so as to compromise no real country by my fantasy (though it is then that fantasy itself I compromise by the signs of literature). I can also – though in no way claiming to represent or to analyze reality itself (these being the major gestures of Western discourse) – isolate somewhere in the world (faraway) a certain number of features (a term
employed in linguistics), and out of these features deliberately form a system. It is this system which I shall call: Japan.

Hence Orient and Occident cannot be taken here as “realities” to be compared and contrasted historically, philosophically, culturally, politically. I am not lovingly gazing toward an Oriental essence – to me the Orient is a matter of indifference, merely providing a reserve of features whose manipulation – whose invented interplay – allows me to “entertain” the idea of an unheard-of symbolic system, one altogether detached from our own.¹ (Empire of Signs 3)

Evidence of Roland Barthes’s influence in Yoko Tawada’s writing can be found throughout her oeuvre in explicit and implicit examples of form, content, themes and messages. From his work on the rhetoric of the image and reading the photographic paradox, to revealing and debunking the mythologies and ideologies underlying representational and signifying practices, to his de-essentializing semiotic readings of ‘Japan’ as a fictive nation and host of an empty, non-referential ‘empire of signs’, Tawada’s texts frequently incorporate, reflect on, interrogate and critique Barthes’s highly provocative, and sometimes problematic, cultural and semiotic theories.

The following literary analyses will highlight some of the various Barthes sources and theory with which Tawada’s texts are in dialogue, yet, as scholars like Sabine Fischer, Andrea Krauß, Christina Kraenzle and Claudia Breger have all indicated,² it is Barthes’s Empire of Signs in

¹ The fictional land Garabagne, to which Barthes refers in this quotation, and to which I will refer later in chapter four with respect to Tawada’s writing on South Africa, is in reference to the title of the Belgian author Henri Michaux’s Voyage en Grande Garabagne (1936). For Michaux, Garabagne was a fantasy space for an imaginary travel narrative, and while Barthes actually did travel to Japan, his narrative is likewise fictitious – it is self-reflexive writing and self-consciously inventive rather than an empirical study and interpretation of Japanese culture and Japanese essence. Barthes makes no claims to revealing cultural ‘truths’ and differences of Japan, though he does fall into fairly simplistic, Eurocentric binaries when comparing European and Japanese bodies, and especially eyes and faces. In particular see Empire of Signs 101-02 for Barthes exposition on the eyelid.

² The list of Tawada scholars connecting Barthes’s Empire of Signs to Tawada’s work is long, and the names provided above represent the most detailed investigations with respect to the notion of a ‘fictive ethnology’ that will feature prominently later. For insight into the connection between Empire of Signs and Tawada, see Fischer’s “Durch die japanische Brille gesehen” 63-65; Andrea Krauß’s “Tavadische Sprachtheorie” 64-67; Christina Kraenzle’s “Limits of Travel” 246-48; and Claudia Breger’s “Mimikry als Grenzverwirrung” 63. Also, Ruth Kersting’s Fremdes Schreiben 9-12 and 74-91, Hiltrud Arens’s “Das kurze Leuchten unter dem Tor” 66, Linda
particular that proves most consequential in influencing Tawada’s literary approach and perspective as a ‘fiktive Ethnologie’ and ‘ethnologische Poetologie’, and the understanding of the ‘Orient’ and ‘Occident’ as discursive constructs (textually and visually produced), and not homogenously frozen cultural or ethnic monoliths. The two terms ‘fiktive Ethnologie’ and ‘ethnologische Poetologie’ will serve as methodological ballasts in several of the textual analyses to follow, informing my approach to Tawada’s texts as critical ethno-graphies (in the sense of critiques on writing culture and knowledge production of ethnicity, not critiques of ethnicities themselves), or “semiotic ethnocriticisms,” to quote Thomas Wägenbaur, and function as analytical links between the three core chapters.

It is the distinctly ‘fictive’ component to this analytically ethnological and experientially ethnographic writing that is key to Tawada’s critical poetics and politics, where “the observing narrator is as much a fiction as the constructed other” (Kraenzle, “Limits of Travel” 248), and which also interconnects Tawada’s literary approach to Barthes’s invention of a ‘fictive nation’. This pervasive fictitiousness is prevalent in her prose, poetic and essayistic texts, and not just in the sense that these are fictional narratives and not autoethnographies or biographical travelogues (although biographical details are often present), but rather the fictional also points to an omnipresent representational and authorial instability, a resistance to realism as a representational approach, and, perhaps most crucially, they narrate the performative qualities to

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3 I will elaborate on both terms, but ‘fiktive Ethnologie’ can be found in Tawada’s “Erzähler ohne Seelen” 24 and ‘ethnologische Poetologie’ in her dissertation Spielzeug und Sprachmagie 14.

4 In his analysis of Tawada’s “Das Fremde aus der Dose,” Wägenbaur frames his reading of Tawada’s texts as ‘semiotic ethnocriticism’. He defines this term as “Arnold Krupat has recently fused ‘ethnology’ and ‘criticism’ into ‘Ethnocriticism’. He states ‘ethnocriticism is concerned with differences rather than oppositions, and so seeks to replace oppositional with dialogical models’. In the relative space between positivism or relativism, it searches for relative truths: ‘As a critical discourse which claims to be both on and of the frontier, traversing middle ground while aspiring to a certain centrality, descriptive and normative at once, it should come as no surprise that ethnocriticism and the oxymoron have particular affinities’.” Wägenbaur recognizes a particular ethnocritical practice in Tawada’s texts, which in representing the strange do not lose their strangeness. See Wägenbaur’s “Semiotic ethnocriticism” 343 for an outline of ethnocriticism.
seemingly natural phenomena like race, gender, ethnicity and national belonging, found throughout Tawada’s texts. Yet this development of a fictive ethnology is also a key component in her literary analyses as well. For example, in her dissertation *Spielzeug und Sprachmagie in der europäischen Literatur: Eine ethnologische Poetologie*, Tawada most expansively employs ‘ethnologische Poetologie’ as an analytical category and trope for literary investigation in relation to representations of magic, masks, toys and dolls in texts by E.T.A. Hoffmann, Franz Kafka and the French surrealist ethnographer Michel Leiris. She explains this concept of ‘ethnologische Poetologie’ with:

gelten einem entsprechenden Feld des Wissens, in dem auch meine Untersuchungen zu magischen Momenten in der Literatur weniger isoliert wären.

(Spielzeug und Sprachmagie 13-14)

Still today in European universities non-European cultures are being researched; this means that a culture’s literature, diet, religions and management strategies are dealt with as a singular subject. The creation of subjects like ‘African Studies’, ‘India Studies’, and ‘Chinese Studies’ cannot be separated from the history of colonialism and the ‘ethnological gaze’ it helped construct. Nevertheless, reversing the gaze or turning around this ethnological model onto European literature promises enriching results. Yet there is still a resistance to ethnologically observe the culture, science and technology of the ‘West’. There is also the new subject ‘European Ethnology’, but this deals more with everyday culture and largely ignores modern literature. My concept of ‘ethnological poetology’ cannot be categorized under any one subject field, but rather articulates a desire and a necessity. It corresponds to a field of knowledge that would make my investigations into the magical moments in literature less isolated.°

Representations of masks, dolls, magic and toys in literary texts of the nineteenth and twentieth century by German and French authors are the focus of this book-length study, where for Tawada the ethnological perspective is crucial since “[d]ie Ethnologie ist die Wissenschaft, die die längste Tradition in der Diskussion des Themas Magie hat, insofern gilt es, deren

° In order to make this dissertation accessible to a non-German speaking audience, I will provide English translations of all German quotes appearing in the body of the text. All translations are mine unless an official translation exists, in which case I also provide the source and page number. When the page numbers of the sources are provided, the German source always precedes the English. The German quotations appearing in the footnotes have been left untranslated since they are primarily directed at a German Studies audience.
Erkenntnisse und Betrachtungsweisen auf die Literatur zu übertragen‖ (“Ethnology is the science in which discussions on the theme of magic have the longest tradition. It is thus valid to transfer these findings and reflections to literature”; 14). While Tawada situates her readings of Hoffmann, Kafka and Leiris in a kind of literary ethnomethodological framework, she also incorporates the ethnological and ethnographic perspective into her prose, poetic and essayistic texts. This perspective, however, is not meant in the sense of articulating a ‘foreign’ perspective on German or European culture as a kind of reverse Orientalism, but rather as an interrogation of the very terms and processes involved in constructing a self and an other; as a critical engagement with representations of authenticity and the exotic; and, as a result, means forcing readers to (self-)reflect on the unstable grounding of home and identity.

While both Tawada and Barthes eschew hierarchical and ethnocentric representations of the ‘primitive’ or concepts of ‘otherness’ moored in essentialism, oppositions and incommensurability, there are fundamental distinguishing features between them that are worth mentioning. Among the crucial differences separating the two authors’ projects are, first of all, the fact that while Barthes was entirely ignorant of the language and sign system of the country he was visiting in *Empire of Signs*, Tawada is fluent in both the linguistic and cultural languages of her second home in Germany. Secondly, as Christina Kraenzle outlines, there is a difference in the context and expectations of the intended audience for their respective works. She notes:

6 Ethnography, as the in-depth study of a particular ethnic or cultural group usually based on fieldwork, and ethnology as the comparative study of groups utilizing ethnographic data, are closely related but not identical fields or research methodologies in anthropology. Tawada distinguishes between the ‘Ethnographen’ and the ‘Ethnologen’ with “[d]ie ‘Ethnographie wurde lange als Stiefkind der Ethnologie und als Synonym für empirisches Arbeiten im Feld auf die Funktion eines Datenlieferanten reduziert, aber heute wird sie als ursprünglicher Akt der Inskription, in dem die Anderen distanziert und objektiviert werden, als primärer Prozeß der Produktion des Bildes der Anderen thematisiert‖ (*Spielzeug und Sprachmagie* 135).

7 Tawada explicitly addresses the possible mis-reading of her texts as a kind of reverse Orientalism, countering with: “Man könnte Europa nicht nur als eine Figur, sondern auch als eine Summe von Bildern verstehen. Ich könnte einige schöne Postkarten aus meiner Sammlung herausnehmen und daraus eine imaginäre Welt bilden. Ich werde das aber hier nicht tun, weil die Gefahr besteht, daß das Ergebnis eine bloße Umkehrung des Orientalismus wäre” („Eigentlich darf man” 50).
Contrary to the travel writer, Tawada is not concerned about rendering the exotic in terms of the intelligible. For many readers, the territory to be explored will be very much home turf, so that the reterming that occurs is not from the foreign to the familiar. Instead, for many, the flipside will occur: the natural, the familiar may become strange. If Barthes undertakes his project at the risk of exoticising the foreign, Tawada deliberately employs exoticising gestures in her exploration of European spaces and social practices. Consequently, by directing the narratives to a German-speaking audience, the authenticity of these reports can be interrogated. ("Limits of Travel" 248)

Neither Barthes’s text nor Tawada’s novels and essays are meant as tourist travelogues that make the ‘foreign’ seem less daunting or more inviting and familiar. Moreover, challenging the very notion of representing authenticity from the perspective of a value-free and objective observer undercuts the more orthodox understanding of ethnography as a ‘scientific’ research methodology, where human subjects become specimens for data collection and cultural description.

No one reads nor writes from a neutral position, however, and since James and Marcus’s *Writing Culture*, with its constant emphasis on the self-critical impulse of ethnographic writing, and its ultimate conclusion that all ethnographic texts are fictions or allegories (as James’s “On Ethnographic Allegory” suggests), it has been clear that ethnographic analysis is as much about the ethnographer’s subjectivity, self-creation and finding otherness in the self, as it is about objective description, data collection and knowledge production, thus making the ‘fictive’ in Tawada’s ‘fictive ethnology’ almost redundant. James T. West outlines this turn in the ethnographic approach with “[e]thnographers do more than just observe the lives of Others. They

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8 In his introduction to the collection Clifford James states “ethnographic work has indeed been enmeshed in a world of enduring and changing power inequalities, and it continues to be implicated. It enacts power relations. But its function within these relations is complex, often ambivalent, potentially counter-hegemonic” (*Writing Culture* 9).
participate in a series of multivocal reflexive interactions that are saturated with power relations and struggles over the meaning of cultural identity” (“Ethnography and Ideology” 209). Tawada’s fictive ethnological and critical ethnographic literary approach does not aim to articulate the defining and unique cultural characteristics of Germans or Europeans from an outsider’s perspective, but rather is heavily directed by, and grounded in, this fictive narratorial position that stresses a turn away from cultural description and towards cultural interrogation.

Unlike the descriptive and textual model of ‘writing culture’ that engraves and freezes culture into words, Tawada’s texts stress the fluid and performative dimension of culture and identity. Her texts are much more about inventing, rather than finding, the self, and about denaturalizing taken-for-granted assumptions about cultural, ethnic and racial differences that are anchored in essentialist, biological and binary logics, than they are an indictment of ethnography or ethnology as research disciplines. Ethnology and ethnography serve only as intellectual and disciplinary contexts for Tawada’s counter-perspective, for, as Clifford James’s The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature and Art demonstrates, ethnographic writing is by no means a homogenous, self-assured or delusionally objective discursive field.

Tawada frames her narratives as fictively ethnographic as a reaction against the idea of presenting insights into cultural differences or truths from some kind of reliable ‘Japanese’ viewpoint, and instead stresses a destabilization of the authority and coherency of both the represented ‘self’ and the author/ethnographic observer in her texts. She is underlining both the complexity and difficulty of objectively or authentically representing the cultural, racial and ethnic ‘other’, while simultaneously exposing the insufficiency of binary categories of belonging.

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9 Tawada stresses that there is no authentically ‘Japanese’ perspective of point of view in “Eigentlich darf man es niemandem sagen” when the text’s narrator indicates that, in order to see Europe, she must put on her ‘Japanese’ glasses. The passage reads: “Ich muß mir, um Europa sehen zu können, eine japanische Brille aufsetzen. Da es so etwas wie eine ‘japanische Sicht’ nicht gab und gibt – und für mich ist das keine bedauerliche Tatsache - , ist diese Brille zwangsläufig fiktiv und muß ständig neu hergestellt werden. Meine japanische Sicht ist insofern keinesfalls authentisch, trotz des Faktums, daß ich in Japan geboren und aufgewachsen bin” 50.
and exclusion – as us/Them, black/white, male/female, foreign/familiar. Through the deployment of masks, mirrors, make-up, rituals and public spaces Tawada recasts ethnographic writing to highlight the theatrical processes involved in constructing, inventing and performing identity - be it gender, racial, ethnic, national or linguistic.

Tawada’s literary approach then, with respect to many of her prose, essayistic and literary-analysis texts which feature narrators and protagonists who travel to other countries, engage with and reflect upon foreign cultures, people, customs and rituals, can be read from the perspective of a ‘fiktive Ethnologie’ or counter-ethnography. To summarize, this literary perspective serves to 1) undermine binary distinctions of ‘otherness’ as us vs. them, east vs. west, black vs. white or man vs. woman; 2) destabilize the position and authority of the author and/or narrator representing the other; and 3) reveal the ideology and power structures behind representing, constructing and classifying difference, but especially difference based on visual representation and visually-based knowledge. Fictive ethnology is more analogous to Norman Denzin’s approach in Performance Ethnography, with its emphasis on a performance based approach to culture and the performative dimension of enacting identities that are in a constant process of development, than it is an attempt to ‘write culture’ from a counter-European authorial perspective. This overarching poetological praxis can be found in various forms throughout Tawada’s writing in texts like Das Bad, Talisman, Verwandlungen and Überseezungen, and therefore these texts will form the core of my analyses. For example, this technique is explicitly articulated in reflections relating to the Hamburg Völkerkundemuseum in the short story “Erzähler ohne Seelen,” where the ethnographic exhibition space is figured as a theatrical stage upon which not only the conquered peoples of non-European nations are put on display like de-contextualized spoils of battle, but so too are the colonial power politics underpinning ethnographic representational practices subtly exposed. Echoes of Barthes’s
Empire of Signs and indications of Tawada’s overall literary approach can be found in section five of this short story from her essayistic collection Talisman, especially in the lines:


Das ist der Versuch der fiktiven Ethnologie, in der nicht das Beschriebene, sondern der Beschreibende fiktiv ist. (24; my emphasis)

As long as an outsider appears threatening, the others try to destroy him. When he is dead, he can be lovingly represented as a doll in a museum. One can look at the doll, listen to the explanations of its way of life, view the photos of its homeland, but there is always something that remains unclear. There is a veil separating the museum visitor from the dead doll, making it impossible to learn much. One learns much more when one attempts to describe an imaginary tribe. What should their lives look like? How does their language function? What is this completely unfamiliar social system like? It is equally interesting to play the role of an

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10 Elsewhere in Tawada’s dissertation, she notes how, for Michel Leiris in his ethnographic diary Phantom Africa, the removal of objects for ethnographic exhibition is part and parcel of the colonial process. Tawada states “[Leiris] vergleicht seine Position als europäischer Ethnograph mit der eines Diebes und Polizisten zugleich, denn er muß nicht nur bestimmte Gegenstände stehlen, sondern auch die Einheimischen entsprechend genau, streng und emotional unbeteiligt befragen, um die Bedeutung der Gegenstände herauszufinden” 121. The primary function of Leiris’s government funded mission (though he was secretary and archivist) was to collect objects for French museums. The group collected more than 3,500 works of art and artifacts that now reside in the Musée de l’Homme.
observer who comes from a fictional culture. How would he describe “our” world? This is the endeavor of fictive ethnology, in which not the described but the describer is imaginary. (“Storytellers Without Souls” 110; my emphasis)

Themes of representational theatre, power and closure, and the masculine, colonial/ethnographic gaze present in this quotation, feature prominently throughout the literary analyses of Tawada’s texts that will follow. This prospect of developing a ‘fiktive Ethnologie’ in which it is not the object of representation, but rather the subject doing the representing who is complicated and undermined, has proven a rich source of investigation for Tawada scholars. In relation to the above quotation, Sabine Fischer, for instance, suggests:

Tawadas Kritik richtet sich gegen eine Völkerkunde, die den Anspruch erhebt, das Fremde wirklichkeitsgetreu nachbilden zu können, ohne über die Voreingenommenheit ihrer Wahrnehmungen und die Intentionalität ihrer Darstellungen zu reflektieren. Sie wendet sich gegen eine Sprache, die ein dichotomisches Denken begünstigt, den Blick auf das Andere determiniert und so das Fortleben traditioneller Theorien über kulturelle Differenz ermöglicht. Die Autorin distanziert sich von jeglichem Versuch, eine konkrete Kultur verstehen und beschreiben zu wollen. Sie propagiert dagegen eine Ethnologie, die den fiktionalen Charakter ihrer Repräsentationen des Fremden kenntlich macht und die Mechanismen des Fremdverstehens offen legt. (“Durch die japanische Brille gesehen” 64)

Tawada’s critique is directed at the kind of anthropology that claims to be able to reproduce the ‘foreign’ as it was in reality without reflecting on the prejudices of these perceptions and the intentions behind the representations. She is working against a language that promotes binary thinking, against the deterministic gaze
focused on the ‘other’, and thus also against the continuation of traditional theories on cultural differences. The author distances herself from any attempt to comprehend or describe a concrete culture. In Tawada’s ethnology the fictional character of her representations of the foreign is made explicit, and the mechanisms behind understanding the foreign are exposed.

As Fischer’s quote indicates, the ethnological component to Tawada’s texts is unstable, self-reflexive and more integrated into a technique of inquiry and interrogation of identity politics and representational practices than it is an attempt at penetrating, understanding and engaging Otherness.

Elsewhere in Tawada scholarship we can find cogent and fecund descriptions of Tawada’s ‘fiktive Ethnologie’ and its relation to Barthes. Claudia Breger, in her article “Mimikry als Grenzverwirrung” (“Mimicry as Border Confusion”) addresses the above passage from “Erzähler ohne Seelen” and also its relation to Empire of Signs:

Tawada pointiert: “Japan existiert nicht in Europa, aber außerhalb Europas findet man Japan auch nicht.” (199)

Tawada’s plaidoyer for a suspension of appeals to reality is in reference to debates surrounding the constructed character of ethnography, which in recent years has been transmitted through literary studies’ and anthropological perspectives. Fiction – meaning that which has been literarily constructed – reflects the theatricality of cultural identity. Kaja Silverman names this performative exhibition as one of the conditions of a mimetic subversion by exposing the ruling norms as such. ‘What should their lives look like?’ This passage from “Erzähler ohne Seelen” is likely a play on Roland Barthes’ *Empire of Signs*, which begins with the author’s recognition the fictional character of this system he calls ‘Japan’. Elsewhere Tawada acutely points out: “Japan doesn’t exist in Europe, but nor can it be found outside Europe.”

Likewise, in her “Limits of Travel,” Christina Kraenzle also emphasizes Tawada’s literary technique as a disavowal of representing cultural essences and as a complication of simplistic and normalized binary distinctions between self and other:

Like Barthes’s *Empire of Signs*, *Talisman* makes no claims to truth, nor does it attempt to render information about cultural essences. Barthes outlines the aims of his project as the creation of a ‘fictive nation’ which should not be understood as the quest for some other cultural reality … Tawada embarks on a similar project, and repeatedly stresses the fictive nature of cultural essences. In interviews, Tawada has maintained ‘daß sie ‘kulturelle Differenzen’ nur konstruiere, denn: ‘die zwei Kulturen gibt es nicht’. Often written in mock ethnographic tone, the *Talisman* essays turn against the mode of travel writing which adopts a seemingly
objective stance and professes to achieve insight and truth. Instead, her collection underscores the inevitable failure of such endeavours … If Barthes undertakes his project at the risk of exoticising the foreign, Tawada deliberately employs exoticising gestures in her exploration of European spaces and social practices. Consequently, by directing the narratives to a German-speaking audience, the authenticity of these reports can be interrogated. (247-48)

And finally with respect to secondary scholarship and Tawada’s concept of a ‘fiktive Ethnologie’, Andrea Krauß’s “Tawadische Sprachtheorie” (“Tawada’s Theory of Language”) stresses Tawada’s deconstructive perspective afforded by this fictive authorial/narratorial position, and how it is derived, but also differs, from Barthes:

Von dieser fiktiven Position aus, die ganz im Sinne Barthes’ ‘japanisch’ genannt werden kann, betrachtet Tawadas Ich-Erzählerin die sie umgebende Welt. Anders als im Reich der Zeichen mobilisieren die ‘fremden’ Gegenstände der Wahrnehmung nicht vorgefaßte theoretische Leitdifferenzen, sondern bewahren zunächst – naiv zugerichtet – ihre Bedutungslosigkeit, sie müssen deshalb gelesen, das heißt interpretiert werden … In Szene gesetzt wird folglich kein dekonstruktives Wissen (Barthes), sondern eher eine dekonstruktive Wahrnehmung, die durchspielt, was im Deutungsprozeß geschehen kann, sobald die Kontexte des Wissens und damit sinnfällige Bedeutungen fehlen.11 (66-67)

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From this fictive position, which is very much meant in the sense of Barthes’ ‘Japan’, Tawada’s first person narrators observe their surrounding world. Unlike in Empire of Signs, these ‘foreign’ objects of perception do not mobilize preconceived theoretical differences, but rather first and foremost maintain their meaninglessness. They must therefore be read and interpreted … Instead of a deconstructive knowledge (see Barthes), a deconstructive perception is established, which shows what can happen in the interpretative process as soon as the context of knowledge and sensible meanings are absent.

This deconstructive perspective implied by the fictive ethnological approach can be linked with the intercultural concept of the ‘ethnological imagination’, which analogously combines the ethnological (“sociological research that compares and contrasts aspects of Western modernity to their corresponding realities in different cultural settings” [Kurasawa 14]), and the imaginative (“the mythical character of the various constructs of cultural otherness [e.g. ‘primitiveness’ and the ‘Orient’]” [14]). The fictive, imaginative, or mythical component to this ethnological representation demands a heightened awareness from readers, who must not mistake these texts as insights into the essence of cultural difference. Tawada’s texts focus on the quotidian, common-place and ritualistic performances of every day life because it is the familiar, natural and codified characteristics of culture and identity that her counter-ethnography is confronting through fictional narratives, and which demand interrogation and reconsideration.

Within the framework of this fictive ethnological and counter-ethnographic perspective, my literary study takes as its point of analysis the complex and problematic concept and conceptualization of subject identities, be they gendered, racial, ethnic, national, sexual, classed, as they are represented and theorized, constructed and subverted, in select German language texts by Yoko Tawada. These overdetermined configurations of identity are viewed in relation to
the individual who is simultaneously a self- and a socially-constructed being; one who is the author of, and responsible for, his or her actions and development, but also one who is subjected to frequently unknowable or invisible forces and structures operating from beneath in terms of everyday social relations, discursive formations, and media technologies, rather than imposed from above. Over the course of this study I will attempt to disambiguate the highly complex conceptions of subjectivity, identity and identity construction, and the diverse and divergent discursive, cultural and historical processes that produce them. Subjectivity, as I interpret it, will neither be expounded as “a form of self-incarceration,” as Eagleton cynically sums up “the political bleakness” of Althusser’s notion of subject interpellation (Ideology 145-46), nor will it be figured as co-terminous or inherently imbued with resistance and ‘agency’, as if awareness of the ideological implications of social and discursive structures can simply be disavowed by conscious counter-action. The subject, as it is constituted from a kind of fictive ethnographic narratorial perspective, exists at the nexus of control and the illusion of control, and in its imbrications of overlapping identities is represented as a fragmented, incohesive and heterogeneous subject in a constant process of becoming.

Nearly every one of the Tawada texts I examine in this study features a female protagonist-subject depicted in a variety of complex processes of identity construction, and it is this individual subject that Tawada is using as a sort of canvas for more broadly illustrating the multiple forces and factors that constitute the individual and social being. The opening lines of Das Bad, for example, portray a nameless, Japanese female protagonist who is first articulated as a body comprised of eighty percent water, and whose skin is like a swamp that is subject to both manipulation from outside influences and also by factors from beneath the surface. Immediately thereafter she is described in a repetitive (repetition is key to the construction of identity) daily process of self-surveillance and stylization, as she attempts to match her mirrored reflection with
a portrait photograph hanging next to it as a symbolic gesture of identification and appropriation of regulatory gender and racial norms externally enforced upon her.

In fact, these first two paragraphs of the first Tawada text I ever read some seven and half years ago now were the motivation for writing a dissertation on the function of photography, skin and race in this, and several other, Tawada texts. The photograph in these opening lines is crucial in the formation of the subject: it is a point of identification; it presents the illusion of realistic representation that she seeks to embody; it is a highly mediated ideal composed by her photographer boyfriend for a tourism brochure; it seeks to capture her ‘essence’, fix her image and proscribe change; and it is an entry point for a literary and cultural studies examination into the role that the visual and textual photographs and photographic practice play in Das Bad. Through these photographs this text is highlighting and critiquing the multiple investments of power in representation, and the act of representing a subject as a repeatable object for mass consumption, or as visual evidence supporting the creation of ‘knowledge’ of others, as indelibly other. My methodological approach, informed by Barthes, Baudrillard, Benjamin, Burgin, Sekula and Sontag to name a few, then considers photography in this text from both the perspective of how a photograph serves in the constitution, classification and commodification of the protagonist, but also how the perceived ‘realism’ of photographic representation as visual testimony is undercut, and how repeatability in photographic reproduction is symbolic of the loss of originality and essence in comprehending the subject’s identity.

The image of a mutable, fluid skin that is constantly manipulated and redefined by external influences, such as expectations and discursive practices, is suggestive of a skin beyond the subject’s control, while sub-cutaneous factors like the unconscious and self-consciousness indicate that it is also a border that psychosomatically registers and remembers. This, however, is just one of the numerous deployments and metaphorical functions assumed by skin in this text
and, as I illustrate in the course of this project, throughout Tawada’s entire body of writing. There is also the marked, scaly skin that the protagonist attempts to remove in a kind of recurring flaying ritual done to minimize her social marginalization; there is her punctured skin that oozes a rancid white substance and which she attempts to keep ‘clean and proper’, or ‘normal’, through bathing; there is the burned skin of the mysterious dead woman; and there is the debated skin that either is naturally or genetically coloured, or that has colour projected upon it. Skin is utilized with both poetic and political intentions in the Tawada texts I address, insofar as not every representation of skin is ideologically loaded, but instead there are several figural functions that it can serve: as border, container, landscape, communicative surface, or interface, though many of these are also politically connoted. Following in the footsteps of texts like Ahmed and Stacey’s *Thinking Through the Skin*, which as its point of departure poses the question “of how skin becomes, rather than simply is, meaningful” as a boundary-object that is “lived, read, written, narrated, seen, touched, managed, worked, cut, remembered, produced and known” (1-2), my methodological approach likewise considers skin from diverse, sometimes discordant, angles, which recognize skin as a discursive construct and material object. The representations of skin in Tawada’s texts must be approached from various literary, cultural, semiotic, critical race, gender and historical theoretical perspectives because only then can it be seen for what it is: discursively constructed and a material sheath; encoded and decoded, read and interpreted; contingent on place, culture, time and class; a protective integument but also one that is extremely vulnerable; and, in a comparable sense to photographs and photography, skin is crucial to the process of identity construction for the protagonists in Tawada’s texts.

Similar to the photograph that paradoxically presents both denotatively and connotatively coded messages to its viewer, skin is also a kind of paradox in the sense that, as Cohen and Weiss describe in *Thinking the Limits of the Body*, “it is as problematic when it is marked (e.g.,
by its race, sex, class, ethnicity, age, abilities, etc.) as when it is un(re)marked and viewed as natural or universal” (1). This alludes to one of the primary goals of this dissertation: by focusing on skin as the subject (of this study and Tawada’s texts, but also as metonymically standing for the subject herself), I attempt to make skin visible in its complex and variegated representations in the works of Yoko Tawada, and detail its many markings, the ideological implications of these markings, the power forces behind concealing skin, but also the power of transgressing the repressively differentiating effect of assigning some skins as marked, and others as not. This tension between the skin as too visible, where the skin stands metonymically for the whole of the subject’s identity, and invisible, in the sense that it is so close to us that it seems solely part of nature or biology and thus beyond dispute, is a tension that vibrates throughout Tawada’s texts, and to which she points in a 2005 interview with Bettina Brandt published as “Ein Wort, Ein Ort, or how Words Create Places.” Tawada states:

The skin is, of course, something that is very close to us. But at the same time, we human beings cannot take our skin off; that would, first of all, hurt a lot and, even worse, without a skin, we would finally just die. Think about it: we cannot even hold our skin in our hands and look at it, contemplate it. No, our skin is very close to us and because of that, it is also often invisible to us. (“Ein Wort, ein Ort” 4; my emphasis)

In the Konkursbuch Verlag Claudia Gehrke collection titled Haut from 2003,12 Tawada’s short poem “Eine Hautnahme” is featured on a page resembling human skin, and unsurprisingly represents the metaphorical and material skin as its central theme. At times the focus on skin in Tawada’s texts is explicit, as in Das Bad or “Eine Hautnahme,” but in other texts it is more subtly embedded in metaphors and historically contingent contexts that need to be explicated.

12 Nearly all of Tawada’s numerous German language texts, whether prose, poetry, essay collections or even her dissertation, have been published by Konkursbuch Verlag Claudia Gehrke.
through critical race, gender, semiotic, or cultural theories in order to comprehend its significance. These texts serve to expose the processes of naturalization that have buried skin, and its implications in race, in the ideological optics of invisibility, and thus as a taken-for-granted given in reality. ‘Naturalization’ is meant here in the sense of Stuart Hall’s definition, whereby it is “a representational strategy designed to fix difference and thus secure it forever. It is an attempt to halt the inevitable slide of meaning, to secure discursive or ideological closure” (*Representation* 245). Naturalization plays a number of roles in Tawada’s work, from the photographic images to constructions and acceptance of race and racial differentiation, but in each case the ease and immediacy of visual perception is a contributing factor, albeit only one of many. The highly unstable and interrogatory counter-ethnographic perspective of Tawada’s texts work to reveal the often overlooked, naturalized power politics involved in photography, skin and race and their enormous influence in classifying bodies and shaping identity, by repeatedly articulating these concepts as literary tropes, metaphors and literal representations throughout her writing.

### 1.2 SECONDARY SCHOLARSHIP ON TAWADA

When researching and writing a project of this length on an author like Yoko Tawada who is still writing prolifically in two languages, there are two significant difficulties which arise and that should be addressed before continuing any further. The first, and by no means insurmountable, challenge lies in keeping apprised of the volumes of secondary scholarship examining Tawada’s texts that are constantly appearing in book collections, special issues, regular print and online journals, and dissertation formats. In July 2011, for example, issue 191/192 of *Text + Kritik* featured sixteen articles on Tawada’s texts and two short fictional pieces by Tawada herself (“Vierundzwanzig” and “Der Handwerker”), plus a comprehensive,
although not complete, bibliography of primary Tawada texts in German, Japanese, French and English, and secondary research on Tawada in mostly German. In 2010 volume sixty-five issue three of Études Germaniques was a special issue on Tawada titled “L’oreiller occidental-oriental de Yoko Tawada,” which is comprised of one poetological essay piece by Tawada called “Europa und Mehrsprachigkeit,” and then eighteen articles in German and French that address a range of Tawada’s works with a focus predominantly, although not exclusively, on translation and language issues. Christine Ivanovic’s 2010 edited volume Yoko Tawada: Poetik der Transformation. Beiträge zum Gesamtwerk is to date the most extensive collection of secondary research on Tawada, consisting of thirty English and German essays examining a variety of primary texts, including two on the fictional piece “Sancho Pansa,” which serves as the collection’s starting point. Doug Slaymaker’s 2007 edited volume Yoko Tawada: Voices from Everywhere remains the only English-exclusive book collection of secondary articles on Tawada, and as the title suggests, these eleven essays, in addition to Tawada’s own original piece “Tawada Yoko Does not Exist,” diversely investigate questions of language, identity, belonging and the body from a multiplicity of theoretical angles and cultural perspectives. Ruth Kersting’s 2006 Fremdes Schreiben – Yoko Tawada (Foreign Writing – Yoko Tawada) exists thus far as the only published monograph on Tawada and her texts. In 250 pages Kersting provides an extremely detailed and comprehensive analysis of, first, Tawada in the context of migrant literature in Germany, and then investigations into some of her lesser known poems, and extensive research into more well-known texts, such as “Wo Europa anfängt,” Verwandlungen and, especially, Das Bad. Kersting’s text is indispensable for scholars interested in Das Bad because of its contribution to outlining and examining the specific historical and cultural allusions and context upon which the text, in both its textual and visual manifestations, is based, together with a theoretically robust, Kristeva-inspired, close reading.
These published issues, collections and monograph are in addition to the numerous dissertations that have been appearing with relative frequency over the past decade. Some of the more in-depth and expansive of these analyses include Ekaterina Pirozhenko’s 2011 “Migrant Flaneuse: Women and the City in the Works of Yoko Tawada and Emine Sevgi Ozdamar;” Suzuko Mousel Knott’s 2011 “Text, Medium, Afterlife: Intertextuality and Intermediality in the Works of Yoko Tawada;” Robin Tierney’s 2010 “Japanese Literature as World Literature: Visceral Engagement in the Writings of Tawada Yoko and Shono Yoriko;” Maria Grewe’s 2009 “Estranging Poetic: On the Poetic of the Foreign in Select Works by Herta Müller and Yoko Tawada;” Marcus Mueller’s 2008 “Opposing ‘Real’ Realities: Critiques of Dominant Reality Constructions in German Intercultural Writing;” Yasemin Yildiz’s 2006 “Beyond the Mother Tongue: Configurations of Multilingualism in Twentieth-Century German Literature;” and Christina Kraenzle’s “Mobility, Space and Subjectivity: Yoko Tawada and German-Language Transnational Literature” from 2004. Even though this is by no means a totally exhaustive list of dissertations that take Tawada’s texts as either a partial or an exclusive point of analysis, it does give a sense of some of the theoretical frameworks in which these texts are being researched; frameworks that consider Tawada’s texts and poetics from trans-national, trans-lingual, and multi-cultural angles, but that also consider the various linguistic and cultural processes and power structures underpinning subjectivity construction. All this, in addition to a bounty of individual articles in English and German published in print and online journals, means that the future trajectory of Tawada studies is splitting into culturally, theoretically, linguistically and thematically diverse paths of investigation. My research, as I detail below, attempts to forge a path that highlights the political impulse subtending Tawada’s poetics by outlining, and expanding on, the counter-ethnographic narratorial technique as a literary interrogation of racial, gendered and ethnic subjectivities.
Throughout the course of this dissertation I confront, reflect on or use as support the vast majority of secondary works on Tawada’s writing that are even remotely connected to my topic, yet, as will become clear, the references I make are occasionally tangential because representations of photography, skin and race have so far remained un(der)researched in secondary analysis. I readily admit the influence, both in terms of concepts and theory but also quality, of research by Tawada scholars including but not limited to Ruth Kersting, Christine Ivanovic, Christina Kraenzle, Sabine Fischer, Andrea Krauß, Claudia Breger, Miho Matsunaga, Maria Grewe and, recently, Suzuko Mousel Knott, that have inspired and motivated me to take this course of analysis with respect to Tawada’s texts. While above I noted the significance of Kersting’s book, and in particular its insights into the cultural-historical meaning of the photographic images in Das Bad, its detailed outline of the text’s complex visual and textual structure, in addition to numerous other investigations into the symbolism and context of the fish, the doll and the coffin, in order to position and differentiate my own work within the field I will make a few detailed comments on some of the other secondary sources most germane to my study. Of course more in-depth engagements with these secondary works will arise over the course of this project, and the following is merely intended to provide a context for the reader.

One of the first, and most influential, secondary sources I confronted in Tawada studies is Sabine Fischer’s “Wie der Schlamm in einem Sumpf” (“Like the Mud of a Swamp”), and the related “Verschwinden ist schön” (“Disappearing is Wonderful”), both from 1997. “Wie der Schlamm in einem Sumpf” is a crucial source of reference for scholars interested in Das Bad, especially with respect to analyzing the protagonist’s process of identification against the mirror image, the role of the camera and photographer in constructing and capturing an exotic ‘authenticity’, but especially the productivity of metamorphosis and mutability symbolized by her fluid body. Fischer famously states “die Haut bildet keine feste Trennungslinie zwischen
Innen- und Außenwelt, sondern ist durchlässig und amorph. Der Blick in den Spiegel offenbart die Flexibilität der Ich-Identität, aber auch ihre Anfälligkeit für Fremdeinwirkungen” (“Skin does not form a fixed line of separation between the inside and outside world, but rather it is porous and amorphous. The look in the mirror reveals the flexibility of self-identity, but also its susceptibility to foreign influences”; “Wie der Schlamm” 64). This line was key to prompting my interest in the function of representations of malleable skin in Das Bad and other Tawada texts, and served as a kind of conceptual lynchpin in my 2010 article “Reading Skin Signs: Decoding Skin as the Fluid Boundary between Self and Other in Yoko Tawada.” Andrea Krauß’s article “‘Talisman’ – ‘Tawadische Sprachtheorie’” is likewise beneficial in establishing the centrality of fluidity and the skin as bodily boundary in Tawada’s texts, as she states “Wasser, das in sich formlose, bewegte Element, taucht genau dort auf, wo Grenzen nur allzu natürlich erscheinen: in Hinsicht auf den nationalen Körper und den Körper des Individuums” (“Water, itself a formless, moving element, appears exactly there where the border seems most natural: in terms of the national body and the body of the individual”; 55). Though Krauß’s article proceeds from a partly Freudian perspective with a focus on ‘Verschiebung’ or ‘displacement’ and ‘Verdichtung’ or ‘condensation’, it is from this position of complicating the all too natural bodily border as potentially, both materially and symbolically, mobile that my analysis develops throughout this paper.

Christina Kraenzle’s work on the interconnectivity between mobility, geography, language and identity has been a rich resource for comprehending whether or not the boundaries presented in Tawada’s texts, be they national, linguistic, geographic or bodily, are really as flexible as some scholars, such as myself, see them, and therefore helps to restore balance to readings that sometimes neglect the very real, material consequences of physical and conceptual borders and limits. Kraenzle is also one of the few to research Tawada’s “Bioskoop der Nacht,”
which is the focus of chapter four, in the articles “Travelling without Moving” and “The Limits of Travel,” and especially in the first of the two she highlights the problematic notion of a singular tie between language and identity, and how the presence of Afrikaans in the protagonist’s unconscious is reflective of debunking this untenable myth. Kraenzle’s “The Limits of Travel,” like Fischer’s “Durch die japanische Brille gesehen” (“Seen through Japanese Glasses”), is particularly productive in establishing the “ethnographic parody” mentioned earlier in this chapter that is so central to Tawada’s literary perspective, especially in the short texts comprising the *Talisman* collection. Kraenzle stresses that “the observing narrator is as much a fiction as the constructed other” (“Limits of Travel” 248), while Fischer expresses Tawada’s approach with “sie propagiert dagegen eine Ethnologie, die den fiktionalen Charakter ihrer Repräsentationen des Fremden kenntlich macht und die Mechanismen des Fremdverstehens offen legt” (“In Tawada’s ethnology the fictional character of her representations of the foreign is made explicit, and the mechanisms behind understanding the foreign are exposed”; “Durch die japanische Brille gesehen” 64). As noted in the opening to this chapter, there is a common theme throughout Tawada’s texts grounded in this fictive ethnological literary technique that questions the very notion of representing difference, ‘authenticity’ or a cultural ‘essence’ and the power politics involved in those representations, especially with regard to different types of photographic representation, e.g., tourism, anthropological, colonial, marketing etc., but also with respect to the construction of racial, ethnic, gender, sexual, and national identities as performatively enacted.

I am not attempting to fill a completely neglected hole in the field of Tawada studies, but rather expand and deepen through close readings and cultural studies analyses some of the areas of research previously opened by the scholars just mentioned, and also contribute new research on texts that are either thus far unexplored (“Eine Hautnahme” and “Afrikanische Zunge”), or
texts that have received relatively little critical investigation (“Bioskoop der Nacht”). Moreover, I investigate texts that have been comprehensively researched from different theoretical and historical perspectives that stress the significance of race and performativity theories in Tawada’s written narratives with the hope of generating new lines of debate on rich and provocative works like *Das Bad*, “Das Fremde aus der Dose” from the *Talisman* collection and “Bioskoop der Nacht” from *Überseezungen*. *Das Bad* holds such a dominant position in this project because contained within this short text are some of the most prominent concepts, themes and political and ethical critiques found throughout Tawada’s writing, for example: representations of photographs and photography; mirrors and processes of identification and subjectivity formation; and also skin as a ubiquitous and highly contestable material and metaphorical literary pattern appearing throughout the oeuvre. My analysis is the first to take as its salient point of investigation the representations and interconnectivity of photography, skin and race and their various functions in identity construction in Tawada’s texts, and the different literary techniques and contexts Tawada deploys to most effectively highlight, critique and deconstruct their often problematic meaning and value. In congruence with Tawada’s own self-reflexive and fictionally ethnographic literary approach, I do not assume a particularly judgmental position when analyzing her texts, especially with regard to their aesthetic and literary qualities since those are determined by subjective interpretation. Rather, I see my role as unpacking and clarifying the enormous theoretical complexity and compelling political commentary that often goes unexplored.

1.3 SELECTION OF PRIMARY TEXTS

With respect to the second major obstacle I have confronted in investigating the prolific writings of Yoko Tawada, the challenge lies in selecting the most appropriate works to best
illustrate and support the thematic and theoretical points I am trying to make from a body of writing far too expansive to address in its entirety. My selection criteria require that the texts be in a German or European cultural, linguistic, historical and spatial context since it is in these texts that representations, constructions and engagements with identity in relation to foreignness, othering, boundary construction, alienation, dislocation and marginalization are most prevalent. These key topics I investigate within the broader framework of Tawada’s ‘fictive ethnological’ or critically counter-ethnographic literary approach, and especially how they are confronted through the ubiquitous tropes and representations of photography, skin and race in Tawada’s writing. I have chosen fictional prose texts such as Das Bad, “Wo Europa anfängt,” “Das Fremde aus der Dose,” and “Bioskoop der Nacht;” poetic texts like Ein Gedicht für ein Buch, “Eine Hautnahme” and “Afrikanische Zunge;” and essayistic / poetological / reflection pieces including “Der Schriftkörper und der beschriftete Körper,” Verwandlungen, “Europa und Mehrsprachigkeit,” and “Eigentlich darf man es niemandem sagen, aber Europa gibt es nicht” as the main focal points of inquiry. However, I also incorporate many other Tawada texts to provide context, reference or complement to more detailed lines of investigation. And while “Bioskoop der Nacht” is set primarily in Cape Town, South Africa rather than a European frame of reference, the reflections on skin colour and race in this work are constructed from a very ‘western’ intellectual, historical and cultural background. In this text, against the context of apartheid Tawada explores and subverts the fixity of colour coded hierarchies of difference and the very stability of racial identity, the processes involved in retroactively establishing collective unity based on these constructed, visually verifiable categories, and how colour coded systems of differentiation have been, and still are, deployed in contemporary ‘western’ contexts.

Methodologically speaking, one course of investigation I take with respect to the role of skin colour and race in Tawada’s texts utilizes the theory of whiteness studies scholars, including
but not limited to Richard Dyer, Ruth Frankenberg and Peggy McIntosh, in order to expose the reified construction of whiteness as ideologically unmarked or invisible, which then serves to conceal the privileges inherent to it and maintain its normative, unwritten status. With the support of Critical Race Studies theory by Omi and Winant, David Goldberg, and Mirón and Inda, the latter of which are heavily reliant on the discourse and performativity theory of Derrida, Foucault and especially Butler, I consider the representation of race in Tawada’s texts from the perspective that “race is not the effect of biological truths, but a historically contingent, socially constructed category of knowledge” (Mirón and Inda 86). That does not mean, however, that these claims about race as an effect of discourse, or that skin colour should be understood as a metaphor, are implying that race is merely a meaningless and empty category that any discerning and self-aware person would recognize as an ideological myth. Mirón and Inda accept that even though race is a discursive effect, it nevertheless has very real, material implications, stating that “while ‘race’ may not be a natural category, it nevertheless plays a central role in the construction and rationalization of orders of difference, making group relations appear as if they were natural and unchangeable … [I]t gives social relations the façade of long duration, hence reducing, essentializing, and fixing difference” (99). In their representations and problematizations of ‘raced’ subjects, texts like “Bioskoop der Nacht,” *Das Bad* and its companion piece “Eigentlich darf man es niemandem sagen” intersect skin, race and the production of differential subjectivities, and work to de-naturalize and de-essentialize skin and race by detailing the terms and processes of its construction.

1.4 CHAPTER OVERVIEWS

First off, the organizational logic behind this study uses thematic and theoretical points of reference, rather than a linear progression or analysis of individual texts as self-contained,
enclosed units, as the principle justification for comparing and connecting each of the primary texts included in the chapters. For example, *Das Bad* appears in all three core chapters because it works as a productive point of analysis for all the diverse themes and theory that run throughout this study, but it also stands as a kind of nexus point linking the thematic network of Tawada’s German language texts that are often in communication with each other, and with literary and cultural traditions outside themselves as well. Since *Das Bad* is such a theoretically complex and dynamic piece of writing, especially if we consider its visual and textual representations of photographs, its central focus on skin as metaphorically and materially meaningful in relation to constructing and conceptualizing foreignness and belonging, its representation of skin as the site where physical and psychical pain are experienced and manifested, and also its interrogation of skin colour and the reification of whiteness as beyond embodiment and teeming with implications of ideology and power, it becomes more sensible to disambiguate *Das Bad* by breaking it down to its constituent tropes, themes and theory.

It is with this image of Tawada’s texts as a web of interconnectivity in mind that I proceed in this study to examine her works as in dialogue with each other – reflecting on, complementing, supporting and connecting key themes, concepts and criticisms that otherwise might go overlooked because of the general opacity, or resistance to realistic representation, that punctuates her rhetorical style. Recognizing Tawada’s texts as a network rather than discrete units helps to ‘suture the conceptual thread’, as I later describe the outcome, and aids in bringing at least a modicum of coherence to an often disorienting reader engagement. Suzuko Mousel Knott appropriately enlists terms of modern literary theory, such as ‘pastiche’, ‘intertextual’, ‘intermedial’ and ‘rhizomatic’\(^1\) to describe both Tawada’s texts and her writing process (“Yoko

\(^1\) Though too sophisticated a theory to articulate in detail here, ‘rhizomatic’ is a useful theoretical figuration with respect to my reading of Tawada’s texts. Mousel Knott outlines the concept generally as “laut vielen, unter anderen Deleuze und Guattari mit ihrer Auffassung des Rhizoms, sei die Welt als unendliche Vernetzung, die eine Vielfältigkeit der Erlebnisse und Wahrnehmungen fördert, zu verstehen. Mit keinem erkennbaren Eingangs- oder
Tawada und das ‘F-Word’” 570-71), and which also supports my approach to reading these texts as intrinsically intertwined. Mousel Knott describes Tawada’s first German-Japanese published text *Nur da wo du bist, da ist nichts* as representative of a pastiche of material layout and book form, and utilizing a Tawada quote from “Bilderrätsel ohne Bilder,” which reads “[s]o wie aus den Scherben einer Geschichte eine neue Geschichte entsteht” (“from the broken shards of one story another story is created”), develops a connection between pastiche and intertextuality that can be applied to Tawada’s texts and writing technique on the whole. Reflecting on this Tawada quote Mousel Knott states “genauso läuft es in den intertextuellen Verfahren einer literarischen Pastiche, wo sich die angesammelten Stränge verschiedener Narrativen verflechten und der Schreibprozess der Autorin ist gleichermassen als eine aus Scherben zusammengeschriebene Geste zu verstehen” (“and so too is it in the intertextual process of a literary pastiche, where the collected strands of various narratives weave together, and at the same time the author’s writing process is to be understood as a move towards reassembling broken pieces through writing”;

“Yoko Tawada und das ‘F-Word’” 571). In my reading the texts themselves enact these net and web metaphors, tropes and literal representations so prevalent in her texts, and therefore I see the concept of pastiche as applicable both to individual texts, and to the texts as a collective. But the pastiche should be conceptualized as a patchwork of both Tawada’s literary themes and concepts, but also the cultural, media, race, and gender theory that is reflected in so many of her texts. By figuring her texts as pastiche or intertextual networks, I approach and investigate these works as theoretical prose, which is far more enjoyable to read than prosaic theory.

In chapter two (the first main chapter), as an example of this interconnectivity, Tawada’s co-created artists’ book *Ein Gedicht für ein Buch* is utilized as a kind of point of departure, support and reference for investigating the material construction of, and inclusion of
photographic images in, the 1993 first edition (third printing) of *Das Bad*, and how this edition is differently connoted than the recent 2010 bilingual edition that omits most of these photographs, and by extension the centrality of photography as its theme. The justification for focusing on *Ein Gedicht für ein Buch* is that in its extreme, self-conscious materiality, it is one of the most explicit examples in Tawada’s oeuvre of texts insisting on being seen, read and comprehended as material objects, and as such they signify and produce semantic messages and meaning through this materiality rather than solely through linguistic codings. As chapter two states, a focus on the meaning and significance of materiality in Tawada’s texts is not absent in secondary research, evidenced by the scholarship of Christine Ivanovic, Christina Kraenzle, Ottmar Ette, Suzuko Mousel Knott and Ruth Kersting. Each of these scholars has examined the various material and visual-aesthetic dimensions in texts including *Nur da wo du bist, da ist nichts, Talisman*, *Überseezungen*, and, to a certain degree, *Das Bad*. It is in the muted gesturings towards photographs and photographic technique present in *Ein Gedicht für ein Buch* with its images, paper construction and fish-skin book cover that motivate me to examine more closely the potential messages and meaning (as ethnographic objects, ethnic and racial types, representations of essence and otherness) contained within the visual photographs (as opposed to only the textually represented photographs) that adorn the pages of *Das Bad*, and which are almost entirely absent in literary analysis, with a few, brief exceptions.

As I outline in chapter two, the few secondary sources that investigate the visual photographs and the function of photography in *Das Bad* include Sabine Fischer’s articles “Wie der Schlamm in einem Sumpf” and “Verschwinden ist schön,” and Ruth Kersting’s chapter in *Fremdes Schreiben* that points to the cultural-historical significance of photographs of Japanese women at the bath and their connotations in *Das Bad*. Fischer’s articles are particularly useful with respect to the textual depiction of photography for developing and subverting the ubiquitous
construction of concepts of authenticity, exoticism, and the body as an exchange object and commodity that feature throughout this, and many of, Tawada’s texts. However, what is absent from any investigation into the photographs and depiction of photography in Tawada scholarship is, from a Media Studies perspective, the significance of photographic theory in relation to the visual and textual representations of photography, and how this photographic theory can help us better relate to the concepts and (de)construction of originality, repetition, commodification, voyeurism, identification and authenticity that are either explicitly or implicitly articulated in Das Bad. More specifically, with the theoretical support of Barthes, Batchen, Benjamin, Burgin, Sekula, Sontag and Urry, I suggest that the photographic representation visually and linguistically presented in Das Bad reflects a number of the theoretical positions fronted by these canonical theorists: such as the destruction of the aura through mechanical reproducibility as exemplary of the destruction of an originality or essence in subjectivity construction;\textsuperscript{14} or the complexity of reading photographic images that, due to their pretence of representational verisimilitude, can serve the ideological function of fixing or freezing an image as common-sense reality, and therefore as part of nature and beyond dispute.

Secondly, there is a multiplicity of photographic histories reflected in this text through the authoritative symbols of the photograph and Xander the photographer that serve as formative in the protagonist’s subjectivity construction, but are also complicit in marketing her as a representation and representative of difference. With echoes of tourism, colonial and anthropological/ethnographic photography, the photographic session between the protagonist and her photographer/boyfriend is illustrative of something far more than a simple modeling session, and instead points to one of the central thematic concepts consistently present in Tawada’s texts:

\textsuperscript{14} ‘Aura’ is used here in reference to Benajamin’s development of aura in “Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit,” which I also elaborate upon in the following chapter. Aura, authenticity and representational authority are intertwined terms and all become eroded under the mechanical means of reproduction, such as photography.
the (im)possibility of representing, or even defining, a core essence formative of identity. The attempt to fix ‘essence’ by capturing her image through representational closure fails however, although it does suggest that this kind of representation is more a reflection of the one doing the representing, rather than of the one being represented. This of course implies that there is power in representation, and elicits a long history of photography that has served to construct a highly mediated and subjective image of otherness crucial to the construction of the racial stereotype. However, as the end of this second chapter outlines, there is also a good deal of instability in the photograph, and similar to the concept of race that photography helped construct, the photograph has never been as fixed nor eternal as it is sometimes considered to be.

Each chapter is underwritten by a common theoretical and analytical tool that utilizes the power of the prefix *de*- as a means of fleshing out, highlighting, exposing and explaining the sometimes subtle, politically invested critiques and messages that are baked in to Tawada’s poetics. My role is to highlight and analyze how Tawada deploys the prefix *de*- in techniques and approaches that *de*-naturalize, *de*-familiarize, *de*-habitualize, *de*-essentialize, and *de*-construct the ideologically infused, common-sense and taken-for-granted elements and givens in social relations, subjectivity construction, human differentiation and classification, but also in representational practices, such as the objective fidelity of the photograph as a testament of the ‘real’, or even the capacity of so-called ‘realism’ to accurately represent the complexity of reality. And similar to the theoretical support informing my reading of the ‘photographic paradox’ and the ‘rhetoric of the image’, so too is my attention to the de-naturalizing function of Tawada’s texts indebted to the work of Roland Barthes. In Barthes’* Mythologies*, which incidentally can be a useful companion piece to investigating Tawada’s texts, he makes a statement on denaturalization which I consider analogous to my own departure point when engaging with the texts analyzed in this project. The Barthes quotes reads:
The starting point of these reflections was usually a feeling of impatience at the sight of the ‘naturalness’ with which newspapers, art and common sense constantly dress up a reality which, even though it is the one we live in, is undoubtedly determined by history ... I resented seeing Nature and History confused at every turn, and I wanted to track down, in the decorative display of what-goes-without-saying, the ideological abuse which, in my view, is hidden there. (11)

In an effort to force the spotlight on how frequently the natural and the historical are confused and conflated to produce that which ‘goes-without-saying’, Tawada adopts a literary technique that combines strategies of de-naturalization with de-familiarization in order to complicate and reveal the seemingly natural and habitual as possibly cultural, or the apparently common-sense biological as in fact historically, culturally and spatially contingent.

Chapter three of this dissertation takes as its point of analysis one such concept that is frequently mistaken as singularly biological, or as pure material without symbolic meaning: human skin. Again in this chapter, I utilize one key text as a kind of literary fulcrum that links the theoretical and conceptual threads of the other texts I analyze, and in this case it is the as yet unresearched Tawada poem “Eine Hautnahme” that serves this function. As its title indicates, this poem focuses on skin, but in a commensurately complex, discordant and theoretically compelling way befitting of Tawada’s overall conceptualization of skin that features in so many of her texts.

Beginning with the two well researched texts “Das Fremde aus der Dose” and Verwandlungen, my research opens a new avenue of inquiry by examining the ways that Tawada considers skin, and more specifically the skin of the face, as something which is produced and read through a kind of cultural literacy limited by often habitual and stereotyping reading
practices. Utilizing a literary technique of de-familiarization, which I connect to the works of Victor Shklovsky, Maria Grewe’s dissertation on ‘estranging poetics’ and Clara Ervedosa’s article on Verfremdung or ‘alienation’ techniques in Tawada’s writing, I underscore how these texts advocate for a ‘change of perspective’ that recognizes the types of cultural codings embedded in skin as a legible bearer of significations and problematic signifier of foreignness.

“Das Fremde aus der Dose” considers how this foreignness inscribed on the protagonist’s skin is appropriated as a marketing technique by totalizing and packaging an easily consumable semantics of otherness into a canned commodity. Yet, as Tawada demonstrates in her subversion of Lavater’s physiognomic interpretation, the external packaging is no one-to-one representation of an internal essence or of a ‘true self’ inside, but rather beneath the layers are only more layers, or more signifiers that are not attached to a core signified.

Next, with recourse to a selection of literary and cultural theory that includes Claudia Benthien’s Skin: On the Cultural Border between Self and the World and Steven Connor’s The Book of Skin, I consider the variety of functions that skin has as both a material and symbolic border between inside and out, and between belonging and exclusion, in Tawada’s “Eine Hautnahme,” “Wo Europa anfängt” and especially Das Bad. While it may sound trivial, these texts, first and foremost, bring skin out of the background and push it under the spotlight, so to speak, making skin the primary focus of analysis instead of just naturally being there. This chapter emphasizes that, because of processes of habituation and naturalization, skin has come to be seen as so close to us that it is often overlooked as invisible, and it is against this notion of invisibility that Tawada is reacting, for skin becomes invisible because it is too visible, it is taken-for-granted and reduced to mere common-sense, rendering it static, fixed and closed to discussion. And it is due to the frequently passive acceptance of skin as a biological truth and
pre-discursive given that it occupies such a prominent place throughout Tawada’s writing in order that it be drained of these congealed natural, mythical and essential qualities.

In the short poem “Eine Hautnahme,” after detailing the connotations of this poetical neologism, I point to the numerous conceptual and theoretical possibilities represented in this brief work with regard to skin, and how these possibilities can be extended to other Tawada texts. In this short poem alone there are figurations of the skin as analogous to landscapes and cartographic representations; to the skin as a protective container; as imagined both as enclosing the subject, and also standing metonymically for the whole body; skin as both constitutive and reflective of subjectivity; as a permeable and fluid border that can determine belonging and marginalization; and as a material surface that bears the marks of physical and psychological pain and trauma, but that can also be the cause of pain and trauma. Again taking up Das Bad as a productive text for analysis, I consider how the protagonist’s scale-covered skin is representative of the pivotal role skin occupies in signifying a subject’s position as marked, stigmatized and different, but also how, in removing her scales, Tawada recasts the flaying metaphor as a symbolic act towards self-liberation and development, while subverting the notion of identity as inevitably tied to the skin. Although the skin is frequently represented and emphasized as a fluid and porous border and boundary in texts from Das Bad to “Wo Europa anfängt,” Tawada does not neglect the very real, material consequences that can result from inhabiting marked, aberrant or marginalized skins, most trenchantly portrayed by the protagonist and the dead woman in Das Bad. Therefore, while I do underscore the very productive reconceptualization of skin present in these texts, I also outline how skin is physically and culturally vulnerable, and whether it is valorized or stigmatized skin is still a stubbornly persistent reflection of ignorance and ideology.

And as chapter four illustrates, ignorance and ideology are frequently complicit in conceptualizing skin and skin colour as visually verifiable justifications for establishing and
maintaining ineradicable and hierarchical difference between human subjects. But as an immediate visual marker skin colour is also a way of already knowing the racialized subject, insofar as it is connotatively meaningful and tied to countless images that precede and erase individuality. Once again in this chapter I enlist a hitherto unexamined Tawada poem, this time “Afrikanische Zunge,” as a point of thematic and theoretical departure for investigating comparable patterns in other Tawada texts. Even though this particular poem is not as rich a source for analysis as “Eine Hautnahme,” it nevertheless provides a productive impulse for engaging with the later, much longer and considerably more compelling short story “Bioskoop der Nacht,” which can be found under the sub-heading “Südafrikanische Zungen” in the collection Überseezungen. There is to date only one secondary source that takes “Bioskoop der Nacht” as its primary focus of analysis, which is Bettina Brandt and Désirée Schyns’s “Neu vernetzt: Yoko Tawadas ‘Bioskoop der Nacht’ auf Niederländisch” (“Newly Networked: Yoko Tawada’s ‘Bioscope of the Night’ in Dutch”). In addition however, Christina Kraenzle’s “Travelling without Moving” and Yasemin Yildiz’s “Tawada’s Multilingual Moves,” both address this short story at considerable length. The Brandt and Schyns’s article provides a useful historical context behind the development of Afrikaans in colonial South Africa and the deployment of Afrikaans as the protagonist’s dream language in the text, but my analysis takes a considerably different angle that has thus far been untouched in the Tawada studies.

By sketching the colonial roots and development of often bizarrely ambivalent apartheid law, my research outlines the historical, political and cultural context in which Tawada situates “Bioskoop der Nacht” as a means of highlighting the processes involved in constructing race as a retroactive unifying category, performatively enacted and contingent on prevailing discourses and ideological positions that produce it as a seemingly natural identity. But despite its contingency and performative constitution, Tawada’s texts also highlight the real, material
ramifications of reifying colour as a principle for belonging and exclusion. I focus on textual
examples (such as representations of segregated public toilets and a ‘whites only’ public bench)
that most explicitly demonstrate Tawada’s engagement with public spaces as constitutive of
everyday racial identifications, but also the power and ambiguity of racial classification. I then
suggest that the South African particularities of this text can be expanded to broader theoretical
and cultural contexts, for example: Japan, Europe and North America. “Bioskoop der Nacht” is
such a thought-provoking piece because of the racial apartheid historical context against which it
is written, and with which it is clearly in dialogue. More specifically, I examine how the initial
introduction of Afrikaans as a kind of conceptual paradox that summons associations of its role
in the articulation of apartheid racial segregation, but also the fact that it is a multi-accentual
pastiche of various and incongruent voices, sets the stage for a destabilization of notions of racial
and cultural homogeneity that the text later articulates. Severing links between identity and
essence, in all its manifestations, is a key component to the texts addressed in this and the other
chapters. Through representations of the tension between constructing racial unity and the ever
present threat of fracturing that unity, which thereby exposes racial borders as malleable,
contingent and open to re-articulation, “Bioskoop der Nacht” serves to undercut the fixity of
racial difference in not only white-supremacist regimes, but also in more subtle, more
contemporary, and more immediate contexts.

In connection to “Bioskoop der Nacht’s” detailed and extensive consideration of skin
colour in the extreme context of the racial hierarchy of apartheid South Africa, I then bring the
discussion back to a dialogue in Das Bad that I omitted from the first two core chapters because
it is most productively analyzed from the perspective of the Critical Race Theory and whiteness
studies work of Ruth Frankenberg, Steve Garner, Richard Dyer, Peggy McIntosh, Omi and
Winant, Mirón and Inda and David Goldberg. And because this dialogue I am analyzing is also
published in Tawada’s essay “Eigentlich darf man es niemandem sagen, aber Europa gibt es
nicht” with additional commentary inserted into the dialogue and with subsequent reflections on
the theoretical implications behind this spirited dispute between the protagonist and Xander, I
utilize this annotated version as my source of study. With its explicit focus on skin colour as the
guarantor of identity and marker of the ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ divide, but also the fact that Xander
considers skin colour to be a common-sense biological or natural fact instead of also a culturally
and historically contingent discursive construct, this particular passage provides illuminating
insight into Tawada’s general political platform that works to problematize, de-essentialize and
de-naturalize the most seemingly taken-for-granted markers of identity, such as skin colour and
race. The juxtaposition of the two theoretical stand-points in this dialogue points to how colour
has become synonymous with race, and how one character represents a discourse that naturalizes
race and fixes difference, while the other represents a much more fluid, contingent and discursive
position. Xander’s position in this debate is symbolic of the differentiation that has come into
effect because of dominant discourses which have served to ‘naturalize’ difference. As Mirón
and Inda indicate in their provocative “Race as a Kind of Speech Act,” this means
“differentiating human subjects into a number of natural and distinct races based on their typical
phenomenal characteristics, and the consignment of some groups as inferior, … amounts to the
familiar practice of locating difference in the presocial realm, as part of nature, hence rendering
it immutable” (86). While Tawada’s texts are by no means attempting to deny the very real,
material construction of the biological body, they are inviting readers to take the ideologically
invested politics of the racially constructed, naturalized, differentiating and inherently privileged
body, more seriously.

With respect to the reified category of whiteness that is prevalent in both “Bioskoop der
Nacht” and “Eigentlich darf man es niemandem sagen,” though it is deployed to very different
ends, I attempt to underscore how Tawada’s texts, with the support of whiteness studies theory mentioned above, attempt to make whiteness as a mechanism of power visible to those who benefit from it without recognizing it. Being unmarked or ‘just human’ (as Richard Dyer terms it) infuses subjects with material and psychical privileges that only become apparent once one is marked, although it is much less common to attempt to pass as ‘marked’ than it is to pass as unmarked. While Tawada employs the explicit and extreme example of South Africa for its production of race as hyper-visible, this context should compel readers to focus on the much more subtle, but equally consequential and hierarchical, construction and maintenance of differentiation based on skin-colour that still persists in western contexts, where privilege is guaranteed by the power of invisibility. Tawada again, in the texts examined in this chapter, creates a travelling narrator to bring the unseen and common-place structures and processes underpinning social relations and differentiation into focus, and forces readers to reflect on what seems so self-evidently natural and beyond question.
CHAPTER TWO: COUNTER-ETHNOGRAPHY AND PHOTOGRAPHY IN YOKO TAWADA’S DAS BAD

2.1 INTRODUCTION

“A woman sits in front of a mirror and compares her image with a portrait photograph. She climbs into the bath, and travels as a scale-covered woman through dream-like and everyday sequences” (“Eine Frau sitzt vor dem Spiegel und vergleicht ihr Bild mit einem Porträtfoto. Sie steigt ins Bad, reist als Schuppenfrau durch traumartige und alltägliche Sequenzen”). This laconic, though telling, description of Yoko Tawada’s Das Bad finds itself on the inside of the book jacket in the most recently released, 2010 German-Japanese edition of the text. And while it is extremely difficult to condense a sixty page novella into a two sentence description, this particular promotional blurb touches on a few of the most critical features of the work; namely, identification with the mirror and photograph, movement (in both the sense of moving through space, but also in the sense of resisting stasis), and the scales that cover the protagonist’s body as a kind of second skin. This dissertation will consider each of these key themes in-depth. More specifically, the following chapter will investigate Das Bad as a kind of critical ekphrasis, and as an intermedial text and amalgam of various photographic interactions that have, thus far, received rather short shrift in secondary research. Nearly every page of the original German edition of this book contains a heavily manipulated photographic image over which the linguistic text is written, and thus I will first consider these frequently overlooked visual representations of photographs, and then how they productively interact with the written text. The self-reflexive materiality of a number of Tawada’s texts, like Das Bad and her co-created artists’ book Ein Gedicht für ein Buch, demands an interpretation that considers and respects their collaborative genesis. In other words, these texts require an interpretation that does not privatize the author’s contribution at the expense of the other signifying features and semantic messages present
therein. Therefore, the significance of the book itself, as an object, and the images that adorn it, will first be addressed.

Secondly, as the quote above indicates, the protagonist’s portrait photograph and her mirror image feature prominently in this work as external images against which she constructs, but also complicates, her self-identity. I will therefore investigate how representation, and especially photographic representation, is not just reflective, but rather is constitutive, of identity formation. Thirdly, I will consider the photographic interaction between the protagonist/photographic model (who is a Japanese female presumably in her late twenties) and her German boyfriend/photographer Alexander (who goes by the name Xander). Xander, who is employed by a travel company, attempts to photograph the protagonist with the intention of using her image for an advertising poster, and it is from the narrative of this photographic session that a number of theoretically complex criticisms can be untangled that serve to unmask and expose the ideological politics inherent in certain representational practices – especially photography.

There is an explicit power discrepancy expressed during this photographic session and throughout this text. It is a discrepancy that points to the oppressive, exploitative and violent history of colonial and anthropological photography, which both served to crystallize hierarchies of value-laden ‘otherness’. Representational politics and power are also witnessed in the photograph’s capacity to objectify, commodify and fetishize the female subject for a masculine, voyeuristic gaze. The interaction between photographer and model, however, is no simplistic subjugation of victimizer over victimized, but rather it highlights and then problematizes the very

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15 The name Xander immediately summons an image of der Zander, or pike-perch fish (also known as Sander or Zander in English). This is apt considering the use of water and scales that feature throughout the text, but it is also indicative of X-ander, der Andere, or ‘the Other’ in English. In reference to the significance of the name Xander, Christine Ivanovic points out, “[d]er griechische Name Alexander (aus ἀλέξω ich wehre ab, und ἀνήπ, Gen. ἀνήπος der Mann) bedeutet wörtlich ‘der Männerabwehrer’. In der hier gegebenen (eher ungewöhnlichen) Abkürzung, die aus der Abspaltung von ‘Alex’ nur den Konsonanten ‘X’ als Kapitale bewahrt, bleibt lediglich der auf das Männliche bezogene Teil des Namens erhalten... Die auf sie einschüchternde Wirkung dieses Names bewirkt daher ein Verstummen, zu dem vielleicht auch die im japanischen Kontext übliche gestische Realisation des X als Zeichen der Durchkreuzung, des Durchstreichens, der Verneinung beiträgt” (“Aneignung und Kritik” 147).
notion of representing ‘authenticity’ in visual imagery, and how these representations are often more a reflection of the one doing the representing than they are of the represented. *Das Bad*, similar to many of Tawada’s texts, complicates common-sense beliefs and exposes seemingly natural and immutable differences like race and gender as culturally and discursively contingent categories. Because it is often viewed as an objective, unmediated representation of reality, photography has served this ideological function of solidifying racial and gendered categories as visually verifiable, and thus beyond contestation. As the end of this chapter highlights though, the stability of the photographic image itself has never been universally accepted, but rather has even served to complicate and problematize ethnographic knowledge of the racialized ‘other’. However, before I enter into an analysis of photographic theory and practice and their role in Tawada’s texts, I will consider how these texts in their very materiality already point to the centrality of photography for Tawada, and how this materiality must be understood in concert with the linguistic medium.

2.2 FOCUSING ON THE MATERIALITY OF THE TEXT: *EIN GEDICHT FÜR EIN BUCH*

It must be recognized that the material book is not merely the vector utilized for transmitting a linguistically coded message to the literate, but rather is itself, as an object, a signifying process that needs to be recognized as part of the collaborative construction of textual meaning. The physical features or textual materials of the book (layout, paper choice, font size and type), paratextual details (dedications, jacket reviews, summaries and recommendations), images and author photos, and other surface phenomena often overlooked as ancillary to the author’s written words are all complicit in the sum of textual meaning, and all comprise what

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16 The term ‘paratext’ is attributed to Gerard Genette from his work *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. The concept is useful for literary interpretation especially here because it refigures para-textual components not as a border or boundary, but as a threshold that allows for a more complete and sophisticated reception of the text, while at the same significantly influencing *how* one reads the text.
Jerome McGann has labelled the ‘bibliographic code’ in his work *The Textual Condition*. While Gérard Genette’s focus on *paratexts* points in the right direction, it is still exclusively linguistically-centric. Conversely, the bibliographic code draws attention to the semantic messages and meaning contained within the tangible vehicle itself, and when considered in relation to, and in dialogue with, the author’s linguistic code, the two can create a composite text dramatically different than would be the case if these codes were read in isolation. More often than not it is the linguistic code that enjoys the status as *the* text and thus the primary object of analysis, while the bibliographic code is often relegated to the periphery or is seen as complementary to its linguistic companion, if it is not entirely overlooked altogether as extraneous ‘noise’ that needs to be filtered. This might be due to the fact that while the author (at least to a certain extent) is the creator of the linguistic text, usually the images, design layout, and overall material instantiation of the book are the creation of the designer, publisher and printer, thereby making the bibliographic code appear as mere window dressing to the author’s sacred word.

Yet, as the editorial theory of McGann and later George Bornstein in his work *Material Modernism: The Politics of the Page* highlights, the text is a “field of communicative exchange” (McGann 62) and its meanings are “collaborative events” (60) constructed by the author, editor, publisher, printer and reader, and thus extend beyond the author’s words, to say nothing of authorial intention. And while the Russian Formalist Boris Tomashevsky went so far

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17 Jerome McGann, in his work *The Textual Condition*, relegates the role of the author and authorial intention in governing textual meaning, and instead focuses on the fact that “all texts, like all other things human, are embodied phenomena, and the body of the text is not exclusively linguistic” 13. McGann attempts to outline a “materialist hermeneutics” that “considers texts as autopoietic mechanisms operating as self-generating feedback systems that cannot be separated from those who manipulate and use them” 15, because “the meaning is in the use, and textuality is a social condition of various times, places and persons” 16.
18 McGann does not believe Genette’s concept of paratexts goes far enough, mainly because “first, their textuality is exclusively linguistic; and second, they are consistently regarded as only quasi-textual, ancillary to the main textual event (i.e., to the linguistic text)” 13.
19 Bornstein’s work, heavily indebted to McGann’s concept of the ‘bibliographic code’, centers on the role the material construction of the text plays in historicizing the text. *Material Modernism*, according to Bornstein, “highlights the notion of material textuality as both the physical features of the text that carry semantic weight and the multiple forms in which texts are physically created and distributed” 1.
as to state “it is not important where the author aims, but what end he reaches” (Martens 212),
authorial intention is certainly one of the criteria that enters the process of textual creation, but it
is not the sole authoritative voice. If the material medium and its bibliographic code remain
transparent, as they often do, then the text becomes only a limited fragment of its potential and
its reception and interpretation are possibly, significantly, diminished. The text is, in a way, akin
to a photograph, as the material transmitter (the book or photographic paper) is really just a
transparent conduit relaying the written message (or in the case of the photograph, the image
rendered) to a qualified reader. The following analysis takes issue with this kind of textual
understanding with respect to selected works by Yoko Tawada, and approaches her texts, as
Gunter Martens advocates in his essay “What Is a Text?,” as always in fluid motion and never
completely fixable.

Artists’ books20 are one way of “thickening the medium” (McGann 13), so to say; of
putting the resources of the medium on full display, which thereby underscores the text as a
tautological, self-conscious and self-generating reflection on its own material textuality and its
presence as a book-as-object. The artists’ book places the printed word on an equal plane with
the visual and material text. It thus demands to be read as a compendium of constituent, though
sometimes discordant, meanings, and rather heavy-handedly emphasizes the inextricability of
medium and message. As someone who herself claims to be “intrigued by books as objects”
(“Scattered Leaves”12) Yoko Tawada has twice participated in the co-creation of artists’

20 While a precise definition on artists’ books has proved to be a moving target over the past half-century, in my
opinion one of the more trenchant descriptions is “the artist book, however disruptive of tradition, strives for
cohesion among its constituent parts by giving equal status to images, typography, binding, page-setting, folds,
collages, and text. The reader must search … for unifying coherence … within and outside the text” 11. This quote
can be found in Renee Riese Hubert and Judd D. Hubert’s The Cutting Edge of Reading: Artists’ Books, which is
useful for the theory behind, and examples of, artists’ books. For an overview of the ongoing debate of defining
what actually constitutes artists’ books, and even the difficulty of settling on the term artists’ book, I suggest Stefan
books.\footnote{Ein Gedicht für ein Buch and Spiegelbild are the two examples I am referring to above. Because they are artists’ books they are, by their nature, neither copied nor mass distributed, and thus they remain elusive to most readers. Clemens-Tobias Lange Presse provides images of the cover of this book and a sample of the translucent paper on its website. This site also gives a sample of the Tawada-Köhler collaboration Ein Gedicht in einem Buch, of which there were 1,000 copies made, including one which I viewed in the Philologische Bibliothek der Freien Universität Berlin. Information on these artists’ books can be found on Clemens-Tobias Lange Presse’s website at: http://www.ctl-presse.de/buecher/11ta.htm} Ein Gedicht für ein Buch, for example, which is a combination of the Japanese handmade book and the more recent European tradition of livres d’artistes, is a collaborative effort between Tawada, photographer and papermaker Stephan Köhler, and book artist and designer Clemens-Tobias Lange. It features an interweaving of Tawada’s poem of the same name, photographs of Tokyo train commuters and Japanese temples taken by Köhler, printed on translucent paper made by Köhler, and a ray-skin book cover obtained by Lange.\footnote{Clemens-Tobias Lange Presse describes the book, of which there are only forty-five extant, as follows: Alle Papiere in dem Band von Stephan Köhler sind original Silber-Gelatine-Handabzüge. Die handgeschöpfften Japanpapiere von Köhler wurden mit lichtempfindlicher Silberemulsion beschichtet und belichtet. Die schmetterlingsleichten Seiten sind nicht fest eingebunden, sondern liegen beweglich übereinander. Lose, gefaltete Blätter in Einbandmappe aus Perlrochen (Galuschat) von Thomas Zwang. (CTL Presse)} Clemens-Tobias Lange Presse describes the book, of which there are only forty-five extant, as follows:

Alte Papiere in dem Band von Stephan Köhler sind original Silber-Gelatine-Handabzüge. Die handgeschöpfften Japanpapiere von Köhler wurden mit lichtempfindlicher Silberemulsion beschichtet und belichtet. Die schmetterlingsleichten Seiten sind nicht fest eingebunden, sondern liegen beweglich übereinander. Lose, gefaltete Blätter in Einbandmappe aus Perlrochen (Galuschat) von Thomas Zwang. (CTL Presse) There are only a few words on pagefilling silver-gelatine printed sheets. The photographs by Köhler are painted on the translucent and crispy medium. Photoemulsion and letterpress on handmade Japanese paper. Bound in natural colour ray-skin (Galuschat) by Thomas Zwang. (CTL Presse)

As my own research investigates the relationship between written text and photographic images in the context of a range of photographic theories and histories in Tawada’s works, as well as the variegated application of skin in her writing, this particular artists’ book seems to highlight a
number of themes which the author frequently addresses, and thus I will return to it occasionally throughout this dissertation. It is noteworthy in the above description of the book’s material construction that not only does it contain photographic images, but the technique of the paper production itself is depicted as a process similar to photographic development. The “Silber-Gelatine-Handabzüge” and the Japanese paper coated and exposed with light-sensitive silver emulsion is strikingly reminiscent of the silver-coated plates of nineteenth century daguerreotypes and later twentieth century photographic developing techniques. The bibliographic code in this instance then is brought to the fore, the medium is made murky, and the very process of the text’s creation and the act of reading become matters of interpretation and reflection in addition to, and in communication with, the written text.

The relationship between written text, the material text and the images that adorn it is complex to say the least. In an interview with Bettina Brandt, Tawada outlines part of the thought process that led her to choose this particular poem for the book. Having already created a poem that was conceptually congruent with the photos of train commuters in Tokyo and Japanese temples, Tawada was told by Clemens-Tobias Lange that “the relationship between text and image should not be too direct ... the text should not look like an explanation of the

23 Mary Warner Marien’s *Photography: A Cultural History* and *Photography and its Critics* both outline the origins of photographic developing techniques and the differences between Daguerre, Niépce and Fox Talbot’s processes. *Photography and its Critics* describes Daguerre’s process as follows: “a photographic plate sensitized with a surface layer of silver iodide was exposed in a camera obscura. The image, which was not visible at the time of the exposure, was developed out by using mercury flames” 31. Niépce abandoned this technique of employing the photosensitivity of silver for one that was more like engraving and etching. Because of their silver plating, Daguerreotypes also came to be viewed as *Silberspiegel* - mirrors that both transmitted and reflected an image. The metaphor of the photograph as a mirror of reality is thus based in a more literal origin. See the chapter “Silberspiegel” 200-203 from Stiegler’s *Bilder der Photographie* for a brief history of its technical and cultural development.

24 There are no page numbers for these photographic images because the book is unpaginated. The CTL Presse website provided in the above footnote gives a sense of what these images look like, and the only secondary source which mentions these images can be found in the Brandt interview “Scattered Leaves.” In the interview Brandt says “Stephan Köhler’s black and white photographs for *A Poem for a Book* are of two kinds: those that portray adults and children in Tokyo traveling by commuter train while reading a book, and a series of images of temple installations” 16. In this interview Tawada later states “Stephan flew to Tokyo and took photographs of [people reading in the commuter transportation system] and combined them with photographs he had taken in Japanese temples earlier” 16-17.
images, or vice versa, the images like illustrations of the text” (“Scattered Leaves” 17). She thus abandoned the synergetic approach and opted for a poem that prevents the reader from seeing the image as a mere accent to the written word, or as an unequivocal one-to-one representation of the semantic content. Looking now briefly at Tawada’s poem, I suggest that ‘word’ is, appropriately, the self-reflexive and central theme of Ein Gedicht für ein Buch, a title which indicates that the book itself as materially and textually encoded is of equal significance to the linguistic poem.

Ein Gedicht für ein Buch

ein wort
ein mord
wenn ich spreche
bin ich nicht da
ein wort
in einem käfig
fesselnd gefesselt
spuckt einen bericht
über meine taten
über meine karten
kein wort
nur sein schatten
in dem ich ruhe
mein schatten verschwindet darin
nichts wird bewertet
wenn ich schweige
bin ich aus demselben stoff gemacht
wie du
stoffliche zeit
zwischen einem wort
und einem schluck wasser
dort
wo die stimme im fleisch aufwacht
hört man ohne ohren
ein wort
befreit von seinem dienst
ein wort
direkt auf das trommelfell geschrieben
die trommel fällt
lautlos
stimmhaft
ein wort
ein ort

A Poem for a Book

a word
a murder
when i speak
i am not there
a word
in its cage
arresting arrested
spits a report
about my crimes
about my cards
no word
only its shadow
in which i rest
my shadow disappears in it
nothing is judged
when i am silent
i am made of the same material
as you
material time
between one word
and a sip of water
there where the voice awakes in the flesh
you hear without ears
a word
liberated from its duty
a word
written directly on the eardrum
the drum falls
soundless
voiced
a word
a place
a place
(trans. Emily Sullivan; qtd. in Brandt “Scattered Leaves” 17)

On the one hand, because the cover of this book is comprised of a fish skin, one that,
incidentally, both appears and feels like human skin in terms of texture, there is already a very
material, corporeal experience pre-figuring the linguistic text. The book’s materiality sets up the
reading experience as something that is simultaneously a bodily experience. The somatic

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25 This poem can also be found, though without the translucent paper, images and overall material experience of the artists’ book, in Tawada’s *Aber die Mandarinen müssen heute abend noch geraubt werden. Prosa and Lyrik* 93-94.
connection to language is then further expanded in the poem’s semantics, especially in the lines “dort / wo die stimme im fleisch aufwacht / hört man ohne ohren.” Here, as is the case in a number of Tawada’s texts, there is the suggestion that language has both a symbolic (in the discursive sense) and a material (in the corporeal sense) effect on the body.\textsuperscript{26} In lines such as “wenn ich spreche / bin ich nicht da” and “wenn ich schweige / bin ich aus demselben stoff gemacht / wie du” and “ein wort / befreit von seinem dienst,” there is an implication of a kind of displacement of the ‘word’ from its conventional function as communicative sign, pointing towards a liberating potential for the ‘word’. Free from its service’, according to Florian Gelzer, means that the word “dient nicht mehr nur als Bedeutungsträger, kann es körperlich und sinnlich in seiner Materialität, als ‘stimme im fleisch’, aufgenommen werden” (“no longer serves as the carrier of meaning; it can be bodily and sensorily received and absorbed, as a ‘voice in the flesh’”; “Wenn ich spreche” 85).

Of course this sensual and bodily experience is considerably augmented when the poem is read in relation to the paper on which it is written. These translucent sheets of Japanese paper are meant to give the reader a feeling of looking through water when attempting to read and comprehend the semantic meaning contained within the words. Viewing this poem, as Tawada claims, gives the feeling “that this object is about to change, that the book will transform itself into something else if you leave it alone for too long” (Scattered Leaves 15). This sense of immanent transformation, however, is likely absent if the poem is read in a more conventional material context, such as in Tawada’s text \textit{Aber die Mandarinen müssen heute abend noch geraubt werden: Prosa und Lyrik}, where the poem is also found, but without the message of the medium. In \textit{Ein Gedicht für ein Buch} the translucent pages that remain unbound, loosely held

\textsuperscript{26} The connection between language and corporeality has been investigated in relation to \textit{Überseezungen} by Christina Kraenzle in “Travelling without Moving” 6-7. Kraenzle outlines how, in Tawada’s texts, there is a “physical transformation that takes place when switching from one language to another.” Kraenzle argues that \textit{Überseezungen} marks a strong reinstatement of the material and corporeal in Tawada’s texts, “attributing substance to the symbolic and reinvesting words with the power to evoke physical sensation” 7.
together in the fish skin book-cover allude to the centrality of representations and metaphors of water and fluidity, of mobility and change that feature so prominently throughout in both the content and materiality of her works, where textual bodies, analogous to the human bodies they depict, are unstable and open to variation. Tawada’s artists’ book-text - self-conscious of its construction and materiality - thus requires a different approach to reading. It virtually insists on being comprehended beyond language, and rather as a compendium of physical, visual and linguistic messages.

The interplay between the bibliographic code (meaning the text outside the text, manifested as images, paratexts or textual materiality) and the author’s written text can be found in a number of Tawada’s works in various forms. Its most explicit instantiation is probably in the artists’ books already mentioned, but is also a productive point of analysis in *Nur da wo du bist, da ist nichts, Das Bad, Talisman, Überseezungen* and *Schwager in Bordeaux*, as well as in a number of her other texts. *Nur da wo du bist, da ist nichts*, for instance, is an unambiguous example of an interactive text that self-consciously reflects on its textual materiality and the importance of the reader in producing textual meaning. The book includes a plastic insert comprised of part text, part plastic windows which the reader lays over a poem and can move up or down in order to constantly reproduce a new version of the poem. Christine Ivanovic’s “Jenseits des Vergleichs,” in which she focuses on the book’s horizontal/vertical aesthetics, its typography, and the sensory rather than semantic experience this work produces. is by far the most extensive analysis of the form and materiality of this text. More recently, Suzuko Mousel Knott has outlined how the layout of this book and the inclusion of the reader as producer is

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27 Christina Kraenzle’s “Travelling without Moving” underlines how in *Überseezungen* (where the stress rests on ‘see’) the typography of the text’s title and the graphics depicting geographical regions overwritten with symbols and characters from various alphabets “reflect the themes that run through each text: language, translation, travel, geography and the embodied self” 2.

28 Ivanovic’s article then goes on to consider some of the bibliographic codings in *Wo Europa anfängt* and *Talismann*, which are two texts I will be addressing later in this dissertation.
representative of Tawada’s broader literary technique of pastiche, in the sense that her texts are really intertextual patchworks of various texts and threads woven together (“Yoko Tawada und das ‘F-Word’” 570-71).

Similar to the original German edition of Das Bad, Talisman also features a nude female figure on its book cover (though this image is a sculpted body rather than a photographic representation), which, in addition to the numerous other bibliographic codings present in this text, has been analyzed in secondary scholarship. Ruth Kersting and Ottmar Ette, for example, consider the significance of the author’s photo by Isolde Ohlbaum in connection to the biographical information provided in Talisman for contributing to a kind of myth that has developed around the author; a myth that has a tendency to influence, and constrict, how her texts are read and researched. Kersting notes how this photo designates and classifies the author as a young woman and as Asian. She continues by describing how in author photos “der Körper des Künstlers oder der Künstlerin ist gezeichnet, Sexualität und ethnische Herkunft sind in ihn eingeschrieben. Gebildet durch Diskurs und sozialen Umgang, ist der Körper in einem ständigen Zustand der Definition und Objekt im dehnbaren Gefüge der Machtverhältnisse” (“the body of a male or female artist is drawn, and sexuality and ethnic background are written into this image. Formed by discourse and social contact, the body is in a constant state of definition and is an object stretched between oppositional forces of power”; Fremdes Schreiben 60). Ottmar Ette, influenced by Kersting, also analyzes the author photo and biographical information in Talisman, but with a nod to Barthes’s Empire of Signs. He states:

Die wenigen Biographeme, die paratextuell eingestreut werden, finden sich vielerlei Formen den Texten der Autorin wieder. So wie Barthes seine eigene Photographie in seinen Ikonotext L’Empire des signes aufnahm, so liefert Tawada dem Lesepublikum zumindest paratextuell eine Bildvorlage für die
Subjektkonstruktion, die durch die Wiederkehr bestimmter Biographeme die Identität von Autorfigur und textexterner Autorin nahelegt. (”Zeichenreiche: Insel-Texte und Text-Inseln” 223)

A few biographical details can be found in varying forms scattered paratextually throughout the author’s texts. Like Barthes reception of his own image in the iconic Empire of Signs, Tawada supplies her reading public with a kind of paratextual model image of subject construction, which through the recurrence of certain biographical details brings the identity of the author figure and the text-external author closer together.

In her collection of poetic lectures titled Verwandlungen, Tawada even quotes Barthes’s comment from Empire of Signs in which he suggests that the reception of his author photo published in a Japanese newspaper is altered by the alienating context and surrounding typography, indicating that his photograph has undergone ‘eine Japanisierung’, as “die Typographie Nippons läßt seine Augen schmaler, seine Augenbrauen schwärzer erscheinen” (“This Western lecturer, as soon as he is ‘cited’ by the Kobe Shinbun, finds himself ‘Japanned’, eyes elongated, pupils blackened by Nipponese typography”; Verwandlungen 53; Empire of Signs 90).  

Barthes is referring to himself in the third-person here because it is not actually Barthes as a person, but rather his image and the perception of his image that is being manipulated by its (dis)placement vis-à-vis the Japanese characters, and the resulting

juxtaposition between photo and text may influence how he is read as an author and a celebrity. For Tawada, this confusion is commonplace in textual reception, and she even suggests that “[t]he authorial image produced from the work is the true author, and the living person who exists as the author may be, in relation to the text, a complete stranger” (“Tawada Yoko Does Not Exist” 15).

Because both the linguistic and visual codes articulated and represented in Das Bad feature photography as one of the primary themes, I will be focusing on the significance of various procedures involved in taking particular kinds of photographs, i.e., staging or not staging the photographic subject, focus, lighting, developing and disseminating, and also some of the more canonical theories of photography from cultural, historical, ethnographic, colonial, and marketing perspectives by academics including Barthes, Batchen, Benjamin, Burgin, Eco, Sekula, Sontag, and Urry. More specifically with regard to Tawada’s text, I am concentrating on the third print of the first edition of Das Bad, published in 1993 by Konkursbuch Verlag Claudia Gehrke, translated into German from the Japanese by Peter Pörtner, with the design layout by the artist Günter H. Seidel. While Das Bad was originally written in Japanese, it was actually first published in German in 1989, and thus I refer to this as the ‘original’ edition. I state these publication details explicitly because since 2010 there is a new German-Japanese edition available. This marks the first time that this text has appeared in its original Japanese language, and even though it contains a limited selection of the images featured in the original edition, in the newer text these images have been minimized and superimposed over images of vast ocean

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30 I will be partly addressing the kind of ‘photography theory’ outlined by Victor Burgin in his introduction to Thinking Photography, which considers photography as a practice of signification. Burgin notes that the “emphasis on ‘signification’ derives from the fact that the primary feature of photography, considered as an omnipresence in everyday social life, is its contribution to the production and dissemination of meaning” 2. Though indebted to semiotics, Burgin’s, and the other authors in the volume, recognize the interdisciplinary nature of the theory, and thus also consider “the complex articulations of the moments of institution, text, distribution and consumption of photography” 2.
expanse. Furthermore, this bi-lingual 2010 edition from Konkursbuch Verlag Claudia Gehrke has the German text horizontally running front to back, while the Japanese reads vertically back to front in a similar fashion to Nur da wo du bist, da ist nichts. Because the Japanese text reads back to front and vertically, the German text does not actually mirror the Japanese text either visually or semantically, which symbolically represents the disjuncture between the subject and her mirrored image in the text, but also undermines the notion that there can be a direct one-to-one literal translation and correlation between languages.

As I noted in the opening to this chapter, the publisher’s blurb on the inner book jacket reads “eine Frau sitzt vor dem Spiegel und vergleicht ihr Bild mit einem Porträtfoto. Sie steigt ins Bad, reist als Schuppenfrau durch traumartige und alltägliche Sequenzen.” This description indicates that, although the photos have been removed from each individual page, nonetheless the photograph and mirror remain central to the meaning of the text. However, in my opinion the recent edition diminishes the emphasis on the photograph and the text’s implicit dialogue with the histories, development and deployment of photography from an especially European, and ethnographic, perspective. Because my focus is on the significance of the visual and textual photographic images in Das Bad, I will therefore be making use of the original edition that exposes photography as its central theme.

Lastly, regarding the various editions of this text, it is finally worth noting here that there is an English translation of Das Bad, translated as “The Bath,” which was published in a collection of short stories by New Directions in 2002 called Where Europe Begins. This edition does not feature any of the photographic images present on each individual page in the German

31 It also bears noting that the publisher info reads: “Dies ist eine überarbeitete Neuauflage von ‘Das Bad’. Die erste, vergriffene, Ausgabe der deutschen Übersetzung, gedruckt auf transparenten Bildern, erschien 1989. Der japansche Originaltext ist hier erstmals veröffentlicht.” This is noteworthy because the original appears twenty years after the translation, confusing the sanctity of ‘originality’.

32 According to the author, while Claudia Gehrke Verlag ultimately decided on the particular images used in, and design of, Das Bad, Tawada indicated to them that she wanted some kind of skin represented on the book cover. With New Directions, however, she was content to leave the book design up to them without her input (from my “Personal Conversation with Yoko Tawada”).
edition, but rather features a cover photograph of the Trans-Siberian Railway. This initial visual encounter with the text sets up a substantially different context and point of entry than that provided by the German edition, not to mention the fact that the German edition of *Das Bad* stands alone as an independent text, while the English edition is subsumed in a collection bearing the title of the anchoring text. Due to the English edition’s conspicuous omission of the photographic images, and because the content of *Das Bad* is situated primarily in Germany and is likely intended for a German-speaking readership, I will thus refer exclusively to the German edition of the text in my analysis.

2.3 THE DE-CONTEXTUALIZED IMAGE: PHOTOGRAPHIC IMAGES IN *DAS BAD*

*Das Bad*’s written text is superimposed over thirty-two individual, monochrome, faded photographs of mostly naked, seemingly young, probably Asian, females. My language here is consciously imprecise because the photographs themselves are so ambiguous and open to interpretation. This is no doubt intentionally done as the ambiguity provides an unmistakable quality that contributes to the text’s overall effect of ambivalence and polysemy. Present among these thirty-two photographs are also, what appear to be, a hand-mirror, a three-legged pot with flowers, and what seem like more or less blank pages. However, because there is some colour present on these otherwise blank pages, they provide an effect of over-exposure rather than an absence. The thirty-two photographs appear in sequence on the first thirty-two pages, and then they repeat this same sequence on the next thirty-two pages, making the text sixty-four pages in length, though not every page consists of written text. This is only noteworthy because the text (and I am of course referring to the original edition that contains all the photographic images) is unpaginated, and since it is more challenging for readers to orient themselves in the middle of a

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33 Ruth Kersting’s *Fremdes Schreiben* provides a detailed breakdown of these images in *Das Bad*, including on which pages these images are found (though the text itself is unpaginated) 133-37.
text without page numbers, as customarily page numbers provide a standard point of reference and a stability, the lack of pagination adds a subtle layer of dislocation and disorientation. In this text, both in terms of the content and visual imagery, the only logical sequence is the sequence of images, yet due to their ambiguity it is unlikely that a reader would recognize the fact that each image appears twice in sequence in this work.

Furthermore, as two of the images from the collection of thirty-two photographs appear on the front and back cover of the text, these two images are present a total of three times, thereby elevating their profile. The image on the cover of the text is the same image that appears on the colophon or Impressum page providing the publication and translator information, possibly because this image is one of the least equivocal of the text’s photographs in terms of signifiers of race, gender, age and the obvious lack of clothing. This page containing the publication information does not provide the origin of these photographs (but rather only publication and publisher details, and printer and designer names), nor can any trace of the origin of these photographs be found throughout the text. We learn nothing of the photographer, the photographed subjects, the place of their taking, to which collection they belong, or any other hint of the referents from which these images were born, and therefore any attempt to label the identities of these subjects in terms of nationality, ethnicity, age etc. would be pure conjecture. Perhaps the fact that on the book cover the author’s name, Yoko Tawada (obviously the name of a Japanese woman), appears across the photographed subject’s forehead, or the fact that “aus dem Japanischen von Peter Pörtner” is written across the same subject’s chest on the page prior to the written text’s beginning, could give the impression that these are photographs of Japanese females. But what is more probable, considering Ruth Kersting’s claim that the publisher at Gehrke Verlag attributes these photographs to a Chinese photographer from the 1920’s or 1930’s
(again note the uncertainty) (Kersting 133), is that they underscore the problematic relationship between image and text, between the referent and the photographic image, between original and copy, and ultimately the dubiousness of the photograph as reliable evidence or testament of authenticity.

Despite the fact that Das Bad is one of the most analyzed of Tawada’s texts in secondary literature, the photographic images that feature throughout this piece have received relatively scant attention. One of the few examples in which these photographs are considered can be found in Sabine Fischer’s 1997 article “Verschwinden ist schön,” where she points to the interaction between image and text:


In Tawada’s short story “The Bath” the interchange between word and image is exposed through the graphics adorning the books pages – a textual feature initiated by the author. Underlying the text are the delicate images of Asian females. The exotic feminine body is covered in writing; this writing conversely becomes ‘embodied’. Influenced by a foreign gaze and foreign words the body of

34 With regard to the origin of the photographic images in Das Bad, Kersting states, “[a]ls unterste Schicht zeichnet sich eine schmehafte Photographie ab, die Kopf und unbekleideten Rumpf einer jungen, leicht in sich gekehrten, vermutlich ‘asiatische’ Frau zeigt. Die Verlegerin des Konkursbuchverlags Gehrke meinte sich auf meine Anfrage hin zu erinnern, dass es sich um Bilder eines chinesischen Photographen aus den 1920er oder 1930er Jahren handelt. Man habe die Bilder ‘abgesofft’, um sie als ‘traumhafte Andeutung’ erscheinen zu lassen” 133.

35 It is interesting to note that, because this text was first written in Japanese but only published as a German translation, the copy is actually the original.
the protagonist (a Japanese woman living in Germany) undergoes continual metamorphoses.

The significance of the unity between body and text and subsequently physiognomically reading bodies will be expansively addressed in the following chapter. In the Fischer quote above, however, there is already a telling example of how bodies in Tawada’s texts are coded as ethnically and racially marked, as the exotic, female body in this text is both literally and figuratively written upon and read and interpreted by a highly subjective ethnographic gaze. The heavily stylized photographic images underlying the written text work in connection to the content insofar as they serve a kind of counter-ethnographic function by providing no knowledge of the figures they portray, but rather only an invitation to re-consider the representational practice itself.

Ruth Kersting’s *Fremdes Schreiben* provides undoubtedly the most extensive account of the photographic images in terms of historical-cultural context and significance, and with respect to how they are structured within the text itself. Kersting considers how the front and back covers of the text (the front cover depicting the image of a naked Asian female, half covered by a drawing of a fish and the text’s title; the back cover featuring a photo of the author overlaying the same image of a naked Asian female) create “eine ambivalente Spannung, denn einerseits werden Klischees von ‘der Japanerin’ und damit assoziierte Stereotype von Exotik bzw. Erotik in Form der Photos bedient ... und andererseits durch die Collage auf der Titelseite problematisiert, da diese den Konstruktcharakter von Identität andeutet” (“an ambivalent tension, since on the one hand clichés of the Japanese woman and associated stereotypes of exotic or erotic are connoted in the form of the photograph, but on the other hand these clichés are problematized by the collage on the book cover, which points to the constructed character of identity”; 136).

Kersting recognises *Das Bad* as a *Bilderbuch* in which the photos often parallel, confront or
complicate the textual passages they accompany. For example, she notes that on the pages where seemingly no image appears, “[e]ine Leerstelle spiegelt die entsprechende Textpassage, in der erzählt wird, dass die Ich-Erzählerin auf Photos nicht zu sehen sei” (“An empty space reflects the corresponding textual passage, in which the first person narrator is absent from the photographic images”; 137). Of course a direct relation between image and text is not possible for every page in this work, but as Kersting remarks, “[d]ennoch ergibt sich aus der Kombination von exotistischen, historischen Bildern und Schrift bzw. Text über eine zeitgenössische Japanerin in Deutschland ein spannungsvolles Ganzes” (“The combination of exotic, historical images together with writing, or in other words text, about a Japanese woman living in Germany creates a kind of suspenseful whole”; 137).

While Kersting’s analysis of these photographs and their historical and cultural significance with respect to the Japanese protagonist is without equal in secondary scholarship, there is more that needs to be said in terms of how these photographs contribute to the overall effect of this text. I argue that this effect is consistent with the text’s over-arching counter-ethnographic approach that exposes these particular photographic representations as heavily mediated and invested, and which then challenges the very possibility of objectively representing ‘authenticity’ and the seemingly incontrovertible knowledge of the ‘Other’ gained by visual images. The instability and ambiguity of the photograph are central to the complex construction of the protagonist’s identity in this text, and thus the following will investigate the diverse deployment of photographs and photographic histories present in the visual and textual content that has hitherto been absent from any discussion of Tawada’s writing.

As noted above, Das Bad literally employs photographic images as context and background to a linguistic code that is rife with photographic content and themes. Moreover, without any indication as to the origin of the photographed subjects adorning its pages the text is
implicitly situating itself within theories of photography and imaging technologies from Benjamin to Baudrillard. These images are essentially copies without originals, false representations with the pretence of reality in the sense of Baudrillard’s simulacra, and seem to exist without an external equivalent – meaning there is no original object to which they correspond. It is certainly no accident that each photographed subject is repeated at least twice in the images in this text, emphasizing its multiplicity and its reproducibility, and as a consequence there is an unmistakable disavowal of originality. Furthermore, in relation to the reproducibility and repetition of the photographs, in addition to the images of naked women there is also an image of a mirror present among these photographs. While I will refer later in this chapter to the crucial role played by the mirror in the protagonist’s identity construction, the inclusion of the mirror among the photographic images in the text should not go overlooked with respect to its unstable status as an ethnographic object. And especially if we consider the extent to which Das Bad is a refraction of Barthes’s Empire of Signs, then Barthes’s thoughts on the culturally specific symbolic function of the mirror as the ultimate empty sign and its implication of repetition without origin resonate here. Barthes states:

In the West, the mirror is an essentially narcissistic object: man conceives a mirror only in order to look at himself in it; but in the Orient, apparently, the mirror is empty; it is the symbol of the very emptiness of symbols (‘The mind of the perfect man,’ says one Tao master, ‘is like a mirror. It grasps nothing but repulses nothing. It receives but does not retain’): the mirror intercepts only other mirrors, and this infinite reflection is emptiness itself (which, as we know, is form). Hence the Haiku reminds us of what has never happened to us; in it we

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36 In the era of simulation, reproduction is key. The difference between the real and its representation is erased. For one of the most influential articulations of ‘simulacra’, see Baudrillard’s Simulacra and Simulation.
recognize a repetition without origin, an event without cause, a memory without person, a language without moorings. (*Empire of Signs* 78-79)

Walter Grond implicitly connects this quote with *Das Bad* in his assertion that “*Das Bad* ist auf den Spiegel geschrieben, in den sie schaut. Ich denke an die nackten Körper der Frauen auf dem Papier, aber sie ist im Spiegel nicht zu sehen, wie die Körper der Toten nicht zu sehen sind … Der Spiegel ist nicht nur nicht leer, er ist Symbol für die Leere der Symbole” (“‘The Bath’ is written on the mirror in which [the protagonist; J.R.] looks. I am thinking of the naked female bodies on the paper, but she can’t be seen in the mirror, just as the bodies of the dead cannot be seen … The mirror is not only not empty, it is symbolic of the emptiness of symbols”; 100). Both Barthes and Grond are promoting here the poststructural notion of the mirror as symbolic of the emptiness of the sign, and especially for Barthes the mirror of his imagined ‘Orient’ is indicative of the infinite play of signifiers, or ‘language without moorings’ as he calls it. In *Das Bad*, as I will later highlight, the mirror and the photograph are being figured as both visually and conceptually analogous symbols through the combined visual and textual content. They both operate as points of identification, but are also symbolic of repetition and a disavowal of originality. Neither the photograph nor the mirror can be taken as direct reflections of an unmediated reality or as connected to a stable referent, but rather can be viewed as constantly changing representations, and as self-reflexive symbols of the one *doing* the representing (in this case the photographer) rather than the object *being* represented.

Although we are now in a digital and post-photographic age and nearly seventy-five years have passed since his seminal work “Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit,” there is still a relevant theoretical dovetailing between *Das Bad* and Benjamin’s focus on the effect of mechanically reproducing images. This ability to mechanically reproduce and circulate multiple copies of images not only influences artistic practices and how
the public is able to access and engage with art, but it also has a significant impact on the relationship between representation and notions of authenticity and originality. The individuals represented in the photographs in *Das Bad* have become photographic subjects, meaning they are now subjected to a multiplicity of ideologically and historically infused discourses embedded in representational practices, and thus they have abdicated any claim to individuality. As Benjamin points out, though without the ideological underpinning, “indem sie die Reproduktion vervielfältigt, setzt sie an die Stelle seines einmaligen Vorkommens sein massenweises. Und indem sie der Reproduktion erlaubt, dem Aufnehmenden in seiner jeweiligen Situation entgegenzukommen, aktualisiert sie das Reproduzierte” (“the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object reproduced”; “Das Kunstwerk” 141; “The Work of Art” 220). This technique of mechanical reproducibility serves to dislocate, de-contextualize and potentially re-contextualize the photographed subjects in ways very dissimilar from their original rendering. While “das Hier und Jetzt des Originals macht den Begriff seiner Echtheit aus” (“the presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity”; “Das Kunstwerk” 139; “The Work of Art” 219), now the reader of these images need not know the referent rendered on the photographic page in order to formulate a seemingly verifiable opinion, making the image open to multiple and divergent readings and interpretations that are limited only by the reader’s own parameters of knowledge and experience. Spatial and temporal limitations have been erased by the ability to reproduce and circulate these images, and therefore they have taken on the status of mobile cultural objects. Of course for Benjamin the ability to reproduce and circulate images to a wider audience irrespective of traditionally
restrictive hierarchies like class or education made this new form of technical reproducibility a
more democratic, inclusive and less elitist practice of representation.\footnote{Benjamin also draws attention to the destruction of the ‘aura’ through mechanical reproduction, and in this case by means of photographic reproduction, in his “A Short History of Photography.” He states “the prizing of the object from its shell, the destruction of its aura is the mark that the sense of the sameness of things in the world has grown to such an extent that by means of reproduction even the unique is made to yield up its uniqueness” 21.}

As is the case with any engagement with photographic images, the deployment of the photographs in Das Bad, and especially their interpretation, is extremely complex and often paradoxical. On the one hand, with the destruction of the ‘aura’ that surrounds the reproduced image due to the nature of mechanical reproduction, there is an erosion of the connection between ‘source’ and ‘image’. Such an erosion effects a concomitant alteration and destabilization of the notion of originality, and therefore, authenticity itself. Without having any credible evidence as to the source of Das Bad’s photographs, or more importantly the historical, cultural or social context from which they were taken, these photographs transmit to the observer only surface, two-dimensional, monochrome details. “The insufficiency of the decontextualized image” means that “what you see is not necessarily what you get” (Jay 163), as it is especially necessary when reading photographic images to have some sense of the context of the rendering and its reception if one is to establish a plausible line of connotative meaning. Documentary photography provides a different context for legibility than commercial or advertising photography, and thus a viewer must recognize the codes of second-order meaning embedded in a photograph that are based on the context of its rendering and on the circumstances of its reception. The American critic Mary Price, in her book The Photograph: A Strange, Confined Space, argues that context and description of the photograph in its reception and usage are most significant in the determination of meaning, as the relationship between the image and the actual reality to which it belonged is but one element in the construction of its message. Because the photographic images in Das Bad have been decontextualized and then recontextualized in this
text for what I must presume is a very different readership than was originally intended, the potential therefore for connotative meaning proliferates, though not without parameters. These images must be read in dialogue with the written text, and in the context of a variety of photographic histories to which they relate: ethnographic, colonial, tourism, erotic and even personal and amateur photography.

2.4 THE RHETORIC OF THE IMAGE AND THE PARADOX OF THE PHOTOGRAPH

Before I address the images in Das Bad within the context of different types of photography and their historical, cultural and social implications, I will first attend to the crucial problem and paradox of reading photographic images, for here we find the source of complexity for photographic literacy. Historically, the power and authority of the photograph as a medium of representation and as a historical artefact lie in its evidentiary quality as an objective, first hand witness to the person or event represented. Alan Sekula, in his straw man account of photographic veracity, professes that the ostensible power of the medium resides in its ability to represent nature itself. It delivers an unmediated copy of reality, and consequently “the propositions carried through the medium are unbiased and therefore true” (“On the Invention” 86). Photograph literally means ‘light writing,’ and in its earliest instantiation as the Daguerreotype was referred to as a ‘mirror image’ or a ‘mirror with a memory’ due in part to the fact that the copper plate upon which the image was inscribed was silver-coated, giving it the effect of a mirror. It was also labelled as a mirror though because it was viewed as a direct and objective reflection of reality uncompromised by a human agent (and in contrast to Talbot’s creation, did not contain a negative, thus making each image unique and un-reproducible). Unlike preceding forms of representation like painting, drawing, sculpting, and of course

38 From the Greek photo-, form of phos meaning ‘light’ and -graphy meaning “process of writing, recording or description” from Greek -graphein “write, express by written characters.”
language, photography was a mechanical medium of representation and thus did not emerge as a product of culture, was not infected by cultural determinations, and therefore belonged purely to nature. William Henry Fox Talbot, who along with Louis Daguerre and Nicéphore Niépce was attributed with developing and popularizing photography, referred to the camera as ‘the pencil of nature’ in a series of books of the same name featuring photographic images, while Samuel Morse, inventor of the telegraph, articulated his admiration for photographic truth and fidelity when he claimed that photographs “cannot be called copies of nature, but portions of nature herself” (Sekula 86). Since photography was elevated above communicative techniques compromised by the human hand and its cultural codes, it was considered a kind of universal language, one that was infinitely more immediate and accessible to its recipient. Bernd Stiegler points to this ‘achievement’ whereby the photograph supersedes language as a communicative medium:

Gerade dank der ihr zugeschriebenen Objektivität sei die Photographie allen anderen Sprachen überlegen und könne endlich die babylonische Sprachverwirrung aufheben, indem sie die Zeichen und die Dinge miteinander gewissermaßen auf natürlichem Wege so eng verknüpft, daß das Band unauflösbar ist. (Theoriegeschichte der Photographie 337)

It is exactly because of the objectivity ascribed to it that photography is superior to all other languages, and is finally able to quash the Babylonian language confusion. Photography connects sign and thing so tightly with one another in the most natural way, so that the bond seems inseparable.

Photography as a ‘human invention’ is problematic, as Talbot, Daguerre and Niépce all trumpeted photography as originating in nature. It is spontaneous, the product of a flash of light, and thus does not belong to a progressive line of print media. See Photography and its Critics 2-7 for a more expansive introduction into the genesis of photographic development, and pages 15-21 in the aptly titled subchapter “Inventing Photography’s Inventors.”

Photography’s capacity to register things-as-they-really-are is trumpeted by the likes of Fox Talbot, Berenice Abbot, Cartier-Bresson and Moholy-Nagy. See Sontag 119-21 for an overview of photography’s relation to realism.
While it is difficult to dispute that the image developed by the photographic process was seemingly a more faithful depiction of reality than was previously possible with preceding representative techniques, the idea that this new Bildsprache or ‘language of images’ was somehow a natural, universal language and guarantor of objectivity soon revealed itself as untenable. Because the photographic process is a near instantaneous capture and representation of the moment, where “photo sensitive emulsion necessarily registers the distribution of light to which it is exposed” as Victor Burgin puts it (“Photographic Practice” 61), there is the feeling that the photograph contains a ‘trace of the real’. This is what Barthes would later translate into semiotic language as “a message without a code” (“Rhetoric of the Image” 25). Although Barthes himself, in the very same essay and in “The Photographic Message,” would subsequently highlight the paradox of an uncoded message, it is nevertheless this “aura of mythic neutrality” surrounding the photograph that lends it its authoritative currency and its persistent status as a testament to the way someone or something really was in reality (Sekula 87). Yet the paradox of the photograph as a “message without a code” becomes evident when the culturally and socially embedded elements in the image are deciphered. Stiegler sets up the ontology of the photograph in Barthes’s text:

Wenn man die Photographie als Sprache versteht, muß sie, um verstanden zu werden, notwendig Zeichen und somit codiert sein. Wir hätten es daher mit kulturell wie gesellschaftlich codierten Zeichen zu tun, der immer wieder angenommene Natürlichkeit Ergebnis von kulturellen Operationen ist und dann auch Gegenstand der Kritik werden kann. (Theoriegeschichte der Photographie 344)

If photography is to be understood as a language, in order for it to be comprehended it must also be a sign and thus coded. We would therefore be
dealing with culturally and socially coded signs, whose assumed naturalness is in fact a product of cultural factors, and which would consequently make them objects of criticism.

In viewing photography as language, however valid its claims to reflecting an objective and authentic reality, it becomes subject to the cultural, historical, social and material conditions external to itself that inform any kind of literacy - whatever the sign system may be.

Roland Barthes was certainly aware of the complexity of reading photographs as one would a language. Not only did he reveal this awareness in the above mentioned essays, but also, and more acutely, in an interview conducted shortly before his death with Angelo Schwarz and Guy Mandery:

To call photography a language is both true and false. It’s false, in the literal sense, because the photographic image is an analogical reproduction of reality, and as such it includes no discontinuous element that could be called sign: there is literally no equivalent of a word or letter in a photograph. But the statement is true insofar as the composition and style of a photo function as a secondary message that tells us about the reality depicted and the photographer himself: this is connotation, which is language. Photographs always connote something different from what they show on the plane of denotation. (“On Photography” 353)

The photographic paradox then, according to Barthes, lies in the fact that a photograph consists of both denotative (meaning image as exact analogon of the referent) and connotative (meaning the cultural, historical, subjective, and interpretive) messages. However, it is this perceived absence of a code “that reinforces the myth of photographic ‘naturalness’” (“Rhetoric of the Image” 33), which can ultimately serve the ideological function of transforming the appearance
of cultural phenomena into natural phenomena. The denoted message can appear “as a kind of Adamic state of the image; utopianly rid of its connotations, the image would become radically objective, i.e., ultimately innocent” (31). Barthes, and many since, sought to unmask the process of naturalization that subsumes the cultural under the natural, the invested under the objective. Geoffrey Batchen points to the photograph as a potentially “powerful ideological weapon because photography works to naturalize a view of the world that is in fact always political and interested” (Photography Degree Zero 8). The naturalized view is so dangerous because when beliefs and assumptions sediment into common-sense, into the taken-for-granted, they are placed beyond question and serve to maintain the dominant order.

Despite the seemingly one-to-one relation of object to image, the photographic image, like language and text, is contingent on not only the referent, but also on codes of perception and recognition, as Umberto Eco outlines in his “Critique of the Image.” In this seminal essay Eco details the multiple conventions of perception that determine how we read photographs like other sign systems. He also recognizes that we have now abandoned any theory that suggests the photographic image is an exact analogue of reality – in contrast to Barthes’s assertion that both a denotative and connotative message are simultaneously present. And while he meticulously outlines the conditions and processes of codification involved in the transmission, recognition and perception of photographs, these codes are not necessarily evident to the average reader of images, and thus photographs continue to be read at face value. Photographic literacy, like all

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41 While a number of Barthes’s texts are dedicated to exposing the ideological underpinnings in cultural practices through techniques of demythification and denaturalization, Mythologies makes this explicit in the line: “the starting point of these reflections was usually a feeling of impatience at the sight of the ‘naturalness’ with which newspapers, art and common sense constantly dress up a reality which, even though it is the one we live in, is undoubtedly determined by history ... I resented seeing Nature and History confused at every turn, and I wanted to track down, in the decorative display of what-goes-without-saying, the ideological abuse which, in my view, is hidden there” 11.
42 Umberto Eco’s “Critique of the Image” outlines a list of iconic codes, such as those of perception, recognition, transmission, taste and style, which can be recognized in every photographic image. Eco contends that the theory of the photo as an analogue of reality has long since been abandoned, as now “we know that the image which takes shape on celluloid is analogous to the retinal image but not to that which we perceive. We know that sensory phenomena are transcribed, in the photographic emulsion, in such a way that even if there is a causal link with the real phenomena, the graphic images formed can be considered as wholly arbitrary with respect to these phenomena” 33.
forms of literacy, is learned over time, and unlike linguistic literacy, the photograph effectively conceals the multiple and diverse codings that infuse every image behind a perceived objectivity and ‘aura of mythic neutrality’.

Regardless of whether a viewer sees the paradoxical presence of two codes of meaning in a photograph or not, it is difficult to deny the photograph’s power to serve as a faithful recorder of reality. As Susan Sontag claims, “the camera record justifies. A photograph passes for incontrovertible proof that a given thing happened” (On Photography 5). The notion that photographs “furnish evidence,” to use Sontag’s words, is directly connected to the first order, denotative message that the photograph transmits. With regard to the photographic images on the pages of Das Bad, however, reading these images as messages without codes would be extremely challenging. While the photographed subjects are seemingly represented in as natural a state as a human can be (meaning they are au naturel, completely naked), this nonetheless does not cleanse them of connotative meaning. In Empire of Signs Barthes makes a comparable move towards washing away meaning with the statement: “to imagine, to fabricate a face, not impassive or callous (which is still a meaning), but as though emerged from water, rinsed of meaning, is a way of answering death” (91). Walter Grond hints at connecting this Barthes quote with Das Bad in his slightly less opaque remark:

Gestures of ideas comprise Yoko Tawada’s figures, cleansed of all expressivity. Roland Barthes named this Japanese impenetrability as a particular way of avoiding death. Faces have the effect of appearing from water, cleansed of all sense or meaning. Not only are these forms not prescribed by life and reality, but they expressively keep the quality of a sign. Signs, as I read them in Roland Barthes, are cut from their referential alibi.

The spirit of Barthes and Grond’s reflections suggest an idealistic refashioning of reading faces and bodily figures, pointing to bodies cleansed of pre-determined and naturalized meanings and read like signs disconnected from a stable or static signified. In Tawada’s text the bath is similarly coded as the site of the protagonist’s constant metamorphosis and a signifying fluidity, but it is also symbolic of the administrative space of a normative body ideal that requires cleansing and policing of the bodily boundary.

The absence of clothing represented in the visual and textual bathing scenes, however, is by no means indicative of an absence of meaning and cleansing of connotation. Clothing is, of course, an immediate signifier of cultural, class and historical meanings, and were these women wearing clothes an astute observer would be able to determine something of their heritage or context. Codes of dress are always ideologically laden, and thus stripping the images in Das Bad of this level of signification might, at first, suggest that they be (mis)read like a photograph: as uncodified, as part of nature rather than culture, as evidence of reality. What seems more productive though, given the intermedial nature of this text and its engagement with

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43 In Roland Barthes’s *The Fashion System* the author develops a semiotic reading of choice and combination of clothing and the ideologically (bourgeois) investment in arbitrarily assigning preference to certain clothes as more fashionable than others. Malcolm Barnard’s *Fashion as Communication* delves even further into the ideological implications of fashion.
photographic practice, is that these photographs be read as reflections on the variegated use of the body in photographic representation, here in all its manifestations as the nude body, the female body, and the foreign or exotic body. In these images there is a larger politics of power and ethnographic representation at work that is also in dialogue with the linguistic code, and it is this politics of power and representation that I will be investigating shortly with regard to a number of textual examples.

2.5 OBJECTIFICATION AND COMMODIFICATION OF THE PHOTOGRAPHIC SUBJECT

With respect to the actual photographic images in this text, it seems to me that they conceal more than they reveal of the subjects rendered. As mentioned, they have been retouched by the human hand to blur or mask the subjects’ features, and as such transmit only the coarsest signifiers of human identity. The knowledge gained from such empirical testimony is inimical because it is so superficial, even though it has the gloss of objective reality. The affected ambiguity of these photographs underscores the complexity and paradoxical nature of reading photographic images. They seem to be asking more questions of the viewer than they are providing answers. Even the most obvious ‘facts’ delivered by these images are problematic and self-consciously reflective, starting with perhaps the most conspicuous detail punctuating each photographed subject: the subject’s naked body. The paradox of the naked or nude body lies in the tension between the seemingly innocent, natural and objective body without clothing, and the connotations of sexuality, commodification, voyeurism, scopophilia and fetishism that are frequently entangled in naked photographic images, especially when these are images of female.

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44 Kerstin Gernig’s edited book *Nacktheit: Ästhetische Inszenierungen im Kulturvergleich* touches on a number of ways that representations and the reality of nudity have prominently figured in mythology, religion, eroticism, sexuality, pornography, commodification and discipline. The book addresses how understanding nudity differs depending on gender, age, culture and era, and encompasses a variety of approaches including sociological, literary studies, historical, ethnological, culture studies and art historical.
nudes. John Berger teases apart the subtle though illuminating, culturally invested semantic distinction between naked and nude bodies with:

To be naked is simply to be without clothes, whereas the nude is a form of art...

[T]he nude is always conventionalized – and the authority for its conventions derives from a certain tradition of art. The nude also relates to lived sexuality.

To be naked is to be oneself. To be nude is to be seen naked by others and yet not recognized for oneself. A naked body has to be seen as an object in order to become a nude. Nakedness reveals itself. Nudity is placed on display.

To be naked is to be without disguise. (Ways of Seeing 53)

Objectively speaking, the photographed subjects in Das Bad are naked, they are without clothing, and therefore they are in their natural state. But because every image is read through a code, they are simultaneously subjectively nude and have been contextualized in a “fantasy space where the hidden, the private, and the forbidden is made available to the eye” (Clarke 131).

Several of the images in this text actually indicate that the subjects are either involved in Schönheitspflege or ‘beautification’, or are at a bath, which, as Ruth Kersting points out with reference to articles by Kerstin Gernig and Claudia Delank, provides a provocative cultural-historical frame for contextualizing the images in the original edition of Das Bad. As a means

45 In her book Skin: On the Cultural Border between Self and Other, Claudia Benthien notes that “we still believe that something is true if it is naked, the absence of makeup is still seen as a mode of authenticity, and nakedness is still the ideal of the natural ... Nakedness is ... not an ontological category but rather a relationship that always relates to something else. Consequently, what we define as skin is also profoundly shaped by history and culture” ix.
46 Kerstin Gernig’s “Photographs furnish evidence’: Zu Funktion und Bedeutung der Photographie im Kontext des europäischen Japonismus” and Claudia Delank’s “Japanbilder – Bilder aus Japan. Yokohama-Photographie in der ostasiatischen und europäischen Bildtradition des 19. Jahrhunderts” are the two articles Kersting refers to. Delank’s article, which preceded Gernig’s, delivers similar examples of the popularity of photographs of Japanese women at the bath, and also delivers this relevant quote from Oscar Wilde, especially in the context of Tawada’s texts like Das Bad and “Eigentlich darf man es niemandem sagen, aber Europa gibt es nicht”: “Do you really imagine that the Japanese people, as they are presented to us in art, have any existence? If you do you have never understood Japanese art at all. The Japanese people are the deliberate self-conscious creation of certain individual artists ... The actual people who live in Japan are not unlike the general run of the English people; that is to say they are extremely commonplace, and have nothing curious or extraordinary about them. In fact, the whole of Japan is a pure invention. There is no such country, there are no such people” 274. Both articles suggest that the effectiveness of the photograph to construct an image of Japanese ‘reality’ was due to its ability to accurately and objectively represent
of highlighting the significance of photography in the ethnographic construction of Japan in the Western imaginary, Gernig’s article “‘Photographs Furnish Evidence’” demonstrates that through travel reports and ethnographic photographs the image of the far-away, foreign and exotic world of Japan was visually and textually constructed for European consumption. Women beautifying themselves and naked women at the bath were among the most popular photographic motifs for both European and Japanese photographers, and these photographs played a substantial role in the eroticization of the Japanese woman in Western perceptions. The inclusion in Das Bad of these stereotypical photographs of Asian women at a bath is clearly linked to this representational tradition, but in an effectively counter-ethnographic way that subverts and undermines ‘knowledge’ of the heavily manipulated, mediated, and reproduced ‘other’ through visual representation. And whether the naked women represented in Das Bad were photographed at a public or private bath is difficult to say, but what is apparent is that they have been removed from a closed space and have been recontextualized for public viewing and consumption. The poses of these photographed subjects seem carefully and consciously choreographed, for if we consider the most recognizable selections from the thirty-two images provided, those being the images uncovered by, or stripped of, written text, it is clear that they are avoiding the camera’s gaze by looking downwards or off into the distance.

The nature of the photographic medium invites looking, yet the voyeuristic pleasure realized with these particular images stems from these photographed subjects being seemingly unaware that they are the object of the gaze, evidenced by the fact that they are not looking back at the camera. Voyeurism, as Liz Wells describes, is “a mode of looking related to the exercise of power in which a body becomes a spectacle for someone else’s pleasure, a world divided into the nature. See also Eleanor Hight’s “The Many Lives of Beato’s ‘Beauties’” 126-58 that analyzes the photographs by Felice Beato of Japanese courtesans and geishas. This article suggests Beato’s photographs not only reveal the traditional market of Western males for sexually alluring Asian women, but also the exploitation of these women by their own countrymen who forced them into positions of servitude.
active ‘lookers’ and the passive ‘looked at’” (171). The visual nudity in the text situates the reader as the voyeur, as there is something undeniably taboo in gazing at these naked females, their age unknown, who have been put on display without their knowledge or consent. The sense of passivity created by this avoidance of the camera’s gaze gives the impression that the viewer, or voyeur, has a kind of power over the photographed subject. John Urry points to this sense of control created by photographic representation:

To photograph is in some ways to appropriate the object being photographed. It is a power/knowledge relationship. To have visual knowledge of an object is in part to have power, even if only momentarily, over it. Photography tames the object of the gaze, the most striking examples being of exotic cultures. (The Tourist Gaze 139)\(^47\)

Although there is nothing explicitly obscene or pornographic about the images in this text, the interplay of pose, nudity, erotic and exotic intimates that these women are being represented and read through a fairly narrow set of determining signifiers that make them objects of desire. Moreover, as photographs they become literally material objects which a viewer can hold and possess; or put differently, they become fetish objects that are viewed as the focus of sexual desire. Christian Metz’s article “Photography and Fetish” compares and contrasts film and photography and the nature of each media with respect to their fetish qualities, ultimately coming to the conclusion that “film is more capable of playing on fetishism, photography more capable of itself becoming a fetish” (90). Metz points to the fact that, because of its qualities, photography is more like a slice of nature that freezes a moment in time. He explains this with “in all photographs, we have this same act of cutting off a piece of space and time, of keeping it unchanged while the world around continues to change” (85). It is this static rendering, this

\(^47\)John Urry’s The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies will feature later in this chapter with regard to the relationship between the photographer Xander and his photographic object / girlfriend.
subject frozen in time, which facilitates the transformation of a human subject into an inert object that can be gazed at and fixated upon – or in other words, fetishized.

Das Bad not only points to the objectification of women through photographic images, but also to how in everyday life women are subjected to a kind of objectifying masculine gaze, one which women ultimately internalize and then use to self-surveille. John Berger, again from his Ways of Seeing, transitions from ‘photographic’ to ‘everyday’ vision and provides a particularly germane description of this internalization of the gaze with respect to Tawada’s text. He argues that “a woman’s self being has been split into two. A woman must continually watch herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself” (46). Berger expands on this idea with “men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of women in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision: a sight” (47). The idea here is that the way men look at women in photographs, as objects of desire, slips or spills over into everyday life and affects the way that men look at women in reality. Moreover, as women are aware that they are being looked at as objects, they begin to survey, surveille and discipline themselves as objects of vision. Celia Lury, with reference to Foucault’s notion that the subject interiorizes the gaze and becomes his or her own overseer, further extends the point and asserts that “subjectivity of the individual is developed by self-surveillance or reflection upon his or her own appearance, as if it were a mirror of the soul” (Prosthetic Culture 10). This self-surveillance through reflection as constitutive of the individual’s subjectivity is a central theme in Das Bad, as indicated in the opening lines where she attempts to conform to a photographic idealization of herself, but which she inevitably fails to appropriate. This crucial scene will be the focal point of the following pages.
2.6 THE PHOTOGRAPH, THE MIRROR AND PROCESSES OF IDENTIFICATION IN DAS BAD

Because images are essentially silent and infinitely interpretable on their own, the theoretical context provided above must be read in relation to both the photographic images covering the pages of Das Bad, and in dialogue with the written text, as image-text, itself. This will permit a much clearer understanding of their context and meaning to be established; therefore, I will now demonstrate how they function in connection with the linguistic code. To begin, the first two paragraphs of Tawada’s text simultaneously serve a descriptive and performative function in relation to the work as a whole. These paragraphs descriptively, actively and conceptually provide a frame for the reader that works as a point of entry into the content and theoretical implications of the text. The opening lines read:

Der menschliche Körper soll zu achtzig Prozent aus Wasser bestehen, es ist daher auch kaum verwunderlich, dass sich jeden Morgen ein anderes Gesicht im Spiegel zeigt. Die Haut an Stirn und Wangen verändert sich von Augenblick zu Augenblick wie der Schlamm in einem Sumpf, je nach der Bewegung des Wassers, das unter ihm fließt, und der Bewegung der Menschen, die auf ihm ihre Fußspuren hinterlassen.

Neben dem Spiegel hing in einem Rahmen eine Portraitaufnahme von mir. Mein Tag begann damit, dass ich beim Vergleich des Spiegelbilds mit der Photographie Unterschiede entdeckte, die ich dann mit Schminke korrigierte. (Das Bad 7) 48

Eighty percent of the human body is made of water, so it isn’t surprising that one sees a different face in the mirror each morning. The skin of the forehead and cheeks changes shape from moment to moment like the mud of a swamp, shifting

48 Although it is the unpaginated, 1993 third printing of the first edition of Das Bad with the full set of photographic images so essential to the text’s composite meaning that I am using in this analysis, for the sake of ease of reference and current spelling I will provide page numbers and quotes from the new, paginated 2010 edition.
with the movements of the water below and the footsteps of the people walking above it.

I had hung a framed photograph of myself beside the mirror. The first things I would do when I got up was to compare my reflection with the photograph, checking for discrepancies which I then corrected with makeup. (“The Bath” 3)

What becomes immediately evident from these two paragraphs is the establishment of a tension between the fluid and malleable body made up of eighty percent water that changes from day to day, and the fixed, frozen and static image inscribed on the photograph that functions as a kind of regulatory model against which the protagonist measures and stylizes her self-identity. At the same time, there is also a tension between notions of surface and depth at work, as the body is being represented as prone to movements and influences taking place beneath and within, while the mirror and photographic images are surface reflections and representations that influence from without.

Throughout the text notions of surface and depth serve to situate the photograph amidst this paradox of change and stasis. The depiction of a different face that appears every day in the mirror image can also be read as reflecting the different photographic images that appear on the pages of the text. In both the linguistic and visual media the face that we literally see at the beginning of the text is not the same face that we see at the end, although each face does occasionally repeat itself. Bluntly put, there is a process of subject constitution developing in these opening lines of Das Bad that underscores the complexities and paradoxes involved in the construction of subjectivity. On the one hand there is a sense of transformation and human agency exemplified by the constant repetition of difference and the sense that she has some control over her appearance, but this is contrasted by the power of prescriptive and binding norms to which the subject is unconsciously beholden. The photograph here is representative of
these normative and ideologically infused discourses that act on, and ultimately constitute, the subject – not in any kind of overtly subjugating way, but in the quotidian performance of daily rituals, e.g., the application of make-up. Marshall McLuhan’s insightful chapter “The Photograph” from Understanding Media aptly underscores the impact photographic representation has had on the subject’s process of identification and self-consciousness. He remarks:

The complete transformation of human sense-awareness by [photographic] form involves a development of self-consciousness that alters facial expression and cosmetic makeup as immediately as it does our bodily stance, in public or in private ... if outer posture is affected by the photograph, so with our inner postures and the dialogue with ourselves. The age of Jung and Freud is the age of the photograph, the age of the full gamut of self-critical attitudes. (197)

The photograph then not only serves the purpose of a seemingly accurate representation of the subject, but it is also complicit in the construction of the subject’s sense of selfhood and self-identity. Photography does not just passively reveal what was already there, but it actively constructs how a subject knows him/herself, and how one is known by others.49

In the sense that the protagonist is repeatedly employing images, manifested as a mirror and a photographic representation, to form an identity, the images then can be read as points of identification to which she relates and measures herself. Identification here is meant in the

49Christina Kraenzle’s dissertation “Mobility, Space and Subjectivity” 83-101 outlines how mapping, in a similar sense to photographic imaging, actively creates reality rather than objectively represents it. Photography and mapping have an intertwined history, and the Victorian Lady Eastlake even goes so far as to call photographic portraits ‘facial maps’. I quote Lady Eastlake in full from Tristam Powell’s “Fixing the Face,” where she claims “what are nine tenths of these facial maps, called photographic portraits, but accurate landmarks and measurements for loving eyes and memories todeck with beauty and animate with expression, perfect certainty that the ground plan is founded upon fact” 10. At one time both maps and photographs enjoyed the status of objective and unmediated representations of reality. Olu Oguibe comments on the impact of this naïve faith, stating “resting on this supposed fidelity and transparency, whole disciplines came to rely upon the evidentiary potentials of the photograph, sociology appealing to it for concrete statistical purposes, anthropology for indubitable evidence of the evolutionary order of the human species and by extension, justification for its mission of salvage exploration outside Europe” 571.
context of “[p]rocesses whereby the individual subject assimilates an aspect, property or attribute of that which is seen and is transformed, wholly or partially, after the model which the other – in this instance the image – provides. Personality is constituted through such imaginary identifications” (Wells 282). In his essay “Remembering Fanon,” Homi Bhabha remarks that “the question of identification is never the affirmation of a pre-given identity, never a self-fulfilling prophecy – it is always the production of an ‘image’ of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image … For identification, identity is never an a priori, nor a finished product; it is only ever the problematic process of access to an ‘image’ of totality” (117). Identification with a mirror image as a process of subject constitution naturally summons Lacan’s ‘mirror stage’, a theoretical interplay that is certainly not lost on Tawada scholars. 50 Sabine Fischer, for instance, notes in her 1997 articles “Verschwinden ist schön” and “Wie der Schlamm in einem Sumpf”:

Der Blick in den Spiegel offenbart die Flexibilität der Ich-Identität, aber auch ihre Anfälligkeit für Fremdeinwirkungen. Individual- und Sozialpsychologie benutzen traditionsgemäß die Metapher des Spiegels zur Erklärung von Prozessen der Fremdbestimmung und Entfremdung des Subjekts. Lacans Ausführungen über das Spiegelstadium des Kleinkindes basieren auf der Grundannahme, daß im Verlaufe der Beschäftigung des Kleinkindes mit seinem Spiegelbild eine

50 Kersting also addresses the mirror motif and implied connection to Lacan in this text: “Das Motiv verweist mit den psychoanalytischen Ausführungen Lacans über das Spiegelbild als ‘Matrix für die spätere Ich-Identität’ auf eine bestimmte Entwicklungsphase des Subjekts” 155. She then goes on to suggest another direction fort the motif with “[i]n einer weiteren Lesart aufbauend auf traditionellen japanischen Vorstellungen von Spiegeln wird hier die Möglichkeit eröffnet, im Spiegel einen ‘Durchgang’ für abwesende oder tote Menschen aus einer fremden Welt zu sehen.” Fischer also highlights the significance of the mirror image for creating a subject’s concept of the self with “[e]thnische Minderheiten sehen sich im Spiegel der dominanten Kultur; Frauen reagieren auf die Bilder, die ihnen von der überlegenen Männerwelt entgegen werden” (“Wie der Schlamm” 66). Fischer concludes that “Tawadas Protagonistin im Das Bad formt ihre Identität in Beziehung zu den von Männern konstruierten, durch geschichtliche Tradition verfestigten Weiblichkeitsbildern aus zwei Kulturen. Ihre Reaktionen auf diese Fremdbilder sind widersprüchlich” 66.
‘Identifikation’ stattfindet: ... eine beim Subjekt durch die Aufnahme eines Bildes ausgelöste Verwandlung. (“Verschwinden ist schön”105)

The gaze into the mirror reveals the flexibility of the I-identity, but also its susceptibility to foreign influences. Individual and social psychology traditionally use the metaphor of the mirror to explain the processes of constituting what is foreign and the alienation of the subject. Lacan’s take on the mirror stage of infants is based on the premise that during the course of the infant’s occupation with its mirror image an ‘identification’ takes places … a metamorphosis which happens with the subject’s inculcation of an image.

The most interesting component present in Fischer’s analysis of this opening encounter with the protagonist’s mirror identification comes when she states that this process of identity construction is not merely passive, but rather “die Interpretation des Spiegelbilds ist von einem bestimmten Vorwissen, von Wünschen und Absichten geprägt. Individuen sind bis zu einem gewissen Grad an der Schaffung ihrer Spiegelbilder mitbeteiligt” (“The interpretation of the mirror image is directed by prior knowledge, and by desires and intentions. To a certain extent individuals actively contribute to the construction of their mirror images”; “Verschwinden ist schön” 105). The manner in which the protagonist reacts to these external images is somewhat ambiguous, in the sense that she both adapts to and resists these models. As the opening lines of this text emphasize, the human body is in a state of constant change and flux, as is human identity, and thus the photographic image in this text initially serves as a point of reference and reassurance for a protagonist seeking control of her personhood, but later proves as unstable and contingent as the identity it helps construct.

If we bear in mind that the image to which the protagonist aims to conform is a mediated representation of reality, meaning it is no exact, objective document of truth but rather is rife
with codes of connotation like style, pose, framing, the photographer’s influence, and context of rendering and reception, then it can be read as both an idealization and technique of control. It is an idealization because it is the selected, directed and stylized creation of a photographer (Xander, the protagonist’s boyfriend) who chose to capture that very moment as the one most exemplary of his image of the protagonist. Der Rahmen of this Porträtaufnahme functions as a kind of signifier of human intervention that undermines any pretence of ‘realism’ associated with the photographic portrait. Framing signifies a special status for that particular rendering, the one chosen from an infinite number of possibilities. It also suggests a particular ideological frame for the photograph insofar as one viewpoint is being promoted while everything existing outside of this frame of reference is being discarded. The photograph’s observer ultimately needs to bear in mind more than just the depicted image itself when interpreting a photograph, since the meaning of the photograph cannot be contained within this frame, however much it appears as a literal and figurative boundary separating the fabricated image from the mirror image hanging next to it.

In “Rhetoric of the Image” Barthes makes the etymological connection between image and its root, imitari, and in these opening lines of Das Bad we witness the imitation of an

51The text makes this explicit with “das Foto von mir, das an der Wand neben dem Spiegel befestigt war, hatte Xander vor ein paar Jahren aufgenommen” 25. With regard to the text’s structure, the three main characters in Das Bad (the protagonist, Xander the photographer and the dead woman), make up, as Matsunaga outlines in “Ausländerin, einheimischer Mann, Confidante,” a triadic constellation that can be found in several other Tawada texts. Texts like “Bilderrätsel ohne Bilder,” “Missing Heels” (“Kakato o nakushite”), “Das Leipzig des Lichts und der Gelatine” (“Hikari to zerachin no raipuchihii”), “The Gotthard Railway” (“Gottharto tetsudô”), etc., are all first person narrations taking place in Germany/Europe (or at least not Japan) that feature a Japanese (or Asian) female main character, a German (or European) male lover/friend character, and a female confidante who usually remains unnamed. In Das Bad the constellation consists of the female Japanese protagonist, her German boyfriend/photographer/language instructor Xander and the dead woman as confidante. The more recent Das nackte Auge features a similar pattern, with a female Vietnamese protagonist who comes to (East) Germany and then France, has a German boyfriend (Georg), and a female confidante (Ai Van), although it could be argued that Catherine Deneuve plays the more central role of confidante.

52 Barthes states, “[a]ccording to an ancient etymology, the word image should be linked to the root of imitari” (“Rhetoric of the Image” 21). The psychoanalytic term imago first utilized by Jung in 1912 is also etymologically linked to image, and when considered in relation to Das Bad’s mirror scene, can be productively understood by its OED definition as “a subjective image of someone which a person has subconsciously formed and which continues to influence his attitudes and behaviour.” In the case of the protagonist and her process of identification, the subjective image is that of herself.
image, insofar as the protagonist is attempting to copy a copy of the ‘real’. The photograph has obtained this authority as a mirror of reality, even more real than the mirror that hangs next to it, because of its unique and obviously paradoxical status as an unbiased and unmediated testament, or as a ‘message without a code’ to again cite Barthes. Herein rest the ideological implications of the photograph that, due to the apparent veracity of its denotative message, is read as though it were merely a natural reflection and not a culturally embedded object. It is partly this naturalization of the cultural that lends the photograph its evidentiary and ideological quality, and furthers the notion that real ‘truth’ and ‘knowledge’ can be established from looking at a photograph. Even though photographic realism based on the iconic code of resemblance between referent and image is obviously problematic, the indexical quality of the photograph, meaning the sense that the referent is present in the image, which thus points to its actual existence in the world, its having-been there at the moment of capture, is what really advances the photograph’s power as something that is both seen and felt. While essays like “The Rhetoric of the Image” acknowledge the indexical power of the photograph to connect image and referent, it is really in Camera Lucida where this sentiment becomes most explicit. Barthes emphasizes this with, “I call the ‘photographic referent’ not the optionally real thing to which an image or a sign refers but the necessarily real thing, which has been placed before the lens, without which there would be no photograph” (49). The simultaneous presence of iconic and indexical qualities infuses the photograph with its authority and makes it a powerful point of identification for the protagonist in Das Bad. Especially when placed opposite the mirror, the photograph opens a complex negotiation of identity construction that continues throughout the text.

53 The three codes of communication, as designed by Charles Sanders Peirce, are the iconic, the indexical and the symbolic signs. The iconic sign is one that resembles in its representation the subject represented – a photograph for example. The indexical, as Barthes later addresses in Camera Lucida, is physically linked to, affected by, or seemingly ‘touched’ by, the object it represents. Barthes also sees the photograph as containing this quality. Finally, the symbolic sign, such as words or speech, always require interpretation, and thus symbol and interpretant are inseparable. See Peirce on Signs: Writings on Semiotics by Charles Sanders Peirce for a complete outline of these sign-types.
The photograph and the mirror are juxtaposed to one another in these opening paragraphs in order to immediately thematize, and ultimately problematize, the significance of the image with regard to the construction of human identity and subjectivity. These terms themselves are suggestive of the theoretical interplay between the mirror and the photograph with respect to the construction of the subject, as identity indicates more of a stability and singular core to the individual, while subjectivity points to the processual and indeterminate nature of development that is often done both by and upon the subject.\textsuperscript{54} Both the mirror and the photograph in Das Bad serve as external points of identification for the protagonist, as they seemingly present an image of a unified, coherent, and fixed model with which she can identify and ultimately appropriate. Yet, at the same time, they also underscore the fact that identification is a process of misrecognition of an image external to the self. As ‘objective’ reflections, the mirror and photographic images are misperceived by the subject because they are, in fact, idealizations of reality (despite the seemingly one-to-one relation of referent to image). The mirror image, according to Lacan, presents the illusion of a stability of the ego and promise of return to an original unity, while the photographic image provides the pretence of a stabilized and fixed identity that can be obtained with the daily application of make-up. Because the protagonist identifies with a densely and culturally coded representation and copy of herself, the identity constructed is really the product of repeated imitation rather than a naturally occurring origin.

The mirror stage and the photographic image, as constituents of the subject’s identity construction, point to the constant process of ambivalent identification, imitation and

\textsuperscript{54} Any attempt here to either define or differentiate ‘identity’ and ‘subjectivity’ would be insufficient, but for the purpose of briefly highlighting how these terms are juxtaposed in the above quotation and with respect to Das Bad, I will quote Donald Hall: “one’s identity can be thought of as that particular set of traits, beliefs and allegiances that, in short- or long-term ways, gives one a consistent personality and mode of social being, while subjectivity implies always a degree of thought and self-consciousness about identity, at the same time allowing a myriad of limitations and often unknowable, unavoidable constraints on our ability to fully comprehend identity” 3. There is undoubtedly a certain tension in subjectivity between choice and the illusion of choice, between agency and interpellation, self-conscious and unconscious processes of identification, and forces which constitute and constrain us and which we can never control. In this sense subjectivity connotes a much more complex, dynamic and problematic layering of identities.
internalization that serves to formulate the subject’s sense of self, while they simultaneously underline the instability and absence of a true, singular original identity. The whole process of identification then is as unstable as the ‘muddy swamp’ image from the opening paragraph of this text, and the notion of an ‘original’ identity is proven untenable.

It was previously noted that, while the photograph represents a false idealization of the protagonist to which she identifies, it also acts as a form of control here. The photograph serves to arrest and anchor the play, circulation and proliferation of signifiers of aberration or difference to a prescribed model which the protagonist feels compelled to imitate. Analogously, Diana Tietjens Meyers in her work Gender in the Mirror considers how women internalize oppression and constantly self-police themselves, although often to no avail. Meyers, in reference to Sandra Lee Bartky’s Femininity and Domination, considers the feminine body:

... as an instance of internalized oppression. Through obsessive dieting and exercising, restricted movement and posture, unreciprocated smiling, elaborate makeup and skin-care routines, and alluring ornaments and clothing, women ‘discipline’ their bodies. An undisciplined body is defective, and yet a properly disciplined female body is a body with ‘an inferior status inscribed’ upon it. The attractive woman is ‘object and prey’ for men, for feminine beauty plays up fragility, weakness and immaturity. (8)

Tawada’s protagonist experiences a similar internalization and self-discipline against the mirror and photograph with her rigorous routine of bodily stylization. This daily ritual of self-surveillance is the result of her internalization of the expectations broadcast in the photographic

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55 John Tagg’s The Burden of Representation and The Disciplinary Frame are seminal texts in highlighting the role that photography has played in advancing techniques of surveillance. Of course indebted to Foucault’s work on surveillance and technologies of power, especially in The Burden of Representation Tagg profoundly complicates the evidentiary quality of the photograph, focuses on the historical development of photographic representation and its deployment by different institutions (like legal, medical, governmental), and the centrality of power in this representational technique.
image and underscores the unresolved and interminable tension between the fluid and constantly changing body articulated in the text’s first line, and the static, stabilized, singular and eternal body image embodied by the photograph.

This tension can be further extended if we consider that this daily ceremony of identification with a photograph and a mirror is symbolic of the constant repetition that is necessary to the construction and confirmation of highly compulsory gender, heterosexual and racial norms that the protagonist is compelled to ‘cite’ or ‘perform’ everyday, and which in this case are rather explicitly, albeit symbolically, represented by an almost literal self-stylization with cosmetic make-up. The repetition, or as Butler puts it, the “stylized repetition of acts” (Gender Trouble 179), of gender, racial and sexual norms is a key component in the normalizing work of power that conceals the effect of these norms as if they were natural or biological, as though there were some prior ground or origin to this norm that makes it ‘real’ or ‘authentic’, and thus necessary to appropriate. The photograph in Das Bad serves as this deceptively stable origin, and is symbolic of a fixed, internal essence or natural gender, racial and sexual identity that the protagonist is required to embody. This daily process of ‘doing’ identity through self-stylization, gestures, movements and rituals rather than having an innate, biologically pre-determined identity, is heavily premised on Butler’s concept of gender performativity, whereby the subject repetitively cites, or performs, the normative and naturalized laws and conventions of gendered and racial identity.

In this daily repetition, or imitation, of an already discursively constructed ideal that is by no means naturally sanctioned, there is a resultant destabilization of the regulatory ideal. In “Imitation and Gender Subordination” Butler details the shaky ground upon which identity, and in this case identity as heterosexuality, is performatively constituted:
If heterosexuality [but also gender or race; J.R.] is compelled to repeat itself in order to establish the illusion of its own uniformity and identity, then this is an identity permanently at risk, for what if it fails to repeat, or if the very exercise of repetition is redeployed for a very different performative purpose? If there is, as it were, always a compulsion to repeat, repetition never fully accomplishes identity. That there is a need for a repetition at all is a sign that identity is not self-identical. (24)

In *Das Bad* the protagonist’s ritual of ‘citing’ the gender, racial, ethnic and sexual norms and expectations through identification with the mirror and photograph is an explicit performance of what, in reality, is in fact a very subtle, even apparently natural, enactment of normative and normalized self-presentation and behaviour concealed in discourse and social relations. This repetition is necessary for the subject’s coherence as a subject, but is also exemplary of her incomplete character. And as the text later demonstrates, these norms of gender, race, femininity and ethnicity are vulnerable because of this necessary repetition, since there is also the possibility that they will be repeated and performed otherwise – with a difference. Even though the subject does not have complete control over the terms of her subjectivity, there is the potential to intervene in this circular process. It is therefore crucial to recognize repetition as central to the visual and textual themes, concepts and theory that register throughout this text: from the repetition of the photographic images on the pages that point to their reproducibility and disavowal of originality; to the opening scene where the protagonist is repeated in a daily ritual of appropriating gender and racial norms; to the later depiction of the protagonist repeating the language that Xander teaches her. However, as I will later highlight, in the end the repetitive circuit is finally cut, and her submission to these regulatory norms is ultimately challenged.
2.7 DEATH AND THE PHOTOGRAPHIC MEDIUM

While the photograph hanging next to the mirror figures prominently in the protagonist’s repeated construction of her identity, in a very different sense the photograph and mirror also function together as images against which the protagonist reflects on her own mortality. Immediately following the description of the daily ritual of self-correction with make-up, the text states “im Vergleich zu dem frischen Teint auf dem Foto wirkte das Gesicht im Spiegel blutleer wie das einer Toten. Wahrscheinlich erinnerte mich der Rahmen des Spiegels deshalb an den Rand eines Sargs” (“Compared to the fresh complexion shown in the photograph, the face in the mirror looked bloodless and pale, like the face of a dead person. Perhaps this is why the rectangular frame of the mirror reminded me of a coffin”; Das Bad 7; “The Bath” 3-4”). Because the photograph represents a captured and fixed moment in time, one that can never again be re-captured despite the protagonist’s best efforts during her daily beautification routine, the image serves as an ever-present connection with inevitable death. Although the photographic image itself is static and eternal, the message of this image is that change and ultimately death await the photographed subject regardless of how much she attempts to resurrect the past. In the quote above the blutleer face reflected in the mirror summons an image of future decay, while the mirror’s frame permits the protagonist a view of herself in her own coffin, but only because the contrast provided by the fresh complexion in the photograph connotes an irretrievable antecedent. Susan Sontag addresses this paradoxical element of the photograph when she notes that “all photographs are memento mori. To take a photograph is to participate in another person’s mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time’s relentless melt” (15). While on the one hand the photographic image inscribes and preserves the subject on paper, a subject whose presence is required for the photograph to exist, it is clear to any observer that this moment can never be recovered. As
Barthes notes, “even if the person in the picture is still alive, it’s a moment of this subject’s existence that was photographed, and this moment is gone” (“On Photography” 356).

Profoundly and irreparably shaken by the death of his mother, in Camera Lucida Barthes expresses his experience with reading photographs as an intimate contact with death, and that death is the logical implication of every photographic image. In the same sense that Camera Lucida is a novelistic narrative of Barthes’s connection and relationship to photographs that elicits a sensualistic and phenomenological reaction rather than a semiological reading, the quotations from Das Bad given above likewise narrate the protagonist’s personal experience with the photograph that hangs on her wall, and death is interwoven into that experience. Part of this deathly relation is due to the very nature of the photograph as a fixed and silent rendering of the photographed subject. In “Photography and Fetish” Christian Metz notes that the essence of authority for both photography and death is located within the immobility and silence that mark their nature (83), and further notes that several critics have drawn this connection. These critics include Barthes and Phillipe Dubois, who equated photography with thanatography. Metz then goes on to compare the photograph with a mirror when he observes, “photography is the mirror, more faithful than any actual mirror, in which we witness at every age, our own aging. The actual mirror accompanies us through time, thoughtfully and treacherously; it changes with us so that we appear not to change” (84). The photograph, while a static and frozen image, is a constant reminder of the transitoriness of existence. While on the one hand the photograph preserves ‘life’ by capturing that moment as-it-was on photographic paper, its accompanying message is that the photographed subject is always already in a process of decay because of ‘time’s relentless melt’. This morbid fact is only accentuated when the photograph is placed in contrast to the mirror image.

56 Metz mentions Phillipe Dubois’s L’acte photographique on page 83 in this article.
As the final line of the text indicates ("Ich bin ein transparenter Sarg" ["I am a transparent coffin"]); Das Bad 185; “The Bath” 55), death continues to feature prominently throughout Das Bad. The protagonist, after having fainted in a hotel bathroom, meets and goes home with a woman who has suffered terrible burns to the majority of her body, and who we later find out is, in fact, dead. There is some question as to whether or not this mysterious, nameless victim was murdered or if her death was the result of suicide. According to a woman who lived in the same building, and to a report in the local newspaper, it was the latter of the two. The deceased, approximately fifty years old, lived alone and was reportedly lonely, although she disputes this assertion earlier in the text when the protagonist visits her apartment. The dead woman asks “[l]eben Sie auch alleine? Wer allein lebt, ist gar nicht einsam. Das darf man aber niemandem erzählen. Sonst bringen sie einen um” (“You live alone too, don’t you? Living alone isn’t a bit lonely. But you can’t go around telling people that. You’d be killed in a minute”; Das Bad 69; “The Bath” 24). According to the dead woman, her lifestyle as a middle age woman living alone puts her in a position of suspicion and even danger, and it becomes apparent that this danger is also almost certainly connected to her sexuality. During the protagonist’s visit, the deceased woman’s homosexuality is revealed in the lines “[d]ie Frau hatte ihre Hand unter der Decke auf meine Brust gelegt … Die Frau streichelte, wie ein südlicher Winde, meine Brüste” (“She slipped her hand under the blanket and placed it on my breast. My body turned to stone”; Das Bad 75; “The Bath” 25). As a single, middle age, homosexual woman with a badly burned body (symbolic of her marking as ‘othered’) the dead woman existed on the margins of society and was made to suffer. It is this image of suffering that we read in her photographic representation articulated later in the text when a newspaper reports on the circumstances of her death.

57 The end of this chapter will analyze this quote in depth.
In the opinion of the deceased’s neighbour, there was no reason to murder this woman. The neighbour even callously adds, “jedenfalls ist es nicht gut, wenn eine Frau alleine lebt” (“In any case a woman living alone, no good ever comes of that”; Das Bad 97; “The Bath” 33). Implicit in this dismissive observation is a criticism of the dead woman’s lifestyle and even sexuality, suggesting that if a woman does not conform to heteronormativity and the convention of heterosexual marriage then repercussions must be expected. The text then goes on to consider the ideological function of the newspaper photograph with respect to memory, as its aim is not to represent the woman as she really was, but rather to transmit to its readership a deterrent against suicide and non-normative lifestyles. The text reads:


I warmed some milk, sat down on a kitchen chair and opened the newspaper. In the human interest section was a photograph of that woman. There were no burn marks on her face. A photographer must have retouched the picture to make her look so unhappy. As well as unattractive. The article said that although there had been an investigation due to the suspicion of foul play, the investigation was now closed and it was concluded that her death had been a suicide. Apparently it was
standard practice to retouch the photo of a suicide to make her look unattractive.

(41)

The press photograph, like the protagonist’s own portrait photograph, is a highly stylized and connotatively rich message that puts an ‘ugly face’ on both suicide and a woman in her fifties living without male companionship. The readership of this de-stylized image is meant to consume an ideologically constructed message that connects the ‘hässliche’ face with an equally unappealing fate; one that is a direct result of transgressing normative boundaries. With regard to the press photograph, the actual woman represented becomes subsumed under a message of moral proscription, further underscoring the fact that there is no ‘real’ that is uncontaminated by signification and ideology, especially when it comes to the photographic medium and news media.

2.8 AUTHENTICITY AND THE TOURISM PHOTOGRAPH

The photographic image, as mentioned earlier, plays a central role in this text insofar as it profoundly influences the protagonist’s relationship to herself, her connection to death, and the development of her sense of identity, but it is not just as an object for self-identification that the photograph becomes a focal point for analysis. Rather, the very act of taking a photograph is of equal concern here, as it situates the text in a broader field of representational power politics and photographic history that point to photography’s unique contribution to the ethnographic construction, classification and exploitation of non-European subjects as cultural objects. Notions of ‘otherness’, ‘authenticity’ and ‘exoticism’ are all central to this representational history, and have been utilized in the West to create an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ binary based on photographic verisimilitude. While the opening lines of the text feature the relationship between the protagonist and her own photographic image, shortly thereafter the text devotes an entire
chapter (the text is comprised of a total of ten chapters of varying length) to constructing the context around the photographic rendering of the protagonist, and then the reception of the resultant image. The stage is set in the opening lines of chapter two with:


(25)

The photograph beside the mirror is one Xander took of me several years ago. He appeared before me one day with three Leica cameras slung over his shoulder.

This was the first encounter between the photographer and his model. (9)

In portrait photography the photographic process necessarily involves a photographer, the one who does the representing, and the photographic model who is being represented. This is an essential distinction to keep in mind when considering this text, for as Stuart Hall indicates in his work on cultural representation and signifying practices:

There is power in representation, power to mark, assign and classify ... Power has to be understood not only in terms of economic exploitation and physical coercion, but in broader cultural and symbolic terms, including the power to

\textsuperscript{58} Developed as a 35 mm camera in 1925 in Germany by Oskar Barnack, the Leica was (as Xander exemplifies) a favourite for European tourist / ethnographic photographers. In terms of the cultural significance and impact on society that this technological innovation delivered, it bears noting that, according to the Leica website, “the Leica became an indispensable companion for all situations, an ‘integral part of the eye’ or an ‘extension of the hand,’” while the “‘viewfinder was said to be an extension of the photographer’s eye.’” Connecting bodies and media, in a sense, echoes McLuhan’s aphorism on photography from \textit{Understanding Media}, where he states that photographs, like all media, act “as extensions of our physical and nervous systems” 202. Bernd Stiegler, in his section “Verlängerung des Auges” from \textit{Bilder der Photographie} extends the point, quoting from a Minolta add from 1976: “Schwer zu sagen wo Sie aufhören und die Kamera beginnt … Minolta. Dann sind Sie die Kamera und die Kamera ist Sie” 241. Stiegler claims “die Kamera wird zu einer Prothese, die ihrerseits die Wahrnehmung nicht nur verlängert, sondern bestimmt” 242. Also, considering how my chapter highlights the combination of camera and psychoanalyst, and also camera and gun, it is worth noting that Henri Cartier-Bresson, one of the most famous photographers who used a Leica, once said “the Leica could be like a big passionate kiss, or then again like a shot from a gun, or the couch of a psychoanalyst.” The Leica website can be found at \url{http://us.leica-camera.com/culture/history/}
represent someone or something in a certain way, within a certain regime of
representation. (*Representation* 259)

In the case of *Das Bad* the power juxtaposition of photographer to photographic model is
but one example, albeit a telling one, of the unequal and subtly oppressive relationship between
the protagonist and her boyfriend, Alexander. As photographer, Xander (this is the name he goes
by, as seen on his *carte de visite*) wields appreciable control over how his photographic subject is
represented – so much so that this rigidly choreographed photographic session is more a
representation of the photographer and his expectations than it is of the actual model
photographed. In a similar and more extreme vein, Sontag even goes so far as to claim that
“every portrait of another person is a ‘self-portrait’ of the photographer” (122). In connection to
Xander, Sabine Fischer makes a comparable observation:

> Der Photograph ist als deutscher Mann zugleich Repräsentant der dominanten
> Kultur und der ihr innewohnenden patriarchalischen Ordnung. Die Kamera dient
> ihm als Spiegel, der ihm die eigene europäisch-männliche Sichtweise der
> japanischen Frau reflektiert. (“Wie der Schlamm in einem Sumpf” 67)

The photographer, as a German man, is simultaneously a representative of the
dominant culture and of the patriarchal order. The camera serves as his mirror,
which reflects his own masculine-European viewpoint upon the Japanese woman.

On multiple occasions the text highlights the photographer’s techniques for the subordination,
silencing and idealization of the foreign subject that were, and still are, employed in
photographic practices. Several of these techniques, which I will address shortly, are also
explicitly demonstrated in the terse commands that Xander delivers during their photographic
sitting.
Before investigating the photographic session it is necessary to understand the context in which this rendering occurs, since the type of photograph, the function it is intended to serve and its target audience for reception substantially transform the meaning it carries. While the photograph hanging on the protagonist’s wall was taken by her boyfriend, suggesting it is a kind of personal, amateur portrait photograph, the actual context of its original rendering casts a notably different light on this image. When the protagonist/narrator recaps their initial encounter as photographer and model, we learn how Xander told the protagonist “dass er lieber Politiker fotografiere, aber weil er davon allein nicht leben könne, suche er heute im Auftrag eines Reisebüros Motive für Werbeplakate” (“He explained that he was really an activist photographer, but he couldn’t live on such little pay, so now he was working for a travel agency and had come to take pictures for an advertising campaign”; Das Bad 25; “The Bath” 9). A photograph of the female, Japanese protagonist taken by a white, male photographer that is intended for a travel poster contains a significantly different message than it would were it meant for her own personal consumption. Quite simply, the ideological implications and representational politics invested in, and implicated by, the former are far more contentious and consequential than they are in the latter. The protagonist’s image has been transformed for this marketing campaign into pure connotation; her markers of authenticity, exoticism, otherness and perhaps even sexual allure metonymically stand in as representative of her people and culture, and hopefully entice viewers into spending money to experience the ‘real thing’. 59

59 Tourism and tourists feature prominently elsewhere in Tawada’s texts. Nur da wo du bist, da ist nichts features the poem titled “Touristen” that appears on the pink pages scattered throughout the work, and which suggests the kind of ‘fiktive Ethnologie’ described by Fischer in her article “Durch die japanische Brille gesehen: Die fiktive Ethnologie der Yoko Tawada,” or the ‘ethnological poetology’ Tawada develops in her dissertation, and which is described by Hiltrud Arens in “Das kurze Leuchten unter dem Tor.” Fischer’s article focuses mainly on Tawada’s text “Rothenburg ob der Tauber” from Talisman that features a group of tourists and their cameras, and for the most part underscores the fictional characteristics of ethnological representation. Kraenzle’s article “The Limits of Travel” also analyzes travel, ethnography and tourism in Tawada’s texts, especially in Talisman. It notes how, comparable to Barthes’s Empire of Signs, Tawada’s texts make no claims to truth or information about cultural essences. Kraenzle states “Tawada’s notion of a ‘fictive ethnology’ stresses that the observing narrator is as much a
‘Authentic’ representation is fundamental to the appeal of the travel photograph as a marketing technique. In order to appeal to what John Urry has termed ‘the tourist gaze’, the image must provide the viewer the simultaneous prospect of something authentically real and markedly different from his or her own everyday life, however staged this authenticity might be (The Tourist Gaze 8-9).60 Certainly, the photograph is an effective conduit to convey this necessary authenticity given its capacity to present a seemingly objective and unmediated image of reality effected by mechanical and chemical processes rather than a human agent, thus making the relationship of viewer to photographic subject all the more familiar and intimate. Yet, while the distance between viewer and photographed subject is seemingly diminished, by its nature the tourist gaze that consumes the photographic image concurrently “ensures a separation between the one who does the looking, assumed to be familiar and like ‘us’, and that which is looked at, assumed to be different and strange” (Wells 123).

The travel poster Xander seeks to create is, from an uncritical perspective, a harmless attempt to attract potential tourists using the image of a Japanese woman as an alluring representation of her country of origin. But when taken in connection to the whole of the text, if we consider how the photographer aims to control his subject during this session in order for the photograph to represent and uncover her authentic foreign or exotic essence, its endeavour to “search for real faces” (104) as Sontag puts it, then the photographic process no longer seems so innocuous. On the contrary, this tourist marketing technique is revealed as an ideologically

60 ‘Authenticity’, since the 1970’s and the birth of tourism studies, is a term so loaded with criticism that it would be awkward to write it without quotation marks. Dean MacCannell’s 1976 book The Tourist cites a search for authenticity as the driving force for the modern tourist who, as a reaction to the alienating conditions of modern industrial society, “has been condemned to look elsewhere, everywhere, for his authenticity, to see if he can catch a glimpse of it reflected in the simplicity, poverty, chastity or purity of others” 41. Ellen Strain, in her work that enriches Urry’s concept of the tourist gaze, seeks to complicate the tourist’s quest for an experience of the authentic by employing a semiotic analysis of tourism. Strain contends that “a semiotics of tourism reveals travel practices to be culturally determined and the resultant experiences to be mediated by expectation, societally shaped viewing practices, and a dense process of culturally situated interpretation … As a core component of the tourist gaze, the illusion of demediation offers the false promise of communion with authenticity and an escape from the very mediation that the semiotics of tourism unveils” 4.
loaded representational practice that transforms the protagonist into a representative of a collective rather than an individual. And if we keep in mind that the camera functions as a kind of mirror of the photographer rather than a representational tool, then the very concept of ‘authenticity of the other’ seems more the product of imposed expectations than it does an actual, portrayable essence. In a comparable sense, Sabine Fischer points to the dubiousness of representing authenticity with “[die Authentizität der exotischen Frau, die der europäische Mann verherrlicht, ist nichts anderes als eine Projektion seiner eigenen Wunschvorstellungen. Indem er der Fremden sein Idealbild überstülpt, macht er die Individualität der realen Frau zunichte” (“the authenticity of the exotic woman, glorified by the European man, is nothing but a projection of his own desires. By overlaying the foreigner with his own ideal image, he essentially destroys the real woman’s individuality”; “Wie der Schlamm” 73). Representing essence and authenticity proves impossible in this text, although the manipulation of visual images can be a convincing intervention. Moreover, this unequivocal subversion of representing authenticity through the tourist photograph is exemplary of Tawada’s broader technique of ‘fictive ethnology’ outlined in the introductory chapter. The text reveals only unstable and contradictory information or knowledge about the Asian female protagonist who is visually constructed as an ethnically and exotically coded ‘type’. This means that Das Bad is more an interrogation of the politics implicit in the photographic representation and the photographer wielding this tool than it is a text expressive of cultural differences or essences.

2.9 THE PREDATORY CAMERA: COLONIZING THE PHOTOGRAPHIC IMAGE

At no time during this photographic session does the protagonist feel comfortable posing for the photographer or his camera. It becomes immediately apparent that there is something very enervating, invasive, even hostile and predatory, expressed during the act of ‘taking’ a
photograph in this text. From the very first attempt at capturing her image, the intrusiveness of the camera is accentuated, exemplified here with “als mich das Kamereauge geradewegs anblickte, wendete ich mich verlegen ab, als hätte mich jemand dabei ertappt, wie ich in den Spiegel schaute. Nach dem Erlöschen des Blitzlichts sah ich nur noch das dunkle Loch der Kameralinse” (“When the camera’s eye stared at me head-on, I turned away in embarrassment, as if I’d been caught gazing into a mirror. The bulb flashed. After that, only the black hole of the lens remained in my field of vision”; Das Bad 27; “The Bath” 9). As a combination of both man and machine the Kamereauge seeks to meet the protagonist’s gaze head-on before the photograph is taken.61 This is unsettling, however, and causes her to turn away in embarrassment, as though someone had caught her looking at her own reflection. It is impossible to know whether this embarrassment is the result of being witnessed in the narcissistic act of taking pleasure in one’s own image, or perhaps it prefigures the anxiety she will later feel when strangers gaze upon her photographic reflection; either way, as the object of a penetrating gaze the protagonist is unnerved and forced into averting her eyes.

During this photographic session the photographer’s gaze and the photographic model’s gaze are considered at length because they are so vital to the complex and sometimes

61 Doug Slaymaker, in the two recent articles “Travelling without Roads: Body and Place” and “Travelling Optics,” touches on the connection between technologies and/or perception in Tawada’s texts. In a footnote in “Travelling without Roads” he states “I have long been aware of the ways that Tawada characters invoke the technologies of seeing in ways that explore the body/machine divide. The visual body becomes a machine for seeing and processing images, a camera. The related questions become: Are these bodies, or are they machines? Is the body a machine, or an organic unit, a housing for travel [akin to a car] or a machine for recording images [akin to a camera]?” 327. In “Travelling Optics,” Slaymaker points to a more explicit example of Tawada’s thoughts on photography in the form of an essay she wrote for a contemporary art exhibition in Graz called ‘Chikaku’ (Perception). In the essay Tawada considers the potential perils of photography with “shooting is not such a harmless activity. If one shoots, it is likely that the object will be injured” 669. Later, after Tawada states “I take photos every day, so my camera has grown into my fingers,” Slaymaker continues with “the camera incorporates itself and becomes a part of the body, more physical, concrete, and therefore more reliable than speech … The narrator becomes camera, the person taking snapshots merges with the machine, and we have a cyborg” 669. In Tawada’s Das nackte Auge, the camera-eye again plays an immediate role in the text’s development, though this time the medium is film rather than photography, as the opening lines read: “Ein gefilmtes Auge, angeheftet an einem bewusstlosen Körper. Es sieht nichts, denn die Kamera hat ihm schon die Sehkraft geraubt” 7. Monika Schmitz-Emans briefly points to this connection with “Tawadas Roman spielt die Idee eines Ichs durch, das sich auf ein Auge reduziert, welches nichts anderes als ein Kamereauge ist und für das darum Wirklichkeit und Filmwelt kongruent sind” (Entgrenzungsphantasien” 201).
contradictory messages a photograph transmits. In his role as photographer, Xander assumes the position of male spectator in a patriarchal society and seeks to manipulate and pacify the protagonist’s gaze for the photograph so that she can most accurately reflect and represent the fantasy which has been projected upon her. The commands Xander delivers throughout the photographic session are indicative of his attempt to intervene in the image and manipulate the photographic subject according to his expectations. Xander’s voice dominates, and the protagonist obeys. For example:

“Schauen Sie in die Kamera!” (27)\(^6^2\)
“Sie müssen Ihre Augen auf die Kamera gerichtet halten.” (29)
“Seien Sie ganz locker!”
“Lächeln Sie!”
“Bitte sprechen Sie nicht. Sie verderben die Aufnahmen.” (31)
“Look at the camera.” (J.R.)
“Keep your eyes on the lens.” (10)
“Relax.”
“Smile.”
“Don’t talk. It’s no good if you talk.”

There is an explicitly aggressive, even exploitative, tone being employed here, one that insinuates an unequal and subordinating relationship between the two characters. Especially in the first two commands there is a sense that the protagonist’s gaze needs to be tamed. Reflecting on this exchange between photographer and model, Maria Eugenia de la Torre even suggests that a kind of rape (*Vergewaltigung*) is being indicated in this scene, as she notes “es geht [Xander] nur um die Exotisierung eines Objekts: “Können Sie nicht ein bisschen japanischer

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\(^6^2\) Benjamin’s “A Short History of Photography” speaks of the reticence that early photographic models harboured for looking at the camera. They were embarrassed, especially because of the accuracy of the rendering. Benjamin also mentions that, unlike Xander, the motto of a photographer was: “Don’t look at the camera” 8.
dreinschauen?,” fragt er sie ... Xander ist befehlshaberisch und seine Haltung wirkt erschrecken auf seine Arbeitskollegin ... In der Szene wird eine Art Vergewaltigung suggeriert” (“For Xander it’s about exoticising the object: ‘Can’t you look a little bit more Japanese?’ he asks her … Xander is demanding and his behavior has a disconcerting effect on his colleague … There is a kind of rape being suggested in this scene …”; 23)

With respect to the gaze, Laura Mulvey theorizes how ‘looking’ in patriarchal society is “split between active/male and passive/female. The controlling male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly” (“Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” 837). Xander, as the bearer of the look, controls this fantasy space by attempting to manipulate the subject into embodying an imposed ideal, and because her gaze holds the potential to destabilize and undermine the power of the observer over the observed, extra attention is paid to mitigating this subversive strength. Theorizing the gaze, however, is an inherently problematic exercise, as no consensus exists among scholars with regard to the ‘look’. This stands to reason when we consider how a look can mean different things to different people, depending on the context. Lutz and Collins highlight that some theorists believe that looking directly into the camera “short circuits the voyeurism identified as an important component of most photography: there can be no peeping if the other meets our gaze” (197). The direct gaze then, from this perspective, can be read as confrontational and active. Others, like Christian Metz, argue that the subject’s gaze into the camera can be read not as resistance but as “assent to being watched,” or in other words, an invitation to open voyeurism (Metz, qtd. in Lutz and Collins 197).

Furthermore, it is crucial to recognize that the masculine gaze represented in this text is also very much an ethnographic/colonial gaze as well, exemplified in Xander’s statement to the protagonist that “ich möchte die Aufnahme für ein Plakat verwenden. Können Sie nicht ein bisschen japanischer dreinschauen?” (“Can’t you look a little more Japanese? This is for a travel
poster” *Das Bad* 27; “The Bath” 9). As mentioned above, the travel photograph needs to emphasize the veneer of exoticism and the pretence of authenticity in order to most effectively market ‘difference’ as a commodity, and thus the photographer here implores his subject to exhibit more ‘Japaneseness’ for the camera. Lacking the legible signifiers of Japanese essence the photograph becomes difficult for the semiotician/viewer to decode, and the result is a failed photograph. This attempt to capture essence on photographic paper is reminiscent of Barthes’s reading of the Panzani pasta advertisement in “Rhetoric of the Image” where he interprets the combinations of pasta, produce and the name *Panzani* as, on the level of connotation, signifiers of *Italianicity*. The neologism *Italianicity*, according to Barthes, “is not Italy; it is the condensed essence of all that can be Italian, from spaghetti to painting” (37). This essence can only be read and decoded through a stock set of “touristic stereotypes” (24) that are required for literacy of national, ethnic or racial essence.

The photographer in *Das Bad* seeks to utilize and accentuate these stereotypes in his rendering of the protagonist when he instructs her to ‘relax’, ‘smile’ and finally to remain silent, as her voice spoils, or even punctures, the photograph’s harmonious meaning. The first call to ‘relax’ evokes images of docility and submissiveness that constitute preconceived expectations of femininity, especially Japanese femininity. Smiling, while undoubtedly a common convention in photography, is also a “key way of achieving idealization of the other, permitting the projection of the ideal of the happy life” (Lutz and Collins 96) – but just as importantly smiling makes the subject appear acquiescent to the viewer’s surveying look. Moreover, this forced smile also underscores to the reader how staged this whole process, and the resultant image, truly is, making the photographic image akin to a choreographed-ethnographic performance space. The

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63 There is a slight, though crucial, difference here between the German and English translations. In the German it states: “Können Sie nicht ein bisschen japanischer dreinschauen?” whereas in the English: “Can’t you look a little more Japanese?” The German ‘look’ refers to the way she looks into the camera with her eyes, meaning her *gaze*, whereas the English ‘look’ is meant in terms of her appearance, meaning how she appears to others.
protagonist responds to the command to smile by stating “ich versuchte, die Muskeln meines Gesichts zu einem Lächeln anzuspannen, aber es misslang mir” (“I attempted to tighten my facial muscles into a smile, but didn’t succeed” Das Bad 29; “The Bath” 10). A smile does not come naturally to her in this moment, and her distorted facial contortion is hardly the true outward expression of an inner emotion. Finally, with the interdict to remain silent, the manipulation of the photograph and control over the photographic subject is complete. Even though every photograph is by its nature silent, the photographed subject is nevertheless a potentially contradictory, destabilizing or subversive force to the spectator’s normalizing gaze, and thus Xander attempts to preclude this potential for agency by foreclosing the protagonist’s voice. Silence is his attempt to ensure that the photograph will ‘say’ what he wants it to say. Understanding the photographer’s position as ideologically invested complicates and compromises the evidentiary quality of the photographic image, and forces the reader of Das Bad into being more acutely aware of the representational politics at play during the photographic session.

While there may be nothing overtly violent about the photographer’s behaviour in this text, there is a more subtle, yet powerful, form of subjugation taking shape in the techniques and technologies of cultural representation articulated here. I previously spoke of Xander’s efforts as photographer to manipulate the photographic subject, but the text also points to the camera itself as a technology of discipline and control. It is frequently noted in photographic theory that the camera served alongside the gun in nineteenth century European colonization and exploitation. While the camera did not physically kill in the sense of a weapon, it did serve in the hierarchical classification and subordination of foreign peoples based on the seemingly incontrovertible, self-

64 While there are numerous accounts of the role photography played in constructing the image of the colonized in the European imaginary, an image that served to justify colonial conquests, my reading is informed by David Bate’s “Photography and the Colonial Vision” and Eleanor M. Hight and Gary D. Simpson’s Colonialist Photography: Imag(in)ing Race and Place.
evident, and visible truth of race. Following this historical connection, Susan Sontag even
purports that there is something predatory in the act of ‘taking’ a photo.65 The very idea that one
‘takes’ rather than ‘makes’ (Ansel Adams would prefer we use the second term) has something
of the exploitative, if not colonial, implicit therein. Sontag suggests, “to photograph people is to
violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them they
can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed. Just as the
camera is a sublimation of the gun, to photograph someone is a sublimated murder” (Sontag 14-15).

On a number of occasions Das Bad makes either explicit or implicit associations between
camera and gun, and by extension ethnographic and colonial projects. The first of these
associations comes when Xander attempts to assuage the protagonist’s anxiety over being
photographed, as he states “Sie brauchen sich nicht zu erschrecken. Eine Kamera ist doch kein
Gewehr” (“Don’t be afraid. The camera isn’t a gun”; Das Bad 27; “The Bath” 9). Towards the
end of the photographic session, after having marked the protagonist’s cheek with an identifying
‘X’ to signify his property, the text states “nun küsste Xander dieses Zeichen, stellte mich vor
eine Wand und betätigte dann den Auslöser so unbekümmert wie einen Gewehrabzug” (“‘When
I was a child, I marked everything precious to me with an x, so it would belong to me.’ Then he
kissed the mark. After that Xander stood me in front of a wall and pressed the shutter release
button as casually as if he were pulling the trigger”; Das Bad 35; “The Bath” 12). There is a
sense here that the protagonist is being set-up, not for a modelling shoot, but rather for an
execution! One only needs to consider Etienne-Jules Marey’s chronophotographic gun from
1882 to locate the origins of the analogy.66 Marey’s photographic gun notwithstanding, the

65 While in German one actually makes a photo (macht ein Foto), the idea of capture in the photograph (Aufnahme)
is still very much present.
66 Bernd Stiegler elaborates on the camera as gun in relation to Marey: “Der französische Physiologe Etienne Jules
Marey entwickelte einen Photoapparat, der wie eine Flinte gebaut war und mit der er seine Ziele anvisieren konnte.
camera is not literally a firearm, but as Sontag points out, the very fact that we load, aim and shoot both a camera and a gun makes them at least conceptually similar. Furthermore, if we bear in mind that they both arrest movement, one physically, the other in terms of ethnographic representational fixity, then the gun and the camera should be recognized as comparable tools.67

It is really in the service of discipline and control that the two share the most in common in Das Bad, especially since the camera is repeatedly depicted as attempting to ‘capture’ the protagonist, while she seeks escape. For example:

Die Linse versuchte mich einzufangen - meine Augen wurden zu Fischen aus Licht und versuchten, in die Luft zu fliehen. (27)

or:


The lens was trying to trap me; my eyes turned into fish made of light and attempted to dart away through the air. (9)

or:

[The camera] kept trying to peer into my eyes, like a psychologist. If it wanted to learn my soul’s secrets, I had nothing to worry about, since there weren’t any. But this camera was trying to capture my skin. (10)

Walter Benjamin lauds the camera’s ability to uncover and record the optical unconscious of the photographed subject “just as psychoanalysis discloses the instinctual unconscious” (“A Short

67 Towards the end of the text, another connection is made between a gun and a camera in the lines “jeder Polizist, der aus der Toilette herauskommt, gähnt einmal und feuert mit der Pistole einen Schuss auf die Frau; ganz leicht, als würde er den Auslöser einer Kamera betätigen” 165.
History of Photography” 7). Unlike other forms of representation (at the time), the photograph captures the imperceptible and covert that would otherwise go unnoticed and remain hidden, and thus the equation of the camera with a psychiatrist in the above quotation.\(^68\) The second of the two quotes mentioned above indicates that, while photography is capable of investigating and representing the interior depths and hidden meaning lurking within the photographic subject, this particular camera and this particular photographer are only concerned with articulating, and capturing, the protagonist’s exterior – namely, her skin. The photographic type here transitions from tourist photography to nineteenth century anthropological photography, as the text depicts the attempt to fix the subject to her skin by way of this visual technology. She is therefore made available for categorization and classification based on the idea of race as a material and biological ‘fact’ that can be seen, and hence known.\(^69\) There are echoes here of that pioneer of eugenics, Sir Francis Galton, whose composite photographs sought to uncover and classify the physiognomy of different types of humans based on the concept of race, and which ultimately served to crystallize and naturalize ‘difference’ as immutable.\(^70\) But just as the racial referent proved too slippery for logically classifying humans based on phenotypes, so too did the photograph lose its stability and fixity as a testament of visual reality.

\(^{68}\) In his Theoriegeschichte der Photographie Stiegler analyzes the optical unconscious according to Benjamin. He states, “Photographie und Psychoanalyse sind für Benjamin ... entscheidene Etappen in der Geschichte der Wahrnehmung. Durch sie wird das Sichtbare neu abgesteckt, medial erschlossen und zugleich analysierbar. Beide haben einen entscheidenden Anteil daran, daß das, was bis dahin nur Teil des Unbewuβten und Nicht-Wahrnehmbaren gewesen ist, nun wahrnehmbar und analysierbar geworden ist“ 271. This equation of the photographer and the psychiatrist, and in particular the psychoanalyst, also has a tradition in German literature. For example, Eric Downing in his article “Photography and Bildung in The Magic Mountain” underlines the identification of Dr. Edhin Krokowski as both a psychoanalyst and a photographer. Downing notes: “Walter Benjamin reminds us that the advent of psychoanalysis coincides with that of photography, and however parodied in the figure of Krokowski, we also know that psychoanalysis in The Magic Mountain remains one of the more important sites for both a reconception of the subject and, more pressingly, for the imposition of an interceding practice of social supervision for the production of the ‘truth’ of the individual” 46. This interweaving of psychoanalysis, photography and truth is very much present in Das Bad as well, though the ‘truth’ of the photograph is being challenged more than supported.

\(^{69}\) My fourth chapter will investigate the representation of ‘race’ in Tawada’s texts more extensively.

\(^{70}\) Highly influenced by his cousin Charles Darwin’s Origin of the Species, Sir Francis Galton (1822-1911) attempted, among countless other things, to use photography to classify humans as ‘types’, to prove intelligence as hereditary, and to develop the science of eugenics. In his lecture “Eugenics: Its Definition, Scope and Aims” Galton defines eugenics as “the science which deals with all influences that improve the inborn qualities of a race, also with those that develop them to the utmost advantage” 79.
While there is no doubt that visual technologies like photography have been enormously influential in developing and constituting the very notion of race as a means of differentiating human bodies, recent studies, like Deborah Poole’s “An Excess of Description: Ethnography, Race, and Visual Technologies,” question the inherently ‘racializing’ and objectifying capabilities of photography. Instead, they consider the much more ambiguous effects that photography can have in constructing, and complicating, race through imagery. Poole’s study in particular points out that while a common (mis)conception still persists that photography invariably serves to stabilize and fix race as a visual and conceptual fact, it is important to realize that “the understanding of race that emerges from a history of anthropological photography is clearly as much about the instability of the photograph as ethnological evidence and the unshakeable suspicion that perhaps things are not what they appear to be, as it is about fixing the native subject as a particular type” (165). This analysis complicates and problematizes the stability and fixity of both photographic representation and the very concept of race itself, in favour of more nuanced, ambivalent, fluid and mobile qualities that better articulate their realities. Poole accepts that visual technologies, especially photography, have historically served to sediment and calcify the taken-for-granted and common-sense understanding of race as a visually verifiable fact, yet she also highlights more recent work on photography that:

Tends to emphasize the ‘slippery’ or unstable quality of the racial referent, the mobile meanings attached to photographs as they circulate through different cultural and social contexts, the importance of gazes as a potentially destabilizing site of encounter within the photographic frame, or the creative re-workings of the photographic surface in postcolonial portrait photography. (“An Excess of Description” 171)
The photograph as a representational medium has, like race, mistakenly obtained a naturalized effect as an image of the real, although in actual fact it is as unstable, culturally and historically contingent and susceptible to interpretation and re-coding as race also is. This means that the photograph is no more an unmediated, objective representation of reality than race is a trans-historical, pre-discursive biological given, and thus neither can be unreflectively seen as taken-for-granted or common sense truisms.

As an analogous argument to the one presented in Das Bad, which points to the expectations, motivation and manipulation of the photographer (Xander) in constructing the photographic object according to his preconceived image, so too does Poole connect the instability of the photograph as ethnographic evidence to the necessarily subjective and compromised position of the ethnographer him/herself. She explicitly states this with, “as much as photographs entered as juridical evidence require a human voice to authenticate their evidentiary status in court, the ‘hard’ visual evidence of ethnographic photography or film is intimately bound-up with the ‘soft’ testimonial voice (or subjectivity) of the ethnographer” (168). The presence of Xander’s ‘voice’ in representing the protagonist is omnipresent throughout the text, especially if we consider his choreographed instructions during their photo shoot, his cosmetic intrusion (applies make-up and marks her skin with an ‘X’) when she does not appear in the photographs, and the later revelation that Xander is the protagonist’s language instructor, whom she repetitively mimics without comprehension of the semantic nuances. In his attempt to fix her to her skin by marking it with an ‘X’, Xander, now the ethnographic photographer, is first forwarding the misconception that certain skins are ‘marked’, or aberrant, while others are simply colour neutral. This simultaneously sets up the false pretence that human bodies can be easily classified and comprehended by racial signifiers. Secondly, the ‘X’ inscribed in the protagonist’s cheek represents the ‘X’ in Xander’s name, and partly serves to
remind the reader of the anxiety this letter causes the protagonist earlier in the text (25), but also makes clear that Xander is just as present in the photographic image as the protagonist herself.

However, it is the photographer’s requisite intervention into the rendering that undermines the logic of this visual veracity and representational stability. *Das Bad*, much like Poole’s article, questions the legitimacy of the photograph as a stable and fixed representation while concurrently fracturing the solidity of race as a visual and conceptual fact of nature. In the following section, I will demonstrate how this subversion of the mock ethnographer and the knowledge he produces is illustrative of Tawada’s broader literary perspective as a ‘fictive ethnology’, which as Christina Kraenzle outlines in relation to *Talismen* in her article “The Limits of Travel,” means that Tawada’s texts make no claims to truth or information about cultural essences. To quote Kraenzle, “Tawada’s notion of a ‘fictive ethnology’ stresses that the observing narrator is as much a fiction as the constructed other. Like Barthes [in *Empire of Signs*], Tawada relinquishes any claim to cultural reality, opting instead … to throw into question that which has been codified as natural” (“The Limits of Travel” 248). In relation to *Das Bad* then, this means that the highly problematic absence of the protagonist from the photographic images can be read as part of Tawada’s unstable counter-ethnology and critique of representing cultural essences, rather than a simple submission to a masculine/colonial/western authority.

2.10 THE MYTH OF REPRESENTING ESSENCE

The ambiguities of photography and race become most explicitly interconnected in *Das Bad* once Xander has finished taking the protagonist’s photograph, and he returns to show her the results:

Ein paar Tage später kam Xander mit seiner Kamera in meine Wohnung. Er sagte:

“Sie sind nicht drauf; auf den Bildern.”
“Wieso? War die Kamera kaputt?”

“Die Kamera war in Ordnung.

Der Hintergrund kommt sehr schön heraus.

Aber Sie sind nicht drauf.”

Eine Zeitlang sagten wir beide nichts.

“Das kommt sicher daher, dass Sie nicht japanisch genug empfinden.” (31)

A few days later, Xander came over again with his camera. “You didn’t come out in any of the photographs,” he said resentfully. “Why? Was the camera broken?”

“The camera was fine. The background came out beautifully, but you aren’t in any of the pictures.” For a while, neither of us said anything. “It’s all because you don’t have a strong enough sense of yourself as Japanese,” he said. (11)

Despite his most determined efforts to manipulate and stylize the photographic subject according to his expectations of the idealized Japanese female, the photograph literally fails to represent her, even in terms of the most superficial, external characteristics. The insuperable disjuncture between the idealized tourist view of the foreigner and the material reality of her actual life causes a deferral of the protagonist’s presence, just as the actual page in the text where this dialogue occurs is conspicuously blank.71 Her absence is clearly not the result of over-exposure in the sense of an excess of light in the photographic development process, since the text describes the background in these photographs as ‘having come out beautifully’. In a different sense though she is ‘over-exposed’ in this photograph, insofar as she is being represented as a representation, as a metonymic representative, as a marketing ploy, as an idealization, and as

71 As Ruth Kersting notes, while almost every page in this text has an image on it upon which the linguistic text is superimposed, on the page where the protagonist and Xander discuss her absence from the photographs, so too is the image absent from the page. The exact quote reads “[c]rwähnenswert sind einige bilderlose Seiten. Eine Leerstelle spiegelt die entsprechende Textpassage, in der erzählt wird, dass die Ich-Erzählerin auf Photos nicht zu sehen sei. Solche engen Bezüge von Text und Bild sind aber nicht in jedem Fall herzustellen. Dennoch ergibt sich aus der Kombination von exotistischen, historischen Bildern und Schrift bzw. Text über eine zeitgenössische Japanerin in Deutschland ein spannungsvolles Ganzes” 137.
overdetermined authenticity that she is incapable of embodying. Her absence is not really her erasure, but rather her disavowal, her assertion of some form of agency against being consumed as a commodity and a cliché.72

Das Bad emphasizes that while subjects are unable to absolutely define the terms of their consumption in society, they are not without agency. Judith Butler highlights this possibility with:

If I have no desire to be recognized within a certain set of norms, then it follows that my sense of survival depends upon escaping the clutch of those norms by which recognition is conferred ... This does not mean that I can remake the world so that I become its maker ... My agency does not consist in denying this condition of my constitution. If I have any agency, it is opened up by the fact that I am constituted by a social world I never chose. That my agency is riven with paradox does not mean it is impossible. It means only that paradox is the condition of its possibility. (Undoing Gender 3)

In connection with Das Bad, Butler’s assertion means that paradox, as the essence of photographic representation, is also the essence of the protagonist’s agency. Her absence from these photographs affirms that her identity as the female, racial and ethnic ‘Other’ can be undone (to borrow Butler’s term) in both positive and negative ways.

Xander, as the photographer, has attempted to encode the photograph with a stock set of highly conventionalized, easily readable ethnic and gendered signifiers. Yet, in the reception and decoding of any message, however denotative it appears to be, meaning is multi-accentual, or open to dis- and re-articulation that contests its original intention, and thus the ideological power and certainty of the photograph is disturbed. Perhaps the protagonist lacks the more readily

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72 It is important to bear in mind the double use of cliché as both something that has lost its meaning due to overuse, and in the French sense as a term for the photographic negative.
palatable signifiers of ‘Japaneseness’ like a kimono, or cherry blossoms in her hair or, as expressed earlier with regard to Gernig’s and Delank’s articles, that she is not represented naked in a public bath or combing her hair in front of a mirror. The protagonist, therefore, remains ethno- graphically illegible. While there is a finite and constricting range of gender and racial ideologies that inform and limit how a photograph can be interpreted, and there still exists a dominant cultural order that promotes “preferred meanings,” as Stuart Hall labels them, nevertheless the “photograph's 'meaning' cannot be controlled in the sense that its image (signifier) remains tied to any one code or referent (signified)” (Poole, Vision, Race and Modernity 18). In the case of Das Bad, the end result then is a potential discord between signifier and signified in photographic representation and reception.

Readers know from the opening lines of this text, however, that the protagonist’s image is eventually successfully captured on photographic paper. Moreover, it is explicitly stated that this image was taken during the photographic session mentioned above. Xander believes that the protagonist is absent from the photograph because she does not have enough sense of herself as Japanese, and this lack of a Japanese essence he connects directly to her skin. After the two heatedly debate whether or not skin actually has a colour (a dialogue I address extensively in chapter four), the text states:

Xander dachte mit gesenktem Kopf eine Weile lang nach, hob dann wieder sein Gesicht und fragte:

“Darf ich Sie schminken?”

Er begann, eine weiße Creme auf mein Gesicht aufzutragen, so dick, dass sie alle meine Poren verstopfte, und die Haut nicht mehr atmen konnte. (33)
Xander thought for a little while. Then he looked up and said, “Would you mind if I tried makeup?” Xander covered my face with a powder base. He laid it on so thickly that it closed up all my pores and my skin could no longer breathe. (12)

The photographer paints his subject’s skin, then her lips, and finally colours her hair in order to ensure that her essence can be visually captured, even if this essence is more the manifestation of an externally imposed ideal, one that is explicitly coded as performance or masquerade, than it is the reflection of an internal authenticity. As mentioned earlier, Xander marks the protagonist’s skin with an ‘X’ as a way of denoting his property, but also as a means of ensuring that she is fixed to her skin, and that she be known and recognized for and as her skin. Having been literally dermatologically marked by the photographer with an ‘X’ that acts as a kind of badge of otherness, the photographic subject becomes an easy target of representation. The final line of the chapter reads “der Buchstabe X fraß sich in mein Fleisch. Er machte dem Spiel des Lichts ein Ende, und die Gestalt einer Japanerin war auf Papier geätzt” (“The x on my cheek dug into my flesh. It stopped the light from playing and crucified the image of a Japanese woman onto the paper”; Das Bad 35; “The Bath” 12). It is the shape, the image, and the form of a Japanese woman that is inscribed on the photographic surface, one that has been highly influenced and encoded by the photographer’s hand, and therefore it can hardly be said that it is the protagonist who is being represented here – it is rather the image of an image that hangs on her wall next to the mirror.

In a similar sense to the majority of the themes and images present in this text, the narrative of the protagonist’s daily routine of self-correction through beautification repeats itself later on, though of course, with a difference. While in the opening paragraphs we witness the protagonist identifying with external images that hang on her wall in order to appropriate an imposed ideal, in a later depiction this daily ritual unfolds quite unexpectedly. Waking up to the
sound of clanking dishes and Xander making coffee in the kitchen, the protagonist begins her day as follows:


I looked in the mirror and found reflected there a healthy woman who looked just like the one in the photograph. Her cheeks glowed like peaches and her lips curved into a smile although I didn’t particularly feel like smiling. I used makeup to create dark circles under my eyes. Then I filled in the contours of my lips with white lipstick, which made them look bloodless. Finally I rubbed the edges of my eyes with a little vinegar so that the skin shrank and puckered. Then I tore up the photograph and went into the kitchen … (31)

With regard to the photographic images on the pages of the book, it is noteworthy that this narrative is written over the photograph that mirrors the narrative in the opening paragraphs, highlighting the repetitive nature of the subject’s identity construction, but always with a difference. In the quote above, the unexpected turn is that instead of conforming to the idealized image in the photograph, the protagonist demonstrates an act of resistance by styling herself otherwise, against the prescriptive image and restrictive norms that she regularly appropriates.

A few lines later this first act of resistance is followed by another, whereby the protagonist ceases to speak the language that Xander, her boyfriend, photographer and language
instructor, has taught her. After having asked her a question, the text reads “er wartete ziemlich lange auf eine Antwort, gab es aber schließlich mit einem Seufzer auf: ‘Sie benutzt die Worte nicht mehr, die er ihr beigebracht hat’” (“He waited a long time for an answer, but finally gave up and said with a sigh, “It looks like she’s stopped speaking the language he taught her”); *Das Bad* 93; “The Bath” 31). When considered in the context of Fischer’s statement that “[b]ereits der Erwerb der deutschen Sprache kommt einer Kolonialisierung gleich” (“Wie der Schlamm” 68) (“the acquisition of German is equated with a colonizations”), this means silence should be read as an act of resistance by the protagonist. Her refusal to continue speaking this language she learned by constant repetition can be best understood in connection to the final lines of Tawada’s short essay “Eigentlich darf man es niemandem sagen, aber Europa gibt es nicht,” when the narrator reflects on the above scene from *Das Bad*. The narrator states: “[i]ch wiederhole Europa in Europa. Kaum fange ich an, über Europa zu sprechen, wiederhole ich sie. Deshalb höre ich auf zu sprechen. Ich muß mir eine andere Methode überlegen, um mit ihr umgehen zu können” (“I repeat Europe in Europe. Hardly have I begun to speak about Europe, and I repeat it. This is why I’ve stopped speaking. I have to think of another method of approaching it”; 51). Xander, as the boyfriend/photographer/language teacher (Xander war in Wirklichkeit nicht Fotograf, sondern Deutschlehrer. Er hatte mir, als ich in diese Stadt gekommen war, die ersten Worte beigebracht” [79]), resembles a kind of puppet-master in this text who controls the protagonist through language and representation. The two even converse with one another through dolls (the protagonist a silk Japanese doll, Xander a blonde violinist marionette [*Das Bad* 83-89]). However, while the protagonist initially mimics his words without understanding their meaning, she eventually recognizes her subservience, and becomes quiet.

Earlier in the text, when Xander addresses the protagonist he speaks to her using the second person formal *Sie*, but, as the above quotation illustrates, this transforms into a third
person form of address when they communicate as dolls. During this peculiar ventriloquist
dialogue he relates to both the protagonist and himself from an external, third person perspective.
The distance between the two characters grows proportionally to the resistance the protagonist
exercises through whatever limited means she has at her disposal: resistance reflected by her
initial absence in the tourism photographs; then her refusal to speak the language Xander taught
her (a language she learned through mimicry); then her self-stylization against normative beauty
ideals; then she tears up the photograph on the wall and turns around the mirror; and finally she
embraces the scales on her skin and joins the circus. In the concluding lines of the text the
narrator expresses the realization that many of the identity markers ascribed to the protagonist
throughout are no longer applicable. For example, she can not be a translator because she has no
tongue; she cannot be a typist because she has forgotten the letters of the alphabet; and she
cannot be a photo-model because she does not appear in photographs – she is “ein transparenter
Sarg.” This ‘transparent coffin’ again serves the function as representational frame, as it
intersects with the narrator’s earlier observation that the mirror’s frame reminds her of a coffin,
and it also completes the frame of the text itself that was begun with the description of a framed
mirror and photograph. It therefore acts, literally and figuratively, as a book-end to the content
and materiality of the text. Paradoxically though, it also reflects through its ‘transparency’ and
absence of image or representation a certain resistance to arresting or capturing meaning on
either the photographic, or textual, page.

Punctuating Das Bad with the concluding line ‘ich bin ein transparenter Sarg’ not only
underlines the text’s focus on problematizing Eurocentric notions of representing the authentic
and exotic Eastern ‘Other’ through technologies of/and visual imagery, it can also be extended to
Tawada’s broader literary perspective present throughout her entire body of writing that she
describes as a kind of ‘fictive ethnology’, and which I outlined earlier. Tawada’s essayistic reflection “Erzähler ohne Seelen” from the collection *Talisman*, for example, directly confronts this image of a transparent coffin as a kind of representational frame for the dead in connection with a visit to the Hamburg Völkerkundemuseum. Tawada equates this ethnographic exhibition space with a ‘Theaterbühne’ where the stories of the dead can be told for them as a staged performance couched in the gloss of objective representation. In “Erzähler ohne Seelen” Tawada states, “im Hamburg Völkerkundemuseum stehen viele transparente Särge nebeneinander, in denen sich jeweils eine tote Figur befindet. Jede Figur verkörpert ein Volk” (“At the Museum of Anthropology in Hamburg there are a number of transparent coffins lined up one beside the other, each containing a dead figure. Each figure personifies a tribe”; “Erzähler ohne Seelen” 25; “Storytellers without Souls” 109). Analogous to the depiction of the protagonist in *Das Bad* who operates as a representation and representative for her collective people, this text describes the power relationship between the represented and those doing the representing, suggesting that the represented are the culturally or economically conquered, even annihilated. She elaborates with:


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73 This concept, so crucial to Tawada’s entire poetical technique, is outlined in “Erzähler ohne Seelen” in the lines “[e]in Schleier trennt den Museumsbesucher von der toten Puppe, so daß er wenig erfahren kann. Man erfährt viel mehr, wenn man versucht, ein ausgedachtes Volk zu beschreiben. Wie soll ihr Leben aussehen? Wie funktioniert ihre Sprache? Wie sieht ein ganz fremdes Sozialsystem aus? Genauso interessant ist es, einen Betrachter zu spielen, der aus einer fiktiven Kultur kommt. Wie würde er ‘unsere’ Welt beschreiben? Das ist der Versuch der fiktiven Ethnologie, in der nicht das Beschriebene, sondern der Beschreibende fiktiv ist” 24, my emphasis.
The figures in the coffins – dolls made of plastic – bear witness to the link between death and these dolls: all of the tribes represented in the form of dolls were, at some point in history, culturally or economically conquered by others and to some extent destroyed. As in other museums as well, a power relationship is illustrated here: that which is represented is always something that has been destroyed (sic). (“Storytellers Without Souls”109)

Again, Tawada is connecting representation and representational practices with a kind of colonial conquest through this ethnographic scene, highlighting its performative element by constantly referring to the dead, who are exhibited in these transparent coffins, as ‘dolls’ performing on a ‘Theaterbühne’. This museum space is being figured as comparable to the photographic image that was articulated in Das Bad, and this space even utilizes photographs as one of its representational devices, indicated with “[s]ollte ein Fremder bedrohlich erscheint, versucht man, ihn zu vernichten. Wenn er tot ist, stellt man ihn als Puppe liebevoll in einem Museum dar. Mann kann dort die Puppe betrachten, die Erklärung über seine Lebensart lesen, die Fotos von seinem Land sehen, aber etwas versteht man nicht” (“As long as an outsider appears threatening, the others try to destroy him. When he is dead, he can be lovingly represented as a doll in a museum. One can look at the doll, listen to the explanations of its way of life, view the photos of its homeland, but there is always something remains unclear” “Erzähler ohne Seelen” 25; “Storytellers without Souls” 109). Hiltrud Arens, in her article “Das kurze Leuchten unter dem Tor,” details Tawada’s attempt to “redirect the ethnological model of the past, in which the cultures of the East or of Africa were interpreted by Westerners” (66), by shifting the critical gaze onto the power structures inherent in the representation itself rather than the represented. In other words, these texts invite readers to reconsider the constructed
perspective of the observer instead of only focusing on the fictional representations of the observed.

In her influential study of Tawada’s technique of redirecting the ethnographic gaze, Sabine Fischer’s “Durch die japanische Brille gesehen: Die fiktive Ethnologie der Yoko Tawada” investigates this tension between power and representation and the history of subjugation endemic in European ethnology. Fischer argues that Tawada is proposing “eine Ethnologie, die den fiktionalen Charakter ihrer Repräsentationen des Fremden kenntlich macht und die Mechanismen des Fremdverstehens offen legt” (“in Tawada’s ethnology the fictional character of her representations of the foreign is made explicit, and the mechanisms behind understanding the foreign are exposed”; 64). Exposing the fictional character of these seemingly realistic representations is meant to encourage readers to reflect on the motivations and manipulations woven into these choreographed images and scenes. Fischer further considers this ethnographic staging with:

Im Museum werden ihre Lebensäußerungen durch starre Repräsentationen – Puppen, Texte und Fotos – ersetzt. Die Ideologiegefärbten Darstellungen des Fremden werden unter Glas konserviert und in einer konsumierbaren Form einer breiten Öffentlichkeit zugänglich gemacht. Die Besucher wiederum betrachten diese Darbietungen unter dem Einfluss traditioneller eurozentristischer Sichtweisen des Fremden. (64)

In the museum their lives are replaced with static representations: dolls, texts and photographs. The ideologically tinted representations of the foreign are conserved in glass and made accessible to a wide audience in easily consumable form. Visitors observe these offerings under traditionally Eurocentric views of the foreign.
Stressing that the observing narrator is “as much a fiction as the constructed other,” Christina Kraenzle, in “The Limits of Travel: Yoko Tawada’s Fictional Travelogues,” also addresses the problematic power relationship present in ethnographic representations and Tawada’s mock ethnographic tone, stating “this ethnographic parody (in ‘Erzähler ohne Seelen’) serves as a caution to the reader who might approach Tawada’s texts as an authentic Japanese perspective on German culture” (247). This ‘ethnographic parody’ disappoints any ethnographic expectations readers might bring to these texts by denying access to not only knowledge of the ‘foreigner’, but also by making even the natural and familiar seem alienating and uncomfortable. And in relation to Tawada’s use of the ethnographic museum, Kraenzle further remarks that “[t]he museum representation constructs a hierarchy in which power accrues to the observer, while the observed remains powerless. Moreover, knowledge of the cultural other remains limited” (247). In a similar fashion to Das Bad then, “Erzähler ohne Seelen” is likewise problematizing the notion of realistic or authentic representation through the seemingly unmediated and objective photographic images and ethnographic exhibition by underscoring the motivations and manipulations that ultimately compr(om)ise their construction. These texts are exemplary of the self-reflexivity and counter-ethnographic perspective present throughout Tawada's writing, which serves to expose the neo-colonial politics and ideological underpinnings of representing ‘otherness’ as a simplistic binary based on monolithic dichotomies of us and them.

2.11 CONCLUSION

By first focusing on the significance of the meaning of materiality in works like Ein Gedicht für ein Buch, but also how even this short text, through its construction, points to the central position that photography as a representational practice occupies in Tawada’s literary approach, chapter one attempted to bring into focus the often overlooked function of the
photographic images adorning the pages of Das Bad. My analysis approached this text as an intermedial dialogue between the bibliographic and linguistic codes (in this case the text is mediated through images and writing) which, when seen in cooperation, produce a composite text that is much more compelling than it would be were these codes read in isolation. With the theoretical support of Barthes, Batchen, Benjamin, Burgin, and Sekula, I first outlined how photographic representation visually and linguistically presented in Das Bad reflects a number of the theoretical positions fronted by these canonical theorists. For example, I argued that the destruction of the aura through mechanical reproducibility is exemplary of the destruction of an originality or essence in subjectivity construction. I also detailed the complexity of reading photographic images that, due to their pretence of representational verisimilitude, can serve the ideological function of fixing or freezing an image as common-sense reality. By stressing the paradoxical nature of the photograph, and then connecting this paradox to Das Bad, I contend that Tawada is attempting to destabilize the taken-for-granted representational closure of the photograph. I then transitioned this paradox onto the text’s protagonist who is constantly torn between images with which she is compelled to identify, albeit unsuccessfully. In her daily ritual of self-stylization against the photographic ideal, the text is also highlighting the repeated performance of gendered, racial and ethnic identity within a highly rigid regulatory frame. This daily ritual of appropriating the gender, ethnic, racial and sexual norms demanded by the prescriptive image in the photograph is eventually subverted, however, as the protagonist demonstrates that she is not without agency, and she breaks the regulatory circuit.

This chapter then proceeded to make the numerous implied links between the depiction of photography in Das Bad with its capacity to objectify, commodify and fetishize, especially if we consider that in Tawada’s text the female, Japanese protagonist is being used as a photo model for a Western, tourist marketing campaign that attempts to represent her as a
representative of a pre-conceived imaginary. The attempt to fix essence by capturing her image through representational closure fails however, although it does suggest that this kind of representation is more a reflection of the one doing the representing, rather than of the one being represented. This of course implies that there is power in representation, and elicits a long history of colonial, and especially ethnographic, photography that has served to construct a highly mediated and subjective image of otherness. However, as the end of this chapter outlined, there is also a good deal of instability in the photograph. Much like the concept of race that it helped construct, the photograph was never as fixed nor eternal as it is sometimes considered to be. This critique of representational authority and reliability is part of Tawada’s broader literary technique as a ‘fictive ethnology’ (as she describes it), which suggests that her texts are not comparative analyses of cultural or ethnic differences gained through observation, but rather emphasize the ideological investments in representation itself.
CHAPTER THREE: A *HAUTNAH* INVESTIGATION OF SKIN IN THE WORKS OF YOKO TAWADA

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The following chapter will analyze the complex and variegated deployment of human skin in select texts by Yoko Tawada. It will highlight the diverse ways skin is articulated as discursively produced and interpreted through a culturally specific grid of intelligibility, how it becomes the site upon which ‘otherness’ is written and read, and how skin as a lived, embodied material can be constitutive of subjectivity and reflect internal psychical processes as a kind of communicative surface connecting inside and outside. In texts like *Verwandlungen* and “Das Fremde aus der Dose,” for example, Tawada articulates how skin, and more specifically the skin of the face, is produced and read through a kind of cultural literacy limited by often habitual and stereotyping reading practices, and in which the narrator/protagonist becomes a kind of object of ethnographic inquiry. Utilizing a literary technique of *defamiliarization* these texts advocate for a ‘change of perspective’ that recognizes the types of cultural codings embedded in skin as a legible bearer of significations and problematic signifier of ‘foreignness’. “Das Fremde aus der Dose” also considers how this ‘foreignness’ inscribed on the protagonist’s skin is appropriated as a marketing technique by totalizing and packaging an easily consumable semantics of otherness into a canned commodity. Yet, as Tawada demonstrates in her subversion of Lavater’s physiognomic interpretation, the external packaging is no one-to-one representation of an internal essence, no outward projection of a ‘true self’ inside. Rather, in a sense analogous to Barthes’s *Empire of Signs*, these texts show that beneath the layers are only more layers, or more signifiers that are not attached to a core signified.

Secondly, this chapter will investigate the not yet researched Tawada poem “Eine Hautnahme” as a connective thematic and conceptual thread that runs through other texts like
Das Bad and “Wo Europa anfängt,” insofar as it introduces and points to central metaphors and literary tropes of skin in these texts. Examples of these metaphors and tropes are: the skin as a fluid boundary or border that effects separation and belonging between self and other, in both an individual and a collective sense; skin as a crucial component of how subjects see themselves and how they are seen by others; and also the classic skin as landscape metaphor that serves to ‘denaturalize’ both skin and geography as taken-for-granted, common-sense and objectively real pre-discursive phenomena. Moreover, with regard to Das Bad I will look at how, through the protagonist’s removal of the scales from her skin, Tawada is recasting the flaying metaphor as a symbolic act towards self-liberation and development, and at the same time ethnocritically subverting the notion of identity as inevitably tied to the skin. Nevertheless, while the skin is frequently represented and emphasized as a fluid and porous border and boundary in texts like Das Bad and “Wo Europa anfängt,” Tawada does not neglect the very real, material consequences that can result from inhabiting marked, aberrant or marginalized skins, most trenchantly portrayed by the protagonist and the dead woman in Das Bad. Therefore, while I underscore the very productive reconceptualization of skin present in these texts, I also outline how skin is physically and culturally vulnerable. Whether it is valorized or stigmatized, this chapter demonstrates how skin is still a stubbornly persistent reflection of ignorance and ideology.

3.2 WRITING ON THE BODY: “DER SCHRIFTKÖRPER UND DER BESCHRIFETE KÖRPER”

During a 2008 conversation I had with Yoko Tawada regarding the prevalence and significance of skin in her texts, she reminded me of the classic Japanese myth Mimi Nashi
This ancient myth is a kind of ghost story later told by Lafcadio Hearn in his 1904 collection *Kwaidan: Stories and Studies of Strange Things*, which then again appeared some sixty years later as one of four short stories recounted in the Japanese film *Kwaidan*. The tale centers on the blind Buddhist monk Hoichi, who is a gifted *biwa* (Japanese lute) performer and renowned for reciting the Tale of the Heike, a task he performs so brilliantly that he even attracts the attention of evil spirits dwelling nearby. Because he is blind and thus unable to see that they are ghosts, and he is intimidated by their aggressive approach, the spirits are able to lure Hoichi away from his temple on consecutive nights and trick him into delivering private performances for their pleasure. The relevance of this myth with regard to Tawada’s texts and my analysis comes from what follows in the story: upon learning of Hoichi’s absence from the temple and the subsequent explanation for this absence, the temple’s priest promises to protect Hoichi from these spirits and the inevitable death that awaits him. To save him, the priests offer to paint the ‘Heart Sutra’ on Hoichi’s entire body in the hope that this protective writing upon his skin will render it invisible to the evil spirits when they come calling, and Hoichi will be spared impending death. Unfortunately, however, the priest and his assistant neglect to write

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74 Tawada also describes the story of Hoichi in her aptly titled essay “Der Schriftkörper und der beschriftete Körper” 71-79.
75 *Kwaidan*, a Japanese film from 1964 directed by Masaki Kobayashi, is a collection of four ghost stories based on Lafcadio Hearn’s collection of short stories *Kwaidan: Stories and Studies of Strange Things*. “Mimi Nashi Hoichi” is one of these stories. Coincidentally in relation to *Das Bad*, in the film *Kwaidan*, the fourth short film in the collection called “A Cup of Tea” centers on the haunting mirror reflection that follows and torments a samurai. Each time the samurai looks at his reflection in a cup of tea or a pot of water, he sees another man’s face.
76 The Tale of Heike is an account of the bloody twelfth century epic sea battle between the Heike and Meiji clans of Japan. The Heike were routed by the Meiji in this account, and thus it is restless Heike spirits who visit Hoichi and force him to perform for them.
77 The Heart Sutra is a short but well-known and often cited Buddhist scripture. It is part of the ‘Perfection of Wisdom’ Group of Mahayan Buddhist literature, and in English is composed of sixteen sentences. Much like the writing on Hoichi’s body and the concept of the ‘written body’ which I address in this chapter, a key theme to this sutra is the idea of constant change, that things never remain the same, but that they also never disappear completely.
78 In Hearn’s version of Hoichi the priest describes his intention to write on Hoichi’s body as follows: “Now I shall not be able to remain with you tonight: I am called away to perform another service. But, before I go, it will be necessary to protect your body by writing holy texts upon it.” Before sundown the priest and his acolyte stripped Hoichi: then, with their writing brushes, they traced upon his breast and back, head and face and neck, limbs and hands and feet, even upon the soles of his feet, and upon all parts of his body, the text of the holy sutra called Hannya Shin Kyo.”
the sutra on Hoichi’s ears and thus they remain visible to the spirits. These cruel spirits subsequently proceed to tear Hoichi’s ears from his body in order to prove to their masters that they attempted to find him, but this was all that remained of his body. Although Hoichi is badly wounded from this violent and bloody act of having his ears torn from his body, he is nevertheless freed from the spirits’ harassment, recovers from his injuries and ultimately becomes revered and wealthy owing to his abilities as a performer.

The story of Hoichi the Earless features prominently in a rich history of Japanese literature and cinema that focuses on the human body as a site upon which text and images are written, inscribed, painted and tattooed. Looking all the way back to Sei Shonagan’s *The Pillow Book* and its more recent instantiation as Peter Greenaway’s film adaptation of the same name, to twentieth century books and films like Akimitsu Takagi’s crime novel *The Tattoo Murder Case*, Kenji Mizoguchi’s film adaptation of *Utamoro and His Five Women*, and Yoichi Takabayashi’s erotic film *Irezumi (Spirit of Tattoo)*, skin has served as a surface of legibility and as a canvas for sign systems of varying kinds that serve diverse purposes in these fictional representations. In the case of Hoichi, writing on the skin is meant to function as protection, or as

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79 Sei Shonagon’s tenth century classic Japanese narrative of a courtesan to Empress Teishi during the Heian period is altered in the Greenaway version. Human skin, in the film, replaces paper as the place of writing. In Greenaway’s 1996 film version starring Vivian Wu as the protagonist Nagiko and Ewan McGregor as Jerome, Nagiko’s bi-sexual English lover, the story unfolds in 1990’s Hong Kong rather than tenth century Japan. The film centers on Nagiko’s seduction of various lovers who serve the dual purpose of sexual fulfillment and human parchment, as Nagiko uses their bodies as surfaces on which she authors her texts. She even has these ‘writing’ sessions photographed, and eventually she sends her manuscript, published on Jerome’s skin, to a publisher who has it transcribed. After Jerome commits suicide, Nagiko covers his whole body with text and has him buried, but the publisher, who is in love with Jerome, has him exhumed, and converts his calligraphed skin into a book. Possibly because there is still not a complete translation of Sei Shonagon’s *Pillow Book* in German, only a handful of secondary sources on Tawada’s *Opium für Ovid: Ein Kopfkissenbuch von 22 Frauen* consider the obvious connection to this classic Japanese text. Sieglinde Geisel’s “Kopfkissenbuch der Verwandlung” is one example that interconnects Ovid, Shonagon and Tawada’s text; Bernard Banoun’s “Words and Roots” briefly addresses the connection between the book and the film; Gerhard Bauer’s “Weitergehen, Verkehren, Freisetzen: Ovid seinerseits verwandelt” looks at Ovid, Tawada and Ransmayr’s utilization of the metamorphosis trope; and Monika Schmitz-Emans’s “Metamorphose und Metempsychose” takes a media studies approach to Ovid, Tawada, Ransmayr, Calvino and Cees Nooteboom’s deployment of metamorphosis.

80 It is significant that in all the films and literature mentioned above, only in “Mimi Nashi Hoichi” is there a male body upon which either text or images are drawn. In all of the other examples the body canvas is that of a female, and the act of writing assumes a much more erotic, and frequently violent, element that is absent in the case of Hoichi. I suggest Karin Beeler’s *Tattoos, Desire and Violence: Marks of Resistance in Literature, Film and Television* 75-95 for a discussion of bodily writing and tattooing in Japanese film.
a kind of invisibility cloak that prevents him from being seen by the evil spirits. Paradoxically, in making Hoichi hyper-visible and literally legible to the literate of the signifying process, which here means both his living companions at the temple and the reader/viewer of the tale, he in turn becomes illegible to the dead souls unable to perceive this textual mask. The paradox can be further extended if we consider that, on the one hand his bodily exterior has literally become the bearer of semiotic meaning, not only in the sense that all bodies are discursively produced and can be read and decoded like any text, but in the much more literal and unequivocal sense that readable *kanji* are written on his body. Yet on the other hand Hoichi is blind and thus incapable of reading his own skin, thereby suggesting that he is as invisible to himself as he is to the spirits who seek him.

Nevertheless, while *Mimi Nashi Hoichi* highlights skin as both an inscriptive and protective surface, it also shows that it is simultaneously vulnerable (proven by the painful removal of his ears) and delible, insofar as the script is not tattooed on his body, but rather is written in soluble ink that later washes off. This impermanent writing underscores the fact that bodily meaning is ambulant, transitory and contingent on context and readership. That being said, it would be no more accurate to suggest that Hoichi’s body can be wiped clean in the way that a computer screen can be deleted of its symbols (for the marks and traces left upon the body can never be completely erased), than it would be to suggest that the priest’s act of writing on Hoichi’s body was either the originary or singular moment of textual inscription on this subject. From the moment of birth one enters into a discursive realm that pre-exists us and over which we have only the most tenuous control, rendering the notion of the skin surface as *tabula-rasa* essentially void and naively positivist. This view of the bodily surface as a site of signification and *re*-signification, as a communicative medium unconsciously susceptible to outside and interior influences, one read through a complex matrix of intelligibility comprised of historically
and culturally invested codes which require an equally complex cultural literacy, is a view that is at least partially represented in Tawada’s texts. Therefore, my analyses of the texts that follow will reflect, albeit not exclusively, this approach to the body and writing.

Although I was led to the tale of Hoichi as a kind of model for Tawada’s considerably more polysemous utilization of skin in her texts through my conversation with the author, she does explicitly and expansively recite this popular Japanese legend in her short poetological reflection “Der Schriftkörper und der beschriftete Körper” from 2000. This text, which, like the title, is separated into two rather distinct, though implicitly connected parts, first focuses on ‘bodies’ of writing. It particularly centers on movement between one’s native language and a foreign language, whereby the “transition into a foreign language … reveals the non-proprietary quality of language and … the absence of language’s natural identity with the speaker” (Banoun 128). Separated by a conspicuous physical gap of white space between the text’s two parts, it then goes on over the final page and a half to rather unreflectively recount the tale of Hoichi, essentially leaving the reader to suture the conceptual thread. If we understand the Schriftkörper as a kind of prescriptive blueprint that precedes the beschriftete Körper, both in the sense of sequential positioning in the title but also in the more relevant fact that every-body is always already a written body, then the Schriftkörper component can be seen to pre-exist and overlap the beschriftete Körper instead of standing discretely apart from it. While this text muses on a variety of topics related to the defamiliarizing, unsettling, alienating but also self-reflection inducing experience of living in another language, it simultaneously points to an intertextually inflected understanding of writing or authorship that nullifies the notion of an ‘original’ text and the author as god-like creator.

Intertextuality here is meant not merely in the sense of locating a text’s sources or influences in other texts, but, in the tradition of Barthes, Bakhtin and Kristeva, more in terms of
the anonymous voices, cultural codes, conventions, and literary and intellectual discourses and traditions that always already exist prior to textual creation. Invariably then, both consciously and unconsciously, these polyphonic voices and discourses intrude upon the text, thereby destabilizing the authority of the author and rendering the notion of ‘originality’ problematic. 

While Barthes’s promotion of the text as an endless play of signifiers and limitless plurality of meaning and interpretation drains the text of a discernible logic and coherency and neglects authorial agency, his etymologically rooted figuration of the inter-text as a tissue or woven fabric (“The Death of the Author” 159) is productive for intertextually reading Tawada’s body of writing as a multilingual and intercultural literary network. Her frequent use of webs and weaving as metaphors are then, though not exclusively, subtly premised on Barthes understanding of intertextuality, especially in the context of her short poem “Eine Hautnahme” that I investigate below.

Barthes perhaps most cogently articulates, at least in part, his admittedly mobile concept of intertextuality with:

We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning (the ‘message’ of the Author-God) but a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture ... the writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest

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81 Though Barthes’s understanding of intertextuality never remained stagnant, it was in “The Death of the Author” that some of his most concrete statements on this concept were formulated. For example, one such statement I find particularly useful for outlining his idea of intertextuality is, “woven entirely with citations, references, echoes, cultural languages (what language is not?) antecedent or contemporary, which cut across it through and through in a vast stereophony. The intertextual in which every text is held, it itself being the text-between of another text, is not to be confused with some origin of the text: to try to find the ‘sources’, the ‘influences’ of a work, is to fall in with the myth of filiation; the citations which go to make up a text are anonymous, untraceable, and yet already read: they are quotations without inverted commas” (“The Death of the Author” 160).
on any one of them. Did he wish to express himself, he ought at least to know that the inner ‘thing’ he thinks to ‘translate’ is only a ready-formed dictionary, its words only explainable through other words, and so on indefinitely. (“Death of the Author” 146-47)

Derrida further echoes and intensifies this image of the text that has neither a beginning nor an end in his assertion that “a ‘text’ is henceforth no longer a finished corpus of writing, some content enclosed in a book or its margins, but a differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself, to other differential traces” (“Living On” 69).

Approaching Tawada’s texts as “tissue[s] of quotations drawn form the innumerable centres of culture” and as “multidimensional space[s]” forces readers to consider and reflect on the multiple, subtle and sometimes discordant voices that operate together to produce the manifold meanings of these hybrid texts. Tawada’s texts frequently attest to and enact the kind of web-like textual figurations Barthes and Derrida design above, and thus this image will serve as a frame for my readings to come.

While theories of intertextuality have remained relatively ignored in Tawada scholarship, Suzuko Mousel Knott, in specific connection to Tawada’s Nur da wo du bist, da ist nichts and Ein Gast, insists that intertextuality and intermediality are central components in nearly all of Tawada texts. She further likens the intertextual processes in Tawada’s writing to the notion of a literary pastiche, “wo sich die angesammelten Stränge verschiedener Narrativen verflechten, und der Schreibprozess der Autorin ist gleichermaßen als eine aus Scherben zusammengeschriebene Geste zu verstehen” (“where the collected strands of various narratives weave together, and at the same time the author’s writing process is to be understood as a move towards reassembling broken pieces through writing”; “Yoko Tawada und das ‘F-Word’” 571). In “Der Schriftkörper und der beschriftete Körper” Tawada makes an analogous claim with regard to her (inter)texts in
the context of intertextuality, opening the essay with the statement “[m]an kann nicht sagen, wann der erste Text geschrieben wurde. Jeder Text entsteht als der zweite, als eine Abfallproduktion. Es sieht so aus, als hätte man nie angefangen zu schreiben, sondern schon immer geschrieben” (“no one can say when the first text was written. Every text already develops as the second, as a trash production. It appears as though one never actually started writing, but rather was always already writing”; 70), which is reminiscent of Derrida’s claim that “the page is white but it has been written on from time immemorial; it is white through forgetfulness of what has been written …” (Dissemination 310).82

This notion of the already written surface, be it textual, bodily or both, is later extended in the essay when Tawada remembers an old (unnamed and uncited) Russian anecdote that explains “wie sich die sogenannte Realität nach dem Geschriebenen richtet und nicht umgekehrt” (“how so-called reality complies with the written, and not the other way around”; “Der Schriftkörper” 74). The anecdote speaks of a Russian architect who, while tirelessly labouring over a design for a new apartment complex, accidentally spills a spot of ink on the drawing the night before his deadline. As he would be unable to redo the work in-time to meet his deadline, and because his boss was so strict that he would be fired were the design not flawless, his wife suggests that that night they go to a nearby park, dig up a large tree and plant it in the exact spot where the ink spill is located on the design. The next day when his boss angrily asks about the ink spot, the architect honestly answers “[e]s sei ein Baum, der dort bereits stehe, und dieser

82 Though not directly in reference to intertextuality per se, on several occasions in her works Tawada reveals her indebtedness to the key figures of theories of intertextuality like Kristeva, Barthes and Derrida. In the secondary literature on Tawada that considers the influence of Barthes in her works, the focus is almost exclusively on the contentious role of Empire of Signs in relation to “Das Fremde aus der Dose” or “Eigentlich darf man es niemandem sagen.” Examples of this trend can be found in Carola Hilmes “Jeder Riß im Kopf bedeutet einen Klang;” Sabine Fischer “Durch die japanische Brille gesehen;” Andrea Krauß “Talisman – Tawadische Sprachtheorie;” Karl Esselborn “Übersetzungen aus der Sprache;” Florian Gelzer “Wenn ich spreche, bin ich nicht da;” Hiltrud Arens “Das kurze Leuchten unter dem Tor;” Ottmar Ette “Zeichenreiche: Insel-Texte und Text-Inseln;” Christina Kraenzle’s “The Limits of Travel;” Thomas Wägenbaur “Semiotic Ethnocriticism”, to name but a few. Ruth Kersting’s Fremdes Schreiben offers the most extensive and useful analysis to date of the connection between Julia Kristeva and Tawada.
Baum solle aus ästhetischen Gründen nach dem bau des Wohnblockes weiterhin dort bleiben”
(“it’s a tree that was already there, and due to aesthetic reasons it ought to remain there even
after the apartment complex is built”; 74). Tawada, who later in “Schriftkörper” claims “die erste
Schreibfläche ist bereits beschrieben” (“the first writing surface has already been written upon”;
75), emphasizes here that reality according to this anecdote does not construct the text but rather
is constructed according to the text. Moreover, it underscores the fact that the ink stain was not
the conscious creation of the author, but rather is an unconscious mark, and a productive one at
that. In her work Word Made Skin: Figuring Language at the Surface of Flesh, Karmen
MacKendrick elaborates on the processual, indeterminate and non-originary nature of the text
with the claim that “we never write on a virginal surface but neither can we ever trust our words
to stay written, nor our inscriptions, however carefully disciplined, to remain in place unaltered
… We are always overwriting an at most incomplete erasure” (150). It has perhaps become
commonplace to proclaim that ‘the body is (like) a text’, as Derrida and Barthes insist, but as the
title of MacKendrick’s book connotes and its contents demonstrate with philosophical and
intellectual rigour, Tawada’s essay also utilizes the figure of the ‘written body’ brought into
closer proximity to the ‘body of writing’. Both concepts are undergirded by the realization that
“[b]ody and text alike are palimpsestic; nobody is natural, no one writes the first word”
(MacKendrick 151). The figure of the textual palimpsest can also be productively conceptualized
as comparable to the palimpsestual body in Tawada’s texts; one that is never an original body,
but is always a hybrid imbrication of multiple identities and is constituted by the cultural,
historical, and social discourses that pre-exist it and construct its intelligibility.
3.3 READING FOREIGNNESS ON THE FACE: PHYSIOGNOMY IN *VERWANDLUNGEN*

Whether it is the face or the skin, reading and interpreting bodies through disparate cultural codes that are contingent on place and history is a central theme in a number of Tawada’s texts. While “body and text alike are palimpsestic” and “no one writes the first word,” it is also crucial to keep in mind that this inscriptive development is ceaseless, as the subject is *always in process.* Frequently Tawada’s narrator underlines the fact that not only is she forever in a process of writing her face, but also that her face is constantly being re-written by those with whom she comes in contact, thereby placing, at least to a certain degree, her identity development outside of herself. In a conversation with Maurizio Ferraris and Giorgio Vattimo titled “I have a Taste for the Secret,” Derrida points to this often unconscious and exterior construction of the self in the brief but germane lines “there is no identity. There is only identification” (28). Elsewhere in “Psyche: Inventions of the Other” Derrida also makes the claim that “we are (always) (still) to be invented” (61), which further serves to interconnect his disavowal of originality and closure with regard to the text and intertextuality, together with the idea that the body and bodily identities are likewise always in a process of becoming and re-articulation.

I provide these two quotes above as a means of establishing a context for the following excerpt from *Verwandlungen* that suggests Tawada is of a similar mind with respect to the interminable process of writing and being written by others:

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83 The ‘subject in process’, though not a term exclusive to her, is at least partially employed here with reference to Kristeva’s notion from *Revolution in Poetic Language of le sujet en procès*. While I am simplifying a theoretically robust term here, I mean it the sense that subjectivity happens in an open system, meaning that there is no stable, self-contained and unified self, but rather subjectivity is profoundly affected by outside agents and influences. For Kristeva, subjectivity is always in the making and the remaking. I am wilfully neglecting the accompanying connotation of this term that suggests the subject is on trial.


I have yet to complete writing my face. Above all else I have never even seen my face, but only its reflection in the mirror … Since I was born into this world, I have never seen my face from the outside. No mirror can show me how I appear when having a conversation with another person. I often see puzzling features in the face of the other person. These features fascinate me, and I reflect them on my own face like a sketch book.

The narrator in this passage likens her face to a sketch book that is always being written, but also establishes that this writing process is profoundly influenced by her identification with, and mimicry of, the faces she meets. Tawada is forwarding the notion here that there is no internal, core and authentic essence to the subject transmitted through the face or the skin, but rather that bodies are always contingent on the literacy of the reader and the prevailing codes of intelligibility through which they are read. The surface of the body is a communicative surface, as Tawada highlights earlier in Verwandlungen when she states that the human body is a medium which can serve as a kind of Leinwand or projection surface, particularly with respect to the human face. The text reads, “[e]in Gesichtsfeld … kann wie eine Leinwand Bilder empfangen und zeigen … Ein Gesicht ist etwas, das sichtbar geworden ist … Anscheinend zeigen sich die

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85 A similar sentiment is echoed in Tawada’s Ein Gast, where the protagonist is described as rubbing her forehead from left to right as though she were rewriting her face. Analyses of this writing on the face can be found in Brandt’s “The Unknown Character” 117-119; Margret Brügmann’s “Jeder Text hat weiße Ränder” 350-51; and Markus Hallensleben’s “Rewriting the Face” (forthcoming).
Gesichter nicht von sich aus, sondern erscheinen erst, wenn sie gelesen werden” (“Like a projection screen, the face can receive and show images … A face is something that becomes visible … Apparently faces don’t show themselves on their own, but rather only appear when they are read”; 46). The meaning a face transmits, therefore, is produced more by the gaze and expectations externally projected upon it rather than from some internal essence. For Tawada, ein Gesicht is something perceived in the phenomenal sense, like ein Geräusch, ein Geruch, ein Geschmack or ein Gefühl (“a sound, a smell, a taste or a feeling”), than it is simply a physical part of the body that can reveal through its visibility insight into an individual’s character. She differentiates her understanding of Gesichter in the following lines:

Es geht beim Gesicht also nicht um einen anatomisch fixierbaren Körperteil, denn man kann ein Gesicht auch auf einer Hand sehen oder in einer Handschrift oder in einer Kopfbewegung.

Gesichter sind überall, dennoch kann man ein Gesicht oft gar nicht erkennen. Es ist zum Beispiel schwer, das Gesicht des Gesprächspartners wirklich zu ‘sehen’. In seinen Augen sehe ich meinen eigenen Gesichtsausdruck widerspiegel …

(Verwandlungen 48)

When speaking of the face we are not talking about an anatomically fixed body part, since a face can been seen on a hand or in handwriting or in the movement of the head. Faces are everywhere, but even so they are often impossible to recognize. For example, it is difficult to really ‘see’ the face of your conversation partner. In his or her eyes I see my own facial expressions reflected back at me.

86 By far the most lengthy analysis of Tawada’s Verwandlungen can be found in Ruth Kersting’s Fremdes Schreiben 173-81, though for my analysis Carola Hilmes’s “Jeder Riß im Kopf” 320-24 has proven more useful.
87 Tawada frames ein Gesicht as something that needs to be perceived in the line, “wenn das Gerochene der Geruch heißt und das Geschmeckte der Geschmack, könnte das Gesehene das ‘Gesicht’ heißen” 48.
It is vital that the reading of ‘faces’ to which Tawada refers in this text not be confused with the kind of physiognomic reading popularized in the late eighteenth century by Johann Caspar Lavater in his *Physiognomischen Fragmente zur Beförderung der Menschenkenntnis und Menschenliebe*. Although it is a simplification, physiognomy in the sense of ‘interpreting nature’ on the body is described as “the technique or art of discovering temperament and character from outward appearance (as from facial features)” (Benthien 103). The influence and consequences of this theory of interpreting moral, intellectual and behavioural proclivities through the face led to the classifying and typifying of humans based on these principles. Moreover, the kind of pseudo-scientific interpretation promoted by Lavater’s physiognomy significantly contributed to the specious and insidious logic of Franz Joseph Gall’s phrenology, and the later development of Sir Francis Galton’s darwinesque eugenics and composite photography that sought to reveal the shared facial characteristics of criminal, racial and ethnic ‘types’. Tawada unequivocally discards this notion of interpreting the natural ‘essence’ of a subject through the outward transmission of an inner being in favour of Walter Benjamin’s conception of reading faces and things. The two concepts are juxtaposed as follows:

Wenn Benjamin von Physiognomie spricht, bezieht er sich auf eine ganz andere Wahrnehmung. Als Physiognomiker liest Benjamin Gesichter von Gegenständen, Traumbildern oder auch Architektur als mehrdeutige Texte. Indem er diese beschreibt, verwandelt sich die Dingwelt in literarische Texte. (Verwandlungen 47)

When Benjamin speaks of physiognomy, he’s not considering the face as a kind of expression of a person’s ‘inner truth’ in the sense of Johann Caspar Lavater, whose work incidentally still resonates in popular impressions of physiognomy. In Lavater’s physiognomy faces are typified and classified, in order to be able to morally evaluate the face’s owner. The body’s changeability is of course negated in this approach. According to Lavater’s physiognomy it is also unthinkable that a face can always reflect something foreign. Benjamin is approaching physiognomy from a completely different perspective. As a physiognomist Benjamin reads the faces of objects, dream-images and also architecture as multivalent texts. By writing this, the world of objects is transformed into literary texts.

It is because Lavater’s reading (judging and classifying) of faces is premised on a core ‘inner truth’ transmitted and hypostatized through the face that the mutable and transitory subject who constantly reflects something foreign becomes untenable according to his model. 88

Tawada later expands on physiognomic reading in her dissertation from 2000 titled Spielzeug und Sprachmagie in der europäischen Literatur: Eine ethnologische Poetologie, where she makes explicit reference to physiognomically reading faces as gendered, raced and classed, and how these categories were linked to internal characteristics and qualities:

88 In her article “Hybridisierung und Polyphonie” 141-42 Ivanovic also contrasts Tawada’s reflections on physiognomy with Lavater’s. Ivanovic states “[e]ben dieses Aufgreifen und Widerspiegeln des Fremden auf dem eigenen Gesicht aber scheint das Faszinosum zu sein, das Tawadas Blick auf Europa nun im dezidierten gegensatz zur Position Lavaters prägt; es ist die Option, das Fremde … in den eigenen Körper zu übersetzen, welche sich als dessen Verwandelbarkeit ausspricht: anstelle des ‘polyphonen Körpers’ also eine per se hybride Gestalt?”
Johann Caspar Lavater, der berühmte Vertreter dieser physiognomischen Tradition, schrieb sogar jeder ‘Rasse’, jedem ‘Geschlecht’ und jeder ‘Klasse’ eine grundlegende Physiognomie zu, die er mit ‘Qualitätsmerkmalen’ verband. Er versuchte, Körperlichkeit als fixierbare Materie zu fassen und Voraussetzungen für spätere rassistische Ideologien, die in solchen Körperbildern ihre Bestätigung finden. (64)

Johann Caspar Lavater, the famous representative of the physiognomic tradition, even attributed an underlying physiognomy to every race, gender and class, which he connected with characteristics of quality. He attempted to establish corporeality as a fixable material; an assumption that would find traction and confirmation in the body images of racist ideologies that later followed.

Tawada is reacting against the proposition that the face is static and coherent and unable to reflect the unfamiliar (“[es] ist auch undenkbar, daß ein Gesicht stets etwas Fremdes widerspiegelt”). She is also rejecting the notion that races, genders and classes ‘read’ on the face are inextricably and interminably tied to internal qualities or a singular essence. On the contrary, Tawada insists that the subject’s identity is constantly in flux, disavowing the notion of a wahres Selbst or internal essence in favour of an external appearance that “entsteht erst im Auge des Betrachters, wird also von den Anderen erzeugt” (“formed only in the eye of the observer – meaning that it is produced by an other”; Hilmes 324). Every face, as a contingent, processual, verwandelbar Leinwand always holds the possibility of reflecting the stubborn uniqueness of individuality, rather than common features of physiognomic classification.
It has already been noted that there are a few Tawada scholars who have considered Verwandlungen’s reaction to Lavater’s theory of physiognomy. For example, in her article “Die Verfremdung des Fremden: Kulturelle und ästhetische Alterität bei Yoko Tawada” (“Alienation of the Foreign: Cultural and Aesthetic Alterity in Yoko Tawada”) Clara Ervedosa writes:

Für die Europäer [verrät] das Studium der Physiognomie die innere Wahrheit und die Moral der Person, weil das Gesicht in der christlichen Tradition als Eingangstor zum Körper gilt … Diese Fähigkeit zur Metamorphose, ständig eine neue Gestalt anzunehmen, in der Umwelt oder Phantasie aufzugehen und sogar zu verschwinden, in der europäischen Kunst negative bewertet, konnotiert Tawada positiv. (576)

For Europeans the study of physiognomy revealed the inner truth and morals of a person, because in the Christian tradition the face is the entrance to the body … This metamorphic ability – to continuously appropriate another form, to go outside and even disappear – that is so negatively valued in European art, is conversely positively connoted by Tawada.

Likewise, Carola Hilmes’s “Jeder Riß im Kopf bedeutet eine Klang: Selbst- und Fremdwahrnehmung im literarischen Werk von Yoko Tawada” (“Every Tear in the Head Makes a Sound: Perceptions of the Self and the Foreign in the Literary Work of Yoko Tawada”) also sees this text as a reaction to the highly problematic potential of reading the expression of a human being’s ‘inner truth’ through the face as a means of gaining knowledge in order to categorize. Hilmes articulates the difference in Tawada’s position with “[f]ür Tawada aber stehen Mehrdeutigkeit und Metamorphose im Zentrum. Die Identität einer Person wird

89 What is also significant in this article for my analysis that follows in this chapter with respect to the body and landscapes in texts like Das Bad, “Eine Hautnahme” and “Wo Europa anfängt,” Brandstetter then states “aus den Körper-Topographien werden Landschaften; und darin nisten Mythen des Körpers und seiner Verwandlung” 115.
entsprechend transitorisch gefaßt” (“for Tawada polysemy and metamorphosis are central. A person’s identity is correspondingly transitorially conceived”; 323).

It is not only in connection to Verwandlungen that scholars have considered the physiognomic theme, however. For example, in reference to Tawada’s Opium für Ovid: Ein Kopfkissenbuch von 22 Frauen, Gabriele Brandstetter’s “Gesichter und Texturen: Zu einer Physiognomik der Falte” (“Faces and Textures: On the Physiognomy of the Fold”) also investigates the function of physiognomy in Tawada’s texts, albeit in the context of the legibility of the ‘fold’ and skin rather than the face. Brandstetter articulates “die Lesbarkeit der Falte als Zeichen und als Leerraum zwischen Figurativem, als Linie in der räumlichen Formung von Flächen – eines Stoffs, der Haut, des Bodens … So bildet die Falte Topographien aus, die als Texturen, als ‘Gesichter’ gelesen werden” (“the readability of the fold as sign and as empty space between the figurative, as a line in the spatial form of surfaces – of material, of skin, of the ground … Thus the fold forms topographies that can be read as textures, as ‘faces’”; 87). In connection to the chapter on the fashion designer ‘Semele’ from Opium für Ovid, where cloth, and especially silk, is being ubiquitously figured as a fold, as drapery and as skin, Brandstetter remarks that “nicht eine Physiognomie der Falten – als Ausdruck des Gesichts – ist hier thematisiert; eher schon eine eigene und eigenwillige Rhetorik der Haut, die sich in Falten legt und Geschichten und Topographien ausbildet” (“it is not a physiognomy of folds – as an expressions of the face – that is being thematized here, but rather its own rhetoric of the skin that is laid out in folds, and which forms its own histories and topographies”; 115). Bernard Banoun likewise comments on the omnipresence and interconnectivity between reading bodies and fabrics in texts like Opium für Ovid and “Der Schriftkörper und der beschriftete Körper,” especially in response to Tawada’s observation that “[m]an kann nicht sagen, wann der erste Text geschrieben wurde. Jeder Text entsteht als der zweite, als eine Abfallproduktion. Es sieht so
aus, als hätte man nie angefangen zu schreiben, sondern schon immer geschrieben”

(“Schriftkörper” 70). Banoun further comments:

When one understands to what extent fabrics and texts are semantically brought together in Tawada’s imagination, it becomes impossible to downplay the importance of these images. Not only isolated letters and ideograms but also objects, behaviors, and movements become new and unknown signs. Sounds, forms, colors and rhythms open the way for apprehending the world, without needing to look for signification underneath or behind the words … The processes of coding and decoding are infinite, and meaning is never discovered nor interrupted since there is no stable meaning, first or last, just as there is no original text. (131)

This quotation is illustrative of both the previously discussed concept of intertextuality and also outlines how, for Banoun, the representation of fabric in Tawada’s texts is significant for two reasons. On the one hand, fabric is a sign that can be read as surface-level meaning without any need to look beneath, but it also elicits a sense of duality between secrecy and depth, or surface and interiority. As Banoun asserts, the complexity of reading signs in non-linguistic systems, especially when it comes to reading and comprehending bodies, is a crucial component in Tawada’s texts. I will therefore address this unique form of literacy below.

Before continuing, however, more needs to be said on the role of physiognomy and the face in relation to Verwandlungen. As the vast majority of Tawada’s texts (and the two quotes above from Ervedosa and Hilmes) emphasize, the notion that there is a viably singular, unified, and immutable self that remains invulnerable to temporal and spatial contingencies is unsurprisingly also disabused in a text titled Verwandlungen. Plurality though is not necessarily

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90 While numerous analyses of Tawada’s texts highlight her refusal that any identity is tied to a singular, stable core self, Doug Slaymaker’s “Writing in the Ravine” succinctly articulates this sentiment: “Tawada asserts that if such a
always positively received, as Tawada frames the idea of possessing multiple faces against the backdrop of a religiously-grounded, negative connotation. The text states “[e]s wird in Deutschland meistens negativ bewertet, wenn man mehrere Gesichter hat. In den christlichen Gemälden haben nur die Gestalten, die das Böse verkörpern, mehrere Gesichter” (“usually in Germany having more than one face is valued negatively. In Christian paintings only the figures that embody evil have multiple faces”; 51). For Tawada, the plural and re-writable face is an inevitability, or at least certainly more realistic and reflective of the majority of people’s realities for whom the static and singular identity is a mere myth. It is especially for those who travel into other lands, cultures and languages that this facial heterogeneity is most closely experienced, considering it is in these situations and encounters that ‘foreignness’ is most acutely brought into intimate contact with the bodily surface, and where one becomes most aware that he or she is being physiognomically and ethnographically read as raced and othered.

In Verwandlungen, Tawada reflects on how the face is a pliable and multi-layered palimpsestual surface that adapts to, and is constructed by, the expectations of observers, but she also subtly points to its performative dimensions here as well. In this text (Verwandlungen 53) Tawada recycles the scene from Das Bad where the protagonist returns to Japan in order to visit her mother after having been in Germany for a substantial duration of time. She is subsequently accused by her mother of having acquired an Asian, but also somehow foreign, face that resembles the Japanese actors in American movies. The dialogue between the protagonist and her mother reads:

Ich bemerke, wie sie ihren Blick über meinen Körper streifen ließ:

“Warum hast du so ein asiatisches Gesicht bekommen?”

“Du redest Unsinn, Mutter. Das ist doch selbstverständlich. Ich bin eine Asiatin.”

thing as an ‘actual self’ exists, then that is the self that speaks/thinks/dreams in multiple languages … [T]he insistence on a single, stable identity denies the messy complexity that constitutes the individual subject who is not, in the end, comprised of pure categories, but of multiple minds and positions” (49).
“So habe ich es nicht gemeint. Du hast ein fremdes Gesicht bekommen; wie die Japaner, die in amerikanischen Filmen auftreten.” *(Das Bad* 133)

My mother glanced me up and down. “How did you get such an Asian face?”

“What are talking about, Mother? I am Asian.” “That’s not what I meant. You’ve started to have one of those faces like Japanese people in American movies.”

(“The Bath” 43-44)

In this scene, the protagonist, who does not initially appear on the photographs Xander takes of her in Germany because she lacks the visible signifiers of an easily readable Japanese ‘essence’, and only once her face has been marked by the photographer can she be seen in the photographic image, is conversely viewed in Japan as having a face that reflects the perceptions and expectations of Westerners. This misrecognition is due to her perceived lack of the Japanese essence; she fits neither one mould nor the other, and thus remains foreign in both cultural contexts. Sabine Fischer outlines this position of existing between stereotypes with:

Das traditionelle Bild der Japanerin, ein Stereotyp, in dem sich exotische Schönheit, Kindlichkeit und Aufopferungsbereitschaft vereinigen, ist jedoch nicht nur ein fester Bestandteil des europäisch-männlichen Diskurses, sondern dient auch der westlichen feministischen Theorie häufig als Grundlage für die Kritik an der Ausbeutung der Asiatin durch das europäische und asiatische Patriarchat.

(“Verschwinden” 107)

The traditional image of the Japanese woman – a stereotype which combines exotic beauty, childishness, and a readiness to self-sacrifice – is nevertheless not only a firm component of the European-masculine discourse, but also features in western feminist theories as a basis for critiques on the exploitation of the Asian female in European and Asian patriarchal systems.
Moreover, the fact that the protagonist, according to her mother, resembles the Japanese characters appearing in American movies, roles frequently played by non-Japanese and until the 1960s often non-Asian actors in Hollywood cinema, not only underscores the mutability and cultural contingency of identity, but also its dramaturgical and performative aspects as well.\textsuperscript{91}

The protagonist is being equated with an actor who performs her identity, and depending on where she is and with whom she is speaking, this identity can assume any number of roles. Her role in this social interaction, however, is received as a misrepresentation by the audience (the mother), thereby exposing the protagonist’s performance as inauthentic, as \textit{dramatically} Japanese but not Japanese in essence. In Germany the protagonist is overlooked as ‘not having enough sense of herself as Japanese’, while in Japan she is seen as \textit{affectedly} Japanese. In both cases however, the misrepresentation of identity expectations underscores the absence of an ‘original’ ethnic essence by stressing the protagonist’s performative enactment, and further points to the prominence of visual media (photograph and film) in constructing these expectations of ethnicity.

This scene from \textit{Das Bad} with the protagonist’s ‘unrecognizable’ face is reproduced and analyzed in \textit{Verwandlungen}, and is consequentially contextualized within Barthes’s “The Written Face” chapter from \textit{Empire of Signs}. The mother/daughter mis-reading is reminiscent of Barthes’s musings on his own photograph that appeared in the \textit{Kobe Shinbun}, and it is the following lines from \textit{Empire of Signs} that Tawada directly reflects upon in \textit{Verwandlungen} (53).

Barthes observes in connection to his photograph that “[t]his Western lecturer, as soon as he is ‘cited’ by the \textit{Kobe Shinbun}, finds himself ‘Japanned’, eyes elongated, pupils blackened by

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{91} The dramaturgical performance is meant here in the sense of Goffman’s \textit{The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life}, while the performative connects to Butler’s notion of performativity, and especially gender performativity. Goffman’s understanding of self-presentation as a theatrical performance incorporates a much more explicit dramaturgical vocabulary and assumption of agency and will on the part of the performer than does Butler’s development of performativity, which is far more discursively based and which pre-exists the performative actor. For Butler, the script (or discourse) is much more deterministic and constitutive than it is for Goffman.
\end{quote}
Nipponese typography” (90). Then in reference to a photograph of a famous Japanese actor, he queries “[w]hereas the young actor Teturo Tanba, ‘citing’ Anthony Perkins, has lost his Asiatic eyes … What then is our face, if not a ‘citation’?” Tawada also considers the face as a kind of citation, as medially contingent, and always in need of translation. She reflectively states in relation to the mother’s (mis)interpretation of her daughter’s face provided above that “die Erwartungen der Betrachter erzeugen Masken, und die wachsen ins Fleisch der Fremden hinein.

So werden stets die Blicke der anderen ins eigene Gesicht eingeschrieben. Ein Gesicht kann mehrere Schichten erhalten. Vielleicht kann man ein Gesicht wie einen Reisebericht umblättern” (“the observer’s expectations produce masks that grow into the flesh of the foreigner. Some else’s look is always being written into one’s own face. A face can keep many layers. Maybe you can even flip through a face like a travel report”; Verwandlungen 53). Again here this passage suggests a degree of cultural literacy required in order to decode the multi-layered inscriptions written on the subject’s face, making the face analogous to a travel report whose pages can be turned and read. Yet it is crucial to recognize that one’s face is constantly being re-written by the expectations and the gaze of others. This is especially true, as Tawada emphasizes, when it is the face of a foreigner: “Man kann das Thema des Gesichtes kaum umgehen, wenn man sich mit der Fremdheit beschäftigt. Reisende bekommen von den Einheimischen deshalb so viele Masken aufs Gesicht gedrückt, weil sie sonst unsichtbar bleiben” (“When you are dealing with foreignness, it is very difficult to avoid the theme of the face. This is why travelers receive many masks impressed into their faces by the locals, since otherwise they would remain invisible”; Verwandlungen 52-53).

The symbolic deployment of the ‘masks’ in the preceding quotations is both provocative and emblematic of how Tawada develops and complicates the connection between the bodily exterior and identity formation throughout her texts, but also intersects her concept of fictive
ethnology with these traditional ethnographic objects. Crucially though, in this case the masks are the creation of the observer and say nothing of the foreigner or his/her culture. Masks, by their nature, are designed to conceal the identity of those who wear them, thereby evoking the prospect that an ‘authentic’ identity resides beneath and can be revealed if the disguise is removed. The fact that these masks, which are constituted outside the subject, grow into the flesh of the ‘foreigner’ corresponds, on the one hand, to the notion that the skin is a mask external to the authentic self that envelops, constricts, separates and announces difference, but only to the literate of the cultural coding. In this sense, the mask is not worn of the subject’s own volition, and is instead inscribed onto the bodily exterior as a way of making difference visible and legible. On the other hand however, these foreign masks bring to mind the overarching theme of fictive ethnology and the ethnographic gaze that Tawada is countering and complicating throughout her texts. They connote performance, deception and the faulty logic that the ‘truth’ lies beneath. The theatrical and performative connotations of these masks as ethnographic objects will therefore be detailed below.

3.4 MASKS, MASQUERADE AND PERFORMATIVITY IN TAWADA’S TEXTS

It is apparent in the above quotation from Verwandlungen (“die Erwartungen der Betrachter erzeugen Masken, und die wachsen ins Fleisch der Fremden hinein ... So werden stets die Blicke der anderen ins eigene Gesicht eingeschrieben”), that Tawada is not promoting the idea that masks are simply available for wearing according to the subject’s will and whim. Because the identity constructed and assumed in this mask is the product of the expectant gaze of

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92 Katrin Sieg’s Ethnic Drag, Performing Race, Nation, Sexuality in West Germany from 2002, in considering cross-racial castings in West German theatre, also examines the performance of race as a masquerade in a specifically German theatre context, but within a more North American theoretical paradigm. Sieg’s analysis considers representations of Jewish, African and Eastern ethnicities in West German theatre, and while it is not particularly relevant for my research, it does present insight into the idea of race as a performative category based on Butler’s outline of performativity.
the observer and is constantly changing depending on who is doing the observing and in what spatial, historical and cultural context, the commonly levied criticism of ‘naïve voluntarism’ directed against theory that promotes human identity as mask or masquerade seems misguided. Without delving too deeply into the theory, I am referring here to the willfully one-dimensional criticisms that proliferated after Martha Nussbaum’s influential article “The Professor of Parody,” and which have been directed at Butler’s theory of drag and masquerade within the context of gender performativity. These criticisms accuse gender performativity of promoting gender as whatever we want it to be, and that the idea of gender as drag suggests we can wear our gender identity as though we were choosing our clothes for the day; like a mask we can decide to put on and remove, as though acts of agency and transgressing norms were only a matter of self-awareness and counter-action.

Following Gender Trouble, Butler constantly needed to emphasize that not every drag performance was exemplary of transgressive performativity or a subversive act. Bodies That Matter firmly denies the voluntarism and quietism of gender performativity criticisms when it outlines performativity as that which “consists in a reiteration of norms which precede, constrain, and exceed the performer and in that sense cannot be taken as the fabrication of the performer’s ‘will’ or ‘choice’” (24). In Undoing Gender Butler also addresses this notion that gender does not reside in some prior origin, but rather is enacted performatively through often unconsciously citing or repeating norms, stating:

If gender is a kind of doing, an incessant activity performed, in part, without one’s knowing and without one’s willing, it is not for that reason automatic or mechanical. On the contrary, it is a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint … [but] … the terms that make up one’s own gender are, from the start,
outside oneself, beyond oneself in a sociality that has no single author (and that radically contests the notion of authorship itself). (1)

Even already in *Gender Trouble* Butler makes clear that while performativity deconstructs the substantive appearance of gender, the repeated acts that constitute identity are done “within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (33). It is this ‘highly rigid regulatory frame’ that prevents the subject from choosing whichever gender, sexuality or even race he or she would like to embody. While gender, sexuality and race may be performatively and repeatedly enacted, there is a very limited number of ‘roles’, ‘costumes’ and masks from which the performer may choose.

In Tawada’s texts, masks, both in their theatrical significance and in their performative connotations, are incorporated in a number of explicit and implicit, literal and symbolic representations. From a literary studies perspective, for example, in her article “Körper, Stimme, Maske,” Tawada considers the relationship between the use of masks in Japanese Nô-Theatre and in Heiner Müller’s drama. Her dissertation *Spielzeug und Sprachmagie* extensively analyzes the use of masks in relation to the ethnographic diaries of the French surrealist author and ethnographer Michel Leiris, noting how, according to Leiris’s ethnographic diary *Phantom Africa*, “[i]m Maskentheater verdoppelt sich der Charakter der ‘Fälschung’ noch, weil darin zusätzlich die Maske das ‘Original’ des nackten Gesichts verfälscht” (“In mask theatre there is even a doubling of the character of deception, since there is an additional falsifying of the original ‘naked’ face”; 123). But especially in her fictional texts Tawada’s characters frequently adopt and hide behind masks or are forced into playing roles, though the performative

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93 Chapter three of Tawada’s dissertation, “Puppenschrift und Ethnologie,” focuses primarily on Michel Leiris’s *Phantom Africa*. As the title suggests, this work is a kind of a-typical ethnographic account in that it contains ample self-reflection on the ethnographic gaze and voice themselves, rather than ‘objective’ or ‘scientific’ insights into African cultural essences and differences. That is by no means to suggest that Leiris’s ethnographic diaries are a radical departure from Eurocentric and colonial-ethnographic accounts, as they frequently articulate Leiris’s disgust with African women and customs that only serve to make him pine for Europe. Yet there is a kind of counter-ethnographic quality to his writing that clearly influences Tawada’s fictional ethnographies, and which I will expand upon further in the following chapter.
nature of all identity should not be limited only to these more explicit masquerades. The protagonist in *Das Bad*, for instance, applies a make-up mask every morning in order to alter her ‘natural’ appearance as a means of adhering to an imposed body image, but this scene actually serves to reveal that instead of *being* herself, she is actually *doing* her identity through this ritual and repeated self-stylization. By drawing attention to this kind of parodic performance that the protagonist repeatedly conducts in *Das Bad*, Tawada is underscoring the constructedness and imitative nature of all identity performances. This parodic performance effectively destabilizes the myth of an essential or natural origin upon which identity is based as, eventually, the protagonist begins to repeat her identity against this normative model.

The mask worn by the protagonist as part of her cultural survival is illustrative of both the limited and normative script which constricts identities, but also points to the mimetology and imitative structure of all identity performances. By virtue of the necessary repetition of these performances, “gaps and fissures are opened up as the constitutive instabilities in such constructions, as that which escapes or exceeds the norm, as that which cannot be wholly defined or fixed by the repetitive labor of that norm” (Butler, *Bodies that Matter* 10). In a similar sense to Butler’s concept of gender performativity, Tawada’s texts like *Das Bad* and *Verwandlungen* present the seemingly irreconcilable tension between performing identities within the limited and

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94 Racial performativity in relation to Tawada’s texts will be analyzed in the following chapter. There are a few examples of the performativity of identity to be found elsewhere in Tawada’s writing, such as in *Das nackte Auge*. For instance, the story’s narrator, a Vietnamese female who accidentally ends up in Paris where she struggles to survive, states “wenn man den Hut wechselt, wechselt man die Identität” 88, which is consistent with the constantly shifting identity of the text’s protagonist, and the sense that one ‘wears’, rather than is, their identity. This protagonist, who lives more in the films of her heroine Catherine Deneuve than she does in reality, later says “so wie Sie [Deneuve] eine Rolle im Film spielen, spiele auch ich eine Rolle in der Geschichte. Ich frage mich manchmal, wer mein Regisseur ist” 88. This again indicates that she is performing a role or assuming an identity. The distinction between role and reality, or mask and the true face behind it, becomes increasingly less clear. Petra Fachinger, in her article “Postcolonial/Postcommunist Picaresque,” considers some of the performative aspects of *Das nackte Auge*, especially in relation to the role of film in the text. Fachinger notes, “within the context of the film it becomes clear that donning ethnic accoutrements is part of a performance, but there is also something more profound about this performance than merely putting on a costume. It is both a personal and a political mode of self-construction. The fact that identity, including ethnic identity, is always performed is a central theme of *Das nackte Auge*. The cinema and the theatre are used as metaphors for the world as a stage, a notion on which the picaresque mode is also based” 304.
rigid regulatory frame of discourse and normativity, and the possibility of disrupting and undermining this repetitive process by revealing gender, but also racial and sexual identities, to be imitations, citations or copies of an original that does not exist.

3.5 LEARNING TO READ DIFFERENTLY: ENCOUNTERS WITH STRANGERS IN “DAS FREMDE AUS DER DOSE”

Yoko Tawada makes frequent reference to masks and identity masquerades in her texts, and the preceding section detailed a select few of the most exemplary textual examples. Another crucial example of Tawada’s use of masks can be found in *Talisman’s* short fictional piece “Das Fremde aus der Dose.” Here readers witness the experience of the ‘strange encounters’ of the female ‘foreigner’, who is read and interpreted through a cultural coding worn on her face and/or skin like an imposed mask. In the first line of this text the prominence of (il)literacy as a thematic thread that runs throughout is underscored, although this literacy does not just refer to the ability to read linguistic sign systems, but also the significations constructed from non-linguistic codes, such as those imprinted or reflected on the body. “Das Fremde aus der Dose,” like many of Tawada’s texts, tells of a female Japanese narrator who comes to Germany (in this case specifically Hamburg), and then relates some of the everyday observations and experiences she has during this time. Initially the narrator is unable to establish meaning between German words and the individual alphabetic letters of which they are comprised, for while she knows each letter on its own, when placed together to form words they say nothing to her. Later she befriends a German woman in her mid-fifties named Sascha. Although this woman is illiterate, there is nothing in the text to suggest, as Thomas Wägenbaur does, that she is also “mentally handicapped” (343). Sascha’s illiteracy is not exclusively meant in the sense that she is

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95 “Das Fremde aus der Dose” does say that she lives with a friend named Sonja, who suffers from a physical condition that prevents her from exiting a bus by herself, and it mentions that a care giver visits them three times a
linguistically analphabetic, but rather that she is not able to ‘read’ the narrator’s face through the conventional or habitual code of intelligibility with its preconceived, common-sense understanding and potentially problematic judgments. Ivanovic and Matsunaga, in the ‘Lesen’ excerpt from their “Tawada von zwei Seiten” glossary, note that in “Das Fremde aus der Dose” Tawada articulates “[d]as Nichtlesenkönnen gerade als Chance für eine andere Art der Wahrnehmung und der gelingenden sozialen Kommunikation” (“not being able to read as the opportunity for another kind of perception and successful social interaction”; 131). The text conveys the alternative to reading that Sascha develops in the line, “[s]ie wollte nichts ‘lesen’, sondern alles genau beobachten” (“She didn’t want to ‘read’ things, she wanted to observe them, in detail”; “Das Fremde aus der Dose” 40; “Canned Foreign” 86). The author places ‘Lesen’ in quotation marks in this sentence for the same reason I attached quotation marks to the word ‘read’ in the previous sentence; because it signifies more than just reading in terms of gleaning meaning from a linguistic text, but also that complex signifying processes are present everywhere, even, or especially, on the surface of the body. As Florian Gelzer puts it, “[l]esbar, so teilt der Essay mit, ist grundsätzlich die ganze Welt. Die Erzählerin liest Risse, Spalten, Handlinien und Falten als ‘Naturschrift’” (“Tawada’s essay expresses that essentially the whole world is readable. The narrator reads tears, cracks, lines on the hand and folds as ‘nature’s writing’”; 75).

In the following passage, the narrator describes how Sascha differs from most people she meets in Hamburg in terms of how they see and interpret her as foreign: “[Sascha] blickte mich jedes Mal an, wenn sie mich sah, intensiv und interessiert, aber sie versuchte dabei niemals, etwas aus meinem Gesicht herauszulesen. Damals erlebte ich oft, daß Menschen unruhig werden, wenn sie mein Gesicht nicht lesen können wie einen Text” (“Whenever [Sascha] saw me she

week in order to handle any written matters, but it does not explicitly state that either Sascha or Sonja are mentally disabled.
gazed at me intently and with interest, but she never attempted to read anything in my face. In those days I often found that people became uneasy when they couldn’t read my face like a text”; “Das Fremde aus der Dose” 40; “Canned Foreign” 86). While this text is certainly not idealizing or advocating illiteracy as a model for intercultural communication, it is identifying that certain types of reading are limited and constricted by Wahrnehmungsgewohnheiten, or established conventions of perception, cultural stereotypes and expectations of foreign that prevent the foreigner from being read as anything but a pre-determined representation and representative of his or her original culture. Brian Lennon, in his recent book *In Babel’s Shadow*, focuses on the protagonist’s scorn towards native speakers who easily and comfortably articulate their own language, and the protagonist’s friendship with Sascha that is based on physiognomic illiteracy. Lennon states:

The narrator of “Das Fremde aus der Dose” valorizes neither her own cultural hybridization – for this serves mainly to position her as a representative of Japan on a German public stage – nor the cultural purity of illiteracy as ‘alternative’, to be embraced in symbolic rebellion by those already possessing its privilege. She prizes her friendship with someone who chooses not to read her, who is uninterested in reading her, who is uncomfortable with a face that is not also a text – or a book. Her own position as a nonnative speaker of German makes her profoundly, physically wary of fluency in any language, of the exclusionary

96 Though in a slightly different context, this term is taken from Sabine Fischer’s “Durch die japanische Brille gesehen” 67. In this essay she approaches “Das Fremde aus der Dose” from the perspective that illiterates can lack both language and cultural competence when it comes to reading signs and images, indicating the numerous codifications embedded in signs that supersede mere linguistic abilities 67–69.
97 Bettina Brandt, in her article “The Unknown Character,” develops a comparable analysis with regard to Tawada’s *Ein Gast*. The text, which also deals with a female Japanese protagonist in Germany, describes her visit to a flea market where a vendor tells her that a book written in an unknown script is actually a mirror. The man explains to her, “to our eyes you look exactly like this writing,” suggesting that the unknown script and the narrator’s mirrored reflection are one and the same. The protagonist then rubs her “forehead from left to right, as if rewriting [her] face.” Brandt contends that “reading the other as a mirror, we know from Lacan, might be a necessary developmental stage in the attempt to create a coherent self, but has precious little to offer as a device that might produce knowledge about the other. Seeing the stranger as mirror means that we have erased the features of the other to see only a reflection of our familiar self on the flattened surface of the other’s face” 118.
exuberance of monolingualism, its inherent self-celebration; her emphasis … is on fluency as a kind of ethical weakness, rather than on nonfluency as ethical strength. (20-21)

Similarly, Susan C. Anderson describes the friendship between the narrator and Sascha (and also with Sascha’s illiterate friend Sonja) as “the possibility of intercultural communication based on concentrated attention to direct observation rather than on inattentive stereotyping” (62). Without generalizing, there is a sense in this text of a population in possession of a very limited cultural literacy, meaning they are only able to read from others what is already familiar to them. In connection, Bettina Brandt highlights, “Tawada has insisted that in order to let ‘the strange’ and ‘the stranger’ exist in their own right, this type of reading the other should be avoided” (118). Even the title itself, and perhaps more so the English translation “Canned Foreign,” implies a certain pre-packaged, stock set of easily palatable and ready-made stereotypes that are on-hand for reading and interpreting foreignness. With this in mind, it is productive to acknowledge that the official English translation is not “Canned Foreigner,” as the definite article das is used here rather than der or die, making it “a disembodied, abstract and intangible notion of foreign” (Grewe 12). Nor is the title, as Thomas Wägenbaur puts it “The Strange out of a Can” (343), although this does retain the disembodied and abstract connotation of Fremde, but also makes more explicit in the term ‘strange’ what is only implicitly implied in ‘foreign’.

Nevertheless, the protagonist’s experience in this text is both as a foreigner and a stranger, insofar as she is nationally, racially and culturally foreign but also someone whom the locals are unable to read ‘wie einen Text’, indicating that she is somehow also strange. Yet the stranger is not simply one who is unknown, but rather someone who is always already known as a stranger. Sara Ahmed supports this approach with “the figure of the ‘stranger’ is produced, not as that which we fail to recognize, but as that which we have already recognized as ‘a
The alien stranger is hence, not beyond human, but a mechanism for allowing us to face that which we have already designated as the beyond” (Strange Encounters 3). The prospect that foreignness is something that can be reduced to a singular and knowable truth worn on the body is suggested and subverted in the text’s title and its English translation. While it may appear simplistic, both titles “Das Fremde aus der Dose” and “Canned Foreign,” as figurations of packaging the abstract into portable containers, elicit the notion of marketing and commodifying foreignness, suggesting that the exceedingly disparate ways a person experiences displacement from home can be totalized and universalized into a singular and easily consumable status of foreign that is visible on their skin. Here, as a canned product, foreignness is framed as something to be desired as opposed to feared, mistrusted or, in its more extreme form, disdained. This certainly counters discourses on ‘stranger danger’ that have proliferated and manifested in the various guises of racism and xenophobia, “but only insofar as it keeps in place the fetishism upon which those discourses rely” (Ahmed, Strange Encounters 4). In this text, die Fremde is transformed into das Fremde, from a figure into a fantasy, where the specificity and individuality of the subject melt into an easily readable and consumable semantics of foreignness.

One of the most troublesome difficulties the narrator experiences as the embodied foreign in this text is that when she is called upon to articulate the cultural differences separating Germany and Japan, she invariably fails to satisfy the request. The text reads:

Jeder Versuch, den Unterschied zwischen zwei Kulturen zu beschreiben, mißlang mir: Der Unterschied wurde direkt auf meine Haut aufgetragen wie eine fremde Schrift, die ich zwar spüren, aber nicht lesen konnte. Jeder fremde Klang, jeder fremde Blick und jeder fremde Geschmack wirkten unangenehm auf den Körper, so lange, bis der Körper sich veränderte. (“Das Fremde aus der Dose” 41)
Every attempt I made to describe the difference between two cultures failed: this difference was painted on my skin like a foreign script which I could feel but not read. Every foreign sound, every foreign glance, every foreign taste struck my body as disagreeable until my body changed. (―Canned Foreign‖ 87)

In this passage we witness a very literal enactment of reification, as here the cultural differences which the narrator fails to articulate hypostatize on her skin as markers of classification and differentiation. On the one hand, the fact that difference is ‘inscribed directly onto the skin’ of the protagonist underscores how the seemingly physical and biological ‘truth’ of skin is really the result of ideological and cultural processes, demonstrating how “the painful pressures of the dominant culture [work] to incorporate her and to impose its view of ‘Japanese’ culture on to her” (Anderson 63). But on the other hand, the idea that she is able to feel but not read this script, and also that her body keeps changing, point to the fact that she, like the tuna can at the end of this text with the image of the Japanese female on its packaging, resists being fixed to, and comprehended as, the label which has been attached to her (“Einmal kaufte ich mir eine kleine Dose im Supermarkt, auf die eine Japanerin gemalt war. Ich öffnete die Dose zu Hause und sah ein Stück Thunfisch darin. Die Japanerin schien sich während der langen Schiffsfahrt in ein Stück Fisch verwandelt zu haben” [―Once, in the supermarket, I bought a little can that had a Japanese woman painted on the side. Later, at home, I opened the can and saw inside it a piece of tuna fish. The woman seemed to have changed into a piece of fish during her long voyage”]; “Das Fremde 43; “Canned Foreign” 89). Since there is no natural, one-to-one relationship between the contents of the can and the image-signifier on its packaging, no internal essence revealed on the exterior, “Das Fremde aus der Dose” can be read, as Gelzer suggests, as a “Plädoyer für eine ‘Befreiung der Signifikanten’” (75) that advocates for a much less superficial reading of bodies. The final line of the text states “[d]iese Wörter motivierten mich hin und
wieder, die äußere Verpackung zu öffnen, um eine weitere Verpackung darunter zu entdecken”
(“These words now and then led me to open the wrapping paper on the outside, only to find
different wrapping paper below”; “Das Fremde” 44; “Canned Foreign” 90), essentially
confirming that there is no essence or core signified to be uncovered, only more signifiers.

3.6 TECHNIQUES OF DEFAMILIARIZATION: MAKING THE SKIN VISIBLE

While in a sense the concept of the ‘body (and its dermal envelope) as text’ has becom
somewhat axiomatic in literary and theoretical discourse by scholars including Foucault, Butler,
Jane Gallop and Susan Bordo, it is precisely the self-evident and commonsense understanding
and perception of the corporeal exterior that made it so problematically and unreflectively hyper-
visible (“the beautiful object on display for exchange” [Winnubst 37]) and in-visible (“the horror
of nothing to see” [Irigaray 26]) in the first place. And as the previous chapter on photography
demonstrated, it is sometimes the most commonplace, normalized and seemingly natural
concepts that most pressingly demand reconsideration. This literary device so frequently utilized
by Tawada is closely linked with Victor Shklovsky’s technique of ostranenie, or ‘making
strange’, which serves to defamiliarize that which has become habitual and therefore beyond
contestation. 98 Maria S. Grewe’s 2009 dissertation “Estranging Poetic: On the Poetic of the
Foreign in Select Works by Herta Müller and Yoko Tawada” 99 relates Shklovsky’s concept of
defamiliarization to the analogous poetic device of estrangement employed by Yoko Tawada; a

98 See Victor Shklovsky’s “Art as Technique” 3-24 for the most comprehensive formulation of the concept of
ostranenie.
99 Grewe’s section on Shklovsky is part of a chapter that establishes the theoretical framework undergirding her
analysis of Müller’s and Tawada’s texts. This chapter also includes a section outlining the tenets of structuralist
linguistics in Roman Jakobson. Julia Genz’s 2010 article “Yoko Tawadas Poetik des Übersetzens am Beispiel von
Überseezungen” 467-482 employs Jakobson’s communication model and his principal of poetical function in
connection with Tawada’s Überseezungen. In “Nomadic Writers” Reiko Tachibana presents, though from a different
angle, a comparable argument for defamiliarization as a literary strategy that Tawada often employs, but in reference
to the short story “Missing Heels.” She notes how, in this text, Tawada provides a pun on the word ika, which means
both ‘squid’ and ‘defamiliarization’ in Japanese. Ika, therefore, is not just part of the content, but part of the
technique 406.
device that forces readers to actively re-engage with, re-focus on, and disturb sedimented knowledge and perceptions. Grewe describes this comfortable yet dangerous process of habituation as follows:

Habitual or ordinary perception is … to numbly recognize reality but not actually see it. Habitual perception forms the reality that is inherited and normal, making the familiar seem commonplace. At the same time, perception is unaware of itself because it is automatic. In this mode of perception, the unfamiliar is absorbed as easily as possible and with minimal cognitive awareness or effort. (44)

For Shklovsky, “[t]he technique of art is to make objects ‘unfamiliar’, to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception” (“Art as Technique” 12) as a means of forcing the viewer/reader to be more (self)-critical and acutely aware of how the familiar came to be that way. This term as a strategy of defamiliarization undoubtedly has much in common with Brecht’s notion of Verfremdung, as Grewe also recognizes in her work, and which Ervedosa likewise points out in relation to Tawada’s literary techniques, which so often resemble surrealist strategies that include metamorphosis and disappearance, a conflation of reality and dreams, non-linear temporal plot structures, endless word play and a general resistance to reader comfort:

Genau betrachtet handelt es sich bei solchen Schreibtechniken nicht um Strategien, das Fremde nahe zu bringen, sondern um Verfremdungstechniken, die das (Un)Bekannte ver-frem-den, d.h. unbekannt(er) machen und so dem Leser vorführen, dass nicht nur das kulturell Fremde, sondern auch das Eigene als fremd erscheinen kann. (Ervedosa 569)

Looked at closely, these writing techniques are not strategies that bring the foreign closer to us, but rather are alienation techniques that make the familiar

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100See pages 46-50 for Grewe’s summary of Brecht’s Verfremdungseffekt in comparison with Shklovsky’s ostranenie and their relation to Tawada’s poetics of estrangement.
more foreign, more unfamiliar. They present to the reader not only the culturally foreign, but also that the self can appear as foreign as well.

In her 2005 interview with Bettina Brandt titled “Ein Wort, Ein Ort, or how Words Create Places,” Tawada makes explicit reference to her literary strategy of questioning or re-focusing upon that which so often goes unquestioned, like one’s native language, for example. This heightened attention also refers to her use of human skin, however, because it is so readily accepted as part of nature, beyond culture, and is therefore ahistorical and transcendental. In the interview Brandt poses the question:

“You recently wrote [in Überseezungen 103]: ‘Ich war ins Japanische hineingeboren, wie man in einen Sack hineingeworfen wird. Deshalb wurde diese Sprache für mich meine äußere Haut. Die deutsche Sprache jedoch wurde von mir hinuntergeschluckt, seidem sitzt sie in meinem Bauch’. In this passage … you refer to the mother tongue as a ‘skin’, whereas you describe a foreign tongue as something on the inside, as something that has been swallowed. But a skin is something biological and a language is something cultural, so how exactly are we to understand these metaphors? (4, my emphasis)

First off, the Tawada quote included in the above question indicates the ease and naturalness with which one occupies their native language (an ease comparable to the unreflective and passive inhabitation of one’s skin), whereas a foreign language is something that must be actively imbibed, gesticulated, and consciously reproduced. The context of this quote comes from the narrator in “Die Ohrenzeugin” (the short story in which it appears) who reflects on the

101 Marcus Mueller’s 2008 dissertation “Opposing ‘Real’ Realities” is one of the few sources to address this quotation and the connection of native language to skin, and the idea of ‘swallowing’ a foreign language. Mueller states, “sie kann nichts ‘für’ ihre Muttersprache, ebenso wie sie nicht ‘aus’ ihr kann, sie ist wie eine zweite Haut – doch kann sie sich neue Sprachen einverleiben ... Die Aneignung der Fremdsprache durch das ‘Verschlucken’ stellt sich aus gegen die ausgrenzende Annahme, dass nur die Muttersprache tiefgehend, quasi ‘natürlich’ auf das Subjekt und seine Identität einwirken kann bzw. dort verankert ist” 123.
term *Eingeborene*, equating the concept that one is born into a place without immigrating there (she uses the example of the Native American) with a native speaker who is ‘naturally’ born into a language, as though language were inherent rather than learned, and therefore so natural that it is like a part of the body.\(^\text{102}\) It is this unself-conscious comfort enjoyed by occupying a seemingly natural language, or skin, that is so vexing for Tawada, evidenced in her text “Das Fremde aus der Dose” in the line “[i]ch ekelte mich oft vor den Menschen, die fließend ihre Muttersprache sprachen. Sie machten den Eindruck, daß sie nichts anderes denken und spüren konnten als das, was ihre Sprache ihnen so schnell und bereitwillig anbietet” (“Often it sickened me to hear people speak their native tongues fluently. It was as if they were unable to think and fell anything but what their language so readily served up to them”); “Das Fremde” 42; “Canned Foreign” 87-88).\(^\text{103}\) The ready-made ease and comfort of the native language can potentially cause the speaker to settle into an unreflective social space of automatized thought, behaviour and disposition. This space is congruent with Pierre Bourdieu’s *habitus*,\(^\text{104}\) whereby in this sense it is the unearned privilege attained by occupying the dominant status of native speaker that differentiates the social positions, although, as Bourdieu said, this differentiating border is interminably fluid and contested. Despite the numerous advantages and ‘cultural capital’ wrought from inhabiting the privileged position of the native speaker, feeling too comfortable in one’s own skin can possibly inhibit the subject’s awareness that another way of perceiving the world exists, one that takes


\(^{103}\) In an interview with the literature critic Yasuhisa Yoshikawa, Tawada makes a similar comment with respect to the passivity that accompanies uncritically thinking in one’s native language. She contends, “wenn wir gewöhnt sind, alles in der normalen japanischen Syntax zu denken, dann sehen wir und beobachten auch alles in dieser Syntax. Die Welt existiert aber eigentlich nicht in der Syntax, so dass diese genormte Sichtweise also Verwirrungen verursacht. Weil man aber so sehr daran gewöhnt und angepaßt ist, kann man nur die Dinge, die zu dieser gezwungenen Norm passen, erkennen und verliert so an Sehschärfe.” Interview can be found in Barbara Oetter’s article “Pech für Leda.”

\(^{104}\) See Pierre Bourdieu’s *Outline of a Theory of Practice* for his most expansive outline of the theory of *habitus*. 
into consideration alternative and marginalized social spaces and the structures that maintain the division.

While the Brandt quotation above points to the link between language and skin, already in this question the distinction and demarcation between skin-as-nature and language-as-culture is being unproblematically assumed, but for Tawada the borderline is hardly as self-evident as it is often believed to be. She responds:

The skin is, of course, something that is very close to us. But at the same time, we human beings cannot take our skin off; that would, first of all, hurt a lot and, even worse, without a skin, we would finally just die. Think about it: we cannot even hold our skin in our hands and look at it, contemplate it. No, our skin is very close to us and because of that, it is also often invisible to us. (4, my emphasis)

It is because of processes of habituation and naturalization that skin has come to be seen as so close to us that it is often overlooked as ‘invisible’, and it is against this notion of invisibility that Tawada is reacting here. Skin becomes invisible because it is too visible, it is taken-for-granted and reduced to mere common-sense, rendering it static, fixed and closed to discussion. And it is due to the frequently passive acceptance of skin as a biological truth and pre-discursive given that it occupies such a prominent place throughout Tawada’s writing. In reference to the quote above, her texts figuratively perform the rather unpleasant task of removing the skin and placing it in the hands of her readers, making it the subject of discussion rather than merely an irreducible component of the characters it houses. As was the case in the tale of Hoichi, the skin then becomes a text that is open to being read, interpreted and re-written.

105 With respect to the distinction between language and skin, Gelzer addresses a comment Barthes makes in *Empire of Signs* that figures language, and in this case a foreign, undecipherable language, as a kind of skin that envelopes and protects the subject. The Barthes quote reads: “the murmuring mass of an unknown language constitutes a delicious protection, envelopes the foreigner (provided the country is not hostile to him) in an auditory film which halts at his ears all the alienations of the mother tongue” 9. In the German translation the ‘film’ to which Barthes refers is actually a ‘Haut’, here seen in the line “sie hüllt den Fremden … in eine Haut von Tönen” 22.
3.7 RE-MAPPING SKINSCAPES: METAPHORS OF GEOGRAPHICAL AND BODILY BOUNDARIES IN “EINE HAUTNAHME” AND “WO EUROPA ANFÄNGT”

So far I have demonstrated, and will continue to demonstrate over the following pages, how Tawada’s texts represent skin as a legible site that is forever in a process of (re)construction and resignification. It would be misleading though to suggest that these texts neglect the very real, material consequentiality of the epidermis as the physical integument upon which every human being relies for protection, coherence and for providing and maintaining the integrity of the bodily hull. The above Tawada quotation explicitly underlines that living bodies are painfully vulnerable and skin is central to this vulnerability. Therefore, in the following texts that I have chosen to analyze (Das Bad and “Wo Europa anfängt”) skin will be considered from a myriad of theoretical positions and not merely as a discursive construct, because this is reflective of the diverse representations it occupies in Tawada’s writing. And while each one of the texts just mentioned employs skin as a literary pattern or rhetorical trope in one way or another, perhaps no text of Tawada’s is as explicit in its dermal focus as her poem “Eine Hautnahme.”

The short poem “Eine Hautnahme” appears in the 2003 Konkursbuch Verlag Claudia Gehrke work appropriately and unambiguously titled Haut, edited by Christine Hanke and Regina Nössler, and does not appear in any other edition or collection, nor has any secondary scholarship on Tawada analyzed this poem. Due to its apparent obscurity, I will quote it here in full:

Eine Hautnahme

1
Aus der Nähe betrachtest bist du abwesend
Ich wandere
von einem Stumpf zum anderen

[106] Konkursbuch Verlag Claudia Gehrke currently (2011) offers Haut as part of a series that is marketed as Körperpaket, and which also features titles like Haare and Blut. Comparable to Haut, Haare and Blut are collections of fictional literary and visual representations of the featured theme, as well as non-fictional cultural-historical analyses of its representations in literature, film, visual and performance art, from a variety of countries over the past centuries.
Du bist nicht da wo deine Haut ist

2
An electric razor
Forgotten in a travel bag
Activates itself
Sounds of a machine from a distance
An unshaven landscape

3
After a landslide
(your surface is deeper than)
The trace of tears like on the moon
Microscopic pains

Skinned

1
Observed up close you are absent
I wander
From one stump to another
You are not there where your skin is

2
Ein Rasierapparat
Vergessen in deiner Reisetasche
Betätigt sich selbst
Maschinenegeräusch aus der Ferne
Eine unrasierte Landschaft

3
Nach einem Erdrutsch
(Deine Oberfläche ist tiefer als)
Die Spur der Tränen wie auf dem Mond
Mikroskopische Schmerzen

4
Ein behaartes Haus
Du bist in ihm aufbewahrt
Wie Essensrest im Magen oder
Blut in einem Plastikgefäß
Nach der Wende vereinen sich eine Kosmohaut mit einer Astrohaut

5
Das Netz schwitzt und schwillt an
Eine Spinne liest mit sieben Beinen
Du bist schon längst von deiner Haut verschluckt
A house covered in hair
You are protected in it
Like the leftovers in the stomach or
Blood in a plastic container
After the fall of the wall a cosmonaut’s and astronaut’s skin unite

The net sweats and swells
A spider reads with seven legs
You were swallowed long ago by your skin

As the title of this short poem indicates (if it were not already apparent by its inclusion in a work called Haut and the fact that each page of text in this work overwrites a faded, though discernible image of human skin), “Eine Hautnahme” takes as its subject skin, but not the narrator’s skin, rather the skin of an-other, of an anonymous ‘du’. The title is, from my perspective, a neologism that combines the German Hautnah with Aufnahme to produce the complex and confusing term Hautnahme. Tawada is, of course, no stranger to neologisms in her German texts, as these are a component of her literary strategy of defamiliarizing or decontextualizing commonly understood concepts or idiomatic expressions in order to promote a heightened and self-conscious awareness of the un-naturalness of language and its alienating effects.

Playing on both its literal (close as skin) and figurative (immediate or very close) uses, Hautnah(me) brings the reader nearer to skin by making skin the singular subject of the text, both linguistically and in terms of the image over which the text is written. This approach

107 As mentioned in the first chapter, the non-linguistic, imagistic and material codes in relation to, and upon which, Tawada’s writing appears is significant and productive in a number of her texts (for example, Das Bad and Ein Gedicht für ein Buch). It is likewise the case with “Eine Hautnahme” that the visual and textual codes operate in conjunction.

108 Some of the more common neologisms are found in Tawada’s Überseezungen – the title itself being one of them. The work also features shorter texts like “Zungentanz,” “Die Ohrenzeugin” and “Eine Scheibengeschichte.”

109 Benthien’s Skin: On the Cultural Border between Self and Other outlines the idiomatic use of Hautnah. Hautnah, however, is just one of numerous idiomatic and other figurative uses of skin prevalent in German, English, French and Italian that this text addresses 18-23.
ensures that skin not only remain visible, but also that it exist as the object of analysis.\textsuperscript{110} Hautnahme, on the one hand, takes skin as its focal point, making skin the contact point between reader and text, and narrator and subject. As the line “Ich wandere / von einem Stumpf zum anderen” indicates, the first person narrator is literally hautnah to the skin, wandering from stump to stump over the bodily surface, disturbing any conventional sense of spatial perspective.

In looking back to its use in the Greek and Roman worlds, Steven Connor’s \textit{The Book of Skin} makes the nah of Hautnah seem even somewhat redundant. He suggests that skin, wholeness and proximity are co-terminous in his statement that, “Χρόνος (chros) is a common name for the skin in Greek, though it can also mean the whole of the body. Often, too, it expresses the idea of proximity: ἐνχρόνο (enchroi) means right up close to the skin” (10).\textsuperscript{111}

Despite the sense of both a spatial and etymological closeness here, when considered in the context of the final line of the poem – “Du bist schon längst von deiner Haut verschluckt” – it is also valid to think of the title as representing the act of swallowing, of ingestion, of incorporating (\textit{Aufnahme} and the verb \textit{aufnehmen} can mean all of these things). Here Haut assimilates and houses \textit{Aufnahme} to create eine Hautnahme. When considered in the context of ingestion, the Tawada quote provided earlier (“Die deutsche Sprache jedoch wurde von mir hinuntergeschluckt”) together with “Eine Hautnahme” posit that there is a very intimate and physical connection between language and one’s sense of identity. They also suggest that one’s sense of self is very much tied to and contingent on the skin, so much so that the ‘du’ in this poem seems dependent on or subservient to the skin.

\textsuperscript{110}Hautnah is also the title of the Italian artist Alba D’Urbano’s project in which she creates a skin-suit by digitally imposing images of her own skin onto fabric, which she then sewed and tailored together, creating a wearable duplicate of her bodily exterior. See D’Urbano’s website for images.

\textsuperscript{111} Also bears noting, especially in relation to the following chapters that considers skin colour, Connor’s next line: “It can also refer to the colour or complexion of the skin, sometimes, as in the word ὅμοχροα (homochroia), signifying evenness of colour. The reference to colour involves a reference to the whole of the body, since … the colour of the skin was held to be the expression of the way in which the entire body was knitted together” 10-11.
Stanza four in this poem further supports this connection between the skin as house or container and the idea of ingestion with “Ein behaartes Haus / Du bist in ihm aufbewahrt / Wie Essensrest im Magen oder / Blut in einem Plastikgefäß.” It is the duality of being both protected, but also consumed and closed-off, from the outside world in this epidermal envelope that is being expressed in this stanza. And while etymology can often serve as a convenient sleight of hand in drawing otherwise improbable interconnectivity, here the similarity between Haut and Haus seems conceivable. Claudia Benthien, with the support of the brothers Grimm, outlines this etymological kinship with:

‘Haut’ comes from the Middle High German ‘hus’, which is considered a close relative of ‘hut’ (Middle High German ‘skin’) with a different suffix. The root common to both words appears in German with the simple initial consonant h, which evolved from the older k, which in turn can be traced back to the stronger anlauts k in the cognate language. Sku- as the original root of both house and skin – means ‘to cover’ and ‘protect’. (Skin 246)

There is a definite correlation here then between the skin as protective container or housing in contrast to the act of consumption and digestion, which is exemplary of the constant tension in this stanza, and the poem overall, between interiority and exteriority, the self as skin or the self as inside the skin, and the skin as malleable or the skin as confining movement. But before entering further into an analysis of this tension in the text, I will first consider how this text is in dialogue with the photographic image present on the adjacent page in the Haut book.

When considering both the poem’s title and its content, it should be remembered that the previous chapter on photography and Das Bad considered the semantic diversity of eine Aufnahme as signifying a photographic image, but also its more contentious meaning of exposure, and of the accompanying sense of exposing the photographic subject as a visual and
ethnographic object. In the case of Tawada’s “Eine Hautnahme” it bears noting that its location in the Haut book is adjacent to an untitled photographic image by Sabine Schnell of what looks to be a manipulated image of skin taken from such close proximity to its subject that it is impossible to decipher any details from the image except that it is most likely a rendering of skin. The roughly parallel lines that striate this image provide the effect of an extreme close-up of the epidermis, but also that this is a kind of dermographic landscape,

112 or even that these lines are in fact waves in a seascape taken from far above the water.113 The referent is so elusive and illusive in this image because the observer is too close to the skin, meaning that there is and can be no meaningful perspective.

The opening line of “Eine Hautnahme” “Aus der Nähe betrachtet bist du abwesend” provides a comparable absence due to its propinquity, intimating, as Tawada also does in the Brandt interview, that because we are so close to our skin it frequently goes unnoticed, as if it were invisible and inescapable. From this opening line however, there is a rather problematic juxtaposition being established between the ‘du’ as skin and the ‘du’ as separate from, but connected to, the skin. In “Aus der Nähe betrachtet bist du abwesend” the narrator is addressing the skin as ‘du’ directly, giving it a literary presence as a subject of analysis that it seldom enjoys. Stanza one then finishes by complicating the skin as subject by explicitly separating the ‘du’ from his or her skin, stating “Du bist nicht da wo deine Haut ist.” Not only is this paradoxical line somewhat self-referentially reminiscent of the title of Tawada’s collection of Japanese and German prose and poetry Nur da wo du bist, da ist nichts (which is also the opening line of a poem in that collection titled “Gebet”),114 it also resembles the already

112 I use the term ‘dermographic’ here with acknowledgment to Ahmed and Stacey’s introduction “Dermographies” from their edited collection Thinking Through the Skin. This work features essays by some of the most prominent contemporary cultural theorists of skin, including Steven Connor and Jay Prosser.

113 The effect of water and fluidity brings to mind the images of water that adorn select pages in the 2010 edition of Das Bad mentioned in my chapter on photography in Das Bad.

114 For the most thorough analysis of this poem in Tawada scholarship, see Ruth Kersting’s Fremdes Schreiben 92-100.
mentioned couplet from *Ein Gedicht für ein Buch*, “wenn ich spreche / bin ich nicht da.” More importantly though, the idea of separating oneself from the skin points to differential conceptions of “thinking about the self as in the skin and the self as the skin” (Benthien 237, my emphasis). Claudia Benthien’s book *Skin* details how language, and especially idiomatic expressions, represents this duality of thinking about skin, and how these representations reflect and produce prevailing ideas and understandings of the body, or to be more precise, the skin, in relation to subjectivity. She outlines this duality as follows:

First, there is the idea that the skin encloses the self: skin is imagined as a protective and sheltering cover but in some expressions also as a concealing and deceptive one. What is authentic lies beneath the skin, is hidden inside the body… its decipherment requires skills of reading and interpretation. Here, skin is conceived of as something other than the self and thus as something foreign to it. A second group of sayings equates the skin with the subject, the person: here the essence does not lie beneath the skin … Rather, it is the skin itself, which stands metonymically for the whole body. (17)

In the first stanza of “Eine Hautnahme” both of these conceptions of the skin in relation to the self are being presented, evidenced in the opening line where the skin is the ‘du’ subject who is absent because the close proximity obscures identity (“Aus der Nähe betrachtet bist du abwesend”). However, in the fourth line of the stanza the skin is represented as something other than the ‘du’ subject, separate from the ‘du’, as though the subject were not necessarily tied to nor determined by skin (“Du bist nicht da wo deine Haut ist”).

From a purely physiological-biological perspective, humans cannot survive without their dermal container – skin provides protection and bodily cohesion and without it we would die; however, the profound meaning of skin does not solely, or even predominantly, rest in its
biological significance. Skin is also a signifier – it bears and signifies profoundly consequential social, cultural, political and historical meanings crucial to how we see ourselves and how we are seen by others, yet without, literally, any connection to or origin in nature. Therefore, the line “Du bist nicht da wo deine Haut ist” supports the potential for movement away from biological determinism that resolutely pre-determines an individual’s development. It provides the notion that skin is a sliding signifier, arbitrarily attached but not necessarily fixed to the subject’s identity, and emblematic of the interminable process of slippage between signifier and signified. Like all signifiers, skin can be disarticulated from its conventional, normalized and naturalized reading, however stubbornly congealed this understanding might be, and rearticulated otherwise.

The sense that skin is a surface open to modification and resignification is only subtly hinted at in stanza two, where the “unrasierte Landschaft” remains untouched, but susceptible to “Ein Rasierapparat / Vergessen in deiner Reisetasche.” Frequently in her works Tawada presents the body, and especially its fleshy envelope, as a mutable and fluid encasing analogous to geographical spaces. Both bodily and geographical spaces in these texts are constructions receptive or vulnerable to powerful external influences, but also determining factors from within or beneath. There is a constant tension in “Eine Hautnahme” between the skin in turmoil and the skin in transition, and both elements can be seen if we extend this territorial metaphor of the “unrasierte Landschaft” to its other instantiation as a physical landscape. “Eine Hautnahme” extends this notion of the constantly changing skinscape in stanza three, where it states: “Nach einem Erdrutsch / (Deine Oberfläche ist tiefer als) / Die Spur der Tränen wie auf dem Mond / Mikroskopische Schmerzen.” The concept generated from this depiction is one of unintended, even potentially hazardous, movement and change exemplified in the ‘landslide’, a seemingly ‘natural’ event produced more from factors occurring beneath than by influence exerted from above. Here the skin surface becomes the bearer of psycho-somatic markings, represented by the
river-like trace of tears incised on the skin surface. This highlights skin’s vulnerability to both interior and exterior variables, and in this case especially the capacity of the unconscious to materially manifest itself on the bodily border. Skin often becomes the visible testament to both physical and psychical pain, even “[m]ikroskopische Schmerzen,” essentially establishing it as the inter-face that connects the interior to the exterior world by making visible that which would have otherwise remained hidden within the bodily sheath.

Geographical metaphors that equate bodies and landscapes prone to change can also be found in the opening paragraphs of Das Bad cited earlier, and serve as a useful complement to “Eine Hautnahme.” The skin of the human face is described here as “wie der Schlamm in einem Sumpf” that changes “je nach der Bewegung des Wassers, das unter ihm fließt, und der Bewegung der Menschen, die auf ihm ihre Fußspuren hinterlassen”; (“like the mud of a swamp, shifting with the movements of the water below and the footsteps of the people walking above it”; Das Bad 7; “The Bath” 3). These opening lines of Das Bad are illustrative of the ubiquitous deployment of skin in Tawada’s texts as a pliable and impressionable membrane that records and remembers, but in this instance it is also a skin stylized and disciplined with make-up as a means of conforming to the mirror and photographic images against which the subject identifies. In addition, this metaphor of the face as swamp also likens skin to physical landscapes that are eternally prone to material transformation and to the human hand which makes them cartographically legible.116

115The notion that the skin is a pliable and receptive surface prone to outside influence is seen elsewhere in Tawada’s texts. For example, in her Japanese text “Kage otoko,” translated into English as “The Shadow Man,” we read that “[t]he professor looked like a doll kneaded from mud … Amo touched Professor Ludwig’s cheeks, which really did feel like mud, his fingers sinking right into them” 37-38. And in another Japanese text “Chantien bashi no maite,,” translated as “In Front of Trang Tien Bridge,” in reference to a young Vietnamese girl selling souvenirs on the street, it reads “why haven’t the tourists’ shoes left prints on her face?” 63. Both texts appear in the collection of English translations called Facing the Bridge.

116In Verwandlungen, Tawada also compares her face with a landscape in the lines “Ich weiß nicht, wie ich von außen aussehe. Von innen aber habe ich mein Gesicht schon oft gesehen: eine schattige Landschaft mit einem sumpfigen Wald und zwei gefrorenen Seen. Außerdem gibt es dort eine Tropfsteinhöhle und zwei Tunnel mit
Equating or juxtaposing skin and landscape here serves to emphasize that both are actually human constructions that, until recently, were uncritically considered irreducible components of nature without much thought as to their ideological underpinnings. David Cosgrove’s *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*, for example, argues that unlike other spatial terminology the term ‘landscape’ “denotes the external world mediated through subjective human experience in a way that neither region nor area immediately suggest” (13).

Towards the end of *Das Bad*, Tawada conceptually mirrors this analogy but with a twist – the face as landscape now becomes the landscape as face (note the numerous similarities that this paragraph shares with the opening to *Das Bad*):

117

Der Weltball soll zu siebzig Prozent mit Meer überzogen sein, es ist daher kaum verwunderlich, dass die Erdoberfläche jeden Tag ein anderes Muster zeigt. Das unterirdische Wasser bewegt die Erde von unten, die Wellen des Meeres nagen an der Küste, oben sprengen die Menschen Felsen und legen in den Tälern Felder an und graben das Meer um. So verändert sich die Gestalt der Erde.


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*Muscheln im Netz*” 50. The swamp-like characteristic mirrors the opening quote in *Das Bad*, while the net metaphor and its connotations of ‘capture’ but also ‘porousness’ appears in *Das Bad* and “Eine Hautnahme.”

Seven-tenths of the globe is covered with water, so it isn’t surprising that one sees the different patterns on its surface every day. Subterranean water shapes the earth’s surface from below, the ocean’s waves eat away at the coastline, and human beings blast holes in mountainsides, plow the valleys for fields and fill in the ocean with land. Thus the shape of the earth is constantly changing.

I spread out a map of the world. On the map, the water has suspended any motion, so all the cities look as if they’re always in exactly the same place. Countless red lines, perhaps air routes or fishnets, run from city to city. The earth’s face is caught in this net. Every day, human beings adjust the face with makeup, using the map as their model. (50)

Whereas in the opening paragraph the prescriptive model to which the protagonist feels compelled to conform is represented by the photographic image taken by her boyfriend, in the quotation above the photographic prescript has been replaced by a world map, one which misleadingly promotes both a static and unmediated idea of geographical space and the notion that maps are simply uninvested, natural reflections of a geographical reality. The surveillant dimension of the photograph outlined in chapter two is likewise present here in the form of this cartographic representation, which, like the photograph, should be read as a culturally coded text that in the service of maintaining dominant power positions represents a profoundly mediated and manipulated spatial image.118 In her 2004 dissertation “Mobility, Space and Subjectivity: Yoko Tawada and German Language Transnational Literature,” Christina Kraenzle considers the constitutive power of mapping in the Tawada excerpt above that complicates the neutrality of

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118I am basing the cartographic critique here mainly on J.B. Harley’s “Deconstructing the Map” 1-20, though in a number of his texts he follows a similar line of analysis. In this seminal essay, Harley looks to establish an ‘epistemological break’ in the very nature of cartography. He attempts to show that “even ‘scientific’ maps are a product not only of ‘the rules of the order of geometry and reason’ but also of the ‘norms and values of the order of social…tradition’.” He goes on to outline “the social forces that have structured cartography” and attempts to “locate the presence of power – and its effects – in all map knowledge.” 2.
reflectivity of cartographic representation, asserting that “the map is not simply a misrepresentation or falsification of reality; on the contrary, it produces that reality … [S]pace is figured not as fixed, but as fluid and changing. Space does not passively await representation, it only comes into being through the act of mapping” (81).

The analogy between the two excerpts from Das Bad can be extended if we consider how, during the photographic session that resulted in the image hanging framed on the protagonist’s wall, the term einfangen was employed on a few occasions to denote the capturing of an image, but also connote a sense of confinement, a feeling that the protagonist is being fixed and submitted to representational closure. Similarly, in the depiction of the world map given above there is a very explicit description of capture, whereby in this instance it is the Gesicht der Erde that is being caught in flight routes and fish nets rather than the protagonist’s skin (in Das Bad the text states “diese Kameralinse wollte meine Haut einfangen.”). The use of the net metaphor and the dual meaning of einfangen points to an attempt and failure at arresting movement, thereby underscoring that the myth of representational neutrality (alluded to in the photographic/cartographic models) is foiled by the ultimate realization that these representations are ideologically invested and compromised just like any representational or signifying practice. Moreover, this net metaphor is also utilized in the final stanza of “Eine Hautnahme:” “Das Netz schwitzt und schwillt an.” In this example the net is connected to a sense of the skin in distress, one that is sweating and swelling up and down as a potential reaction to its confinement. The text here becomes particularly ambiguous and complex, as das Netz (“the net”) could also be considered as ein Gewebe (“a web”). This becomes more apparent if we consider that the following line is “Eine Spinne liest mit sieben Beinen,” which then conjures an image of either ein Spinnengewebe or ein Spinnennetz (“a spiderweb or spidernet”). Without exhausting the metaphor into meaninglessness, it should be noted that ein Gewebe is also both text and tissue in
German (the reader will recall the Barthes quotation on intertextuality from earlier in the chapter),\textsuperscript{119} finally bringing both the form and content of this poem full circle by producing an image of a subject caught, confined and swallowed by a skin.\textsuperscript{120}

The bodily boundary as skin and landscape presented in Das Bad and “Eine Hautnahme” also serves as a metaphor for other kinds of borders, like national or linguistic, in Tawada’s texts. Sabine Fischer accurately expresses the kind of skin border that so prominently figures in Tawada’s writing with “die Haut bildet keine feste Trennungslinie zwischen Innen- und Außenwelt, sondern ist durchlässig und amorph” (“Wie der Schlamm” 65). The skin as swamp metaphor from Das Bad conceptualizes skin as a permeable and amorphous boundary, and, as seen in the recently published “Europa und Mehrsprachigkeit,” Tawada again elaborates on this conception of borders that are more complex and ambiguous than merely solid lines that separate two homogenous and fixed wholes:


Denn die Grenze ist eine Tür, die man öffnet, um das Vergessene zugänglich zu machen ...

\textsuperscript{119} I was made aware of the etymological connection between tissue and text in Markus Hallensleben’s “Rewriting the Face, Transforming the Skin, Performing the Body as Text: Palimpsestuous Intertexts in Yoko Tawada’s ‘The Bath’” (forthcoming).

\textsuperscript{120} As noted, ‘nets’ or ‘webs’ feature throughout Tawada’s texts in the sense of multiple connections (rhizomes), but also as metaphors of confinement. For example, Tawada’s essay “Schreiben im Netz der Sprachen” considers the net in a multi-lingual context, while in a text like “Chantien bashi no mae nite” (“In Front of Trang Tien Bridge”), as Doug Slaymaker highlights in “Writing in the Ravine of Language” 48, the net metaphor can have both linguistic and embodied connotations. The text, featuring a Japanese protagonist Kazuko who is in Vietnam and is descending into the Cu Chi tunnels, states “a dampness that was neither the tunnel wall nor her own skin clung to her like a fishnet and she could no longer move … This clammy web she was caught in could not be real” 86. In this quotation the discomfort is more a result of linguistic rather than bodily effects. More recently, Suzuko Mousel Knott has also made the connection between Tawada’s strategy of interconnectivity and intertextuality with Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the ‘rhizome’, but she also links this idea with technological networks like the internet and social media networks. Mousel Knott suggests that Tawada’s writing is more accurately understood as a network of discourse systems like “Sprachsysteme, Kultursysteme, Literatursysteme, Mediensysteme ... und Bedeutungssysteme” 571, rather than in relation to singular conceptualizations like ‘hybrid’, ‘between’ or ‘inter’.
I am unable to leave a border behind me. I am often asked why I left Japan. I haven’t left any country. No border lies behind me, since the border is a door that you open in order to access the forgotten …

I was born and grew up in a country in which trains are unable to cross national boundaries. On an island it is mistakenly believed that the end of one’s own world is decided by salt water. In reality water has many more characteristics – it separates and connects.

In this context, as the quotation from *Das Bad* provided above that analogizes the body and physical landscapes intimates, Tawada is reconstituting national and geographical borders in these texts not as something exclusively exclusionary and fixed, but as shifting, mutable and porous surfaces that can also connect and include. The porous bodily border in *Das Bad* that proved so unreliable in maintaining its solidity is again taken up as the subject of investigation in Tawada’s first German authored text “Wo Europa anfängt,” though this time in the context of relating physical geography to national and cultural boundaries. This text underscores that similar to models of linguistic and bodily identities, borders affixed to national identities are fluid, constructions of human perception and are frequently transgressed and subverted through …

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121 Walter Grond echoes this analogy of body and physical landscapes in Tawada’s texts with “den Körper beschreibt sie wie einen Globus, sie spricht von Konsistenzen, von Topographien, sie gibt den Gestalten einen physiologischen Klang” 98.

122 Kari van Dijk’s “Arriving in Eurasia” notes how in Tawada’s *Das nackte Auge* there is a similar depiction of water’s capacity to connect, 169. The quote from *Das nackte Auge*, where two characters are together in a bathtub, reads “die beiden Körper berühren sich nicht mehr, aber sie sind verbunden durch das Element Wasser” 141.
the itinerancy of individuals. In her article “Fließende Grenzen und rätselhafte Verwandlungen” Monika Schmitz-Emans describes “Wo Europa anfängt” as an “Osmose-Geschichte,” stating that “[s]ie handelt bereits im ersten Satz von Durchdringungen des eigenen Körpers mit Fremdem – mit ‘fremdem Wasser’ – und lässt damit diesen Körper selbst von vornherein als permeable erscheinen” (“already in the first sentence it is dealing with the penetration of one’s own body with foreignness – with foreign water – and from then on the body appears as permeable”; 328).

In “Bemerkungen zur Hybridität” Karin Schestokat highlights Tawada’s deployment of fluid borders with respect to “Wo Europa anfängt” when she states:

Auch Grenzen an sich faszinieren Tawada; sie versteht sie immer wieder als ein fluides Konzept. So vergleicht sie sie mit dem Wasser der Ozeane, auf dem die Kontinente schwimmen … Oder sie sieht Grenzen als unheimlich breite Regionen, wie z.B. Sibirien, das sie auf dem Weg nach Europa durchquerte.

Durch dieses amorphe Konzept wird Marginalität selbst auch als ein Zwischenraum angesehen, der niemals statisch bleibt, sondern sich immer wieder verändert und von allen Seiten zugänglich ist. (34)

Borders as such fascinate Tawada; she understands them time and again as a fluid concept. She compares them then with ocean water on which continents swim … Or she sees borders as extraordinarily wide regions; evidenced in the case of Siberia, which she crosses on her way to Europe. Through this amorphous concept marginality itself is recognized as an in-between space that cannot remain static, but rather is continuously changing and is accessible from all sides.

For Tawada, as “Wo Europa anfängt” and Das Bad demonstrate, it is inherent in human subjectivity that one’s identity is multiple, perpetually in transit, and osmotically always in dialogue with the cultural and social context in which it inhabits.
Problematizing material and conceptual borders lies at the heart of both texts. With the use of the theoretically robust concept of mimicry as an analytical tool, Claudia Breger illustrates how these borders have proven prone to confusion, stating:


Borders are the theme of Where Europe Begins, though not the borders of language, but rather borders that through language are constructed, displaced and reconfigured. The text mimetically presents this process of bending borders: the image of the border is multiplied, put in perspective and disarticulated ... Border spaces are the places where mimicry is actualized – they are spaces where language and identity are confused, where meaning is complicated and articulated differently, and ultimately displaced and transformed.

Breger’s analysis accentuates the ambivalence and mutability of the borders illustrated in Tawada’s texts, but also that despite being porous these borders can still prove to be extremely exclusionary and real. The text’s protagonist finds out how real imaginary borders can be when she is forced to leave Russia due to an expired visa.¹²³

¹²³ The Vietnamese protagonist in Das nackte Auge also experiences the very real implications of discursively constructed borders and identities during her illegal stay in Paris. Later, when she attempts to use a forged Japanese passport at the customs check in a French airport, she is caught and incarcerated. The protagonist, knowingly breaking the law, comments ‘ich war kriminell geworden, ohne die Absicht gehabt zu haben, etwas Schlechtes zu
Briefly summarized, “Wo Europa anfängt” is the travel report (one written before the narrator departs!), diary and dream narrative of a protagonist who voyages from Japan to Moscow via the trans-Siberian railway in order to ‘arrive’ at the place where Europe begins. The problematic notion of ‘arrival’ lies at the heart of this text, since it connotes reaching a destination and a definition, both physically and conceptually, of what Europe truly is and where its origins reside. Yet, as Tawada emphasizes elsewhere in *Talisman* in the short work on Celan “Das Tor des Übersetzers,” “[e]s geht nicht darum, eine bestimmte Grenze zu überschreiten, sondern darum, von einer Grenze zu einer anderen zu wandern” (“it’s not about crossing over a certain border, but rather about wandering from one border to the next”; 123-24).124 This statement, applicable to many of Tawada’s texts, underscores that one is always unterwegs. Representations of movement between borders does not suggest, however, that Tawada is advocating for physical, national or cultural spaces as fixed and stable wholes, but rather she is figuring the interstices as thresholds. Kari van Dijk’s “Arriving in Eurasia” addresses the complex thematics of arrival and how texts like “Wo Europa anfängt” complicate even the possibility of arriving at one European voice, culture or territory. In Tawada’s text Siberia is presented as a border between East and West, or as “die Grenze zwischen hier und dort … was für eine breite Grenze!” (“the border between here and there … such a wide border!”); “Wo Europa anfängt” 73; “Where Europe Begins” 129) It is the conceptual room between Europe and Asia and thus acts as the in-between, interstitial space. In this in-between space the notion of the homogenous subject is disturbed by the conflictual and contesting identities that form its hybrid

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124 This quote resembles one Tawada makes in *Ekusophonii: bogo no soto e derutabi*, where she states “I do not want to cross the boundary that separates languages and countries, rather, I want to reside on that border” (translation taken from Douglas Slaymaker’s “Introduction” in *Voices from Everywhere 3*).
nature, in this borderline engagement between here and there, in this place of neither one nor the other.\textsuperscript{125}

The concept of ‘movement’ is crucial in “Wo Europa anfängt,” as it is in most of Tawada’s texts, and thus this transitional space of identity negotiation should not be misunderstood in the sense of ‘being stuck between two homogenous worlds’, in the sense of the critiques of Adelson and Şenocak that counter the in-between paradigm,\textsuperscript{126} but instead these texts work to destabilize fixed, monolithic notions of culture through tropes of mobility. Petra Fachinger insists that this passage through space “is not a poetics of ‘between’, but the logic of ‘trans’, as in translation, transliteration, translingual, transcription, transgression, transition, translocation, and transnational” (“Postcolonial/Postcommunist” 307) that is so central in Tawada’s writing. The heterogeneous natures of the subjects on this voyage in “Wo Europa anfängt” therefore become apparent through their displacement and unboundedness, although it seems that once they are presented with an awareness of the provisional nature of their territorially defined identities, they suddenly attempt to root themselves in the idea of home. Even before the ship has departed someone asks “‘[w]o bist du aufgewachsen?’” (“where did you grow up”; 69; 124), immediately appealing to ideas of origin and place as identity, to which the narrator comments “[a]uf dem Schiff fängt jeder an, eine kleine Autobiografie zusammen

\textsuperscript{125}Schesterok’s article briefly considers an understanding of “Wo Europa anfängt” in connection to Bhabha’s ‘third space’, ‘in-between space’ or ‘interstitial space’. Arens’s “Das kurze Leuchten unter dem Tor” considers “Das Tor des Übersetzers” and Tawada’s writing as stemming from an in-between space on a threshold; see 62-63.

\textsuperscript{126} Leslie Adelson’s seminal “Against Between: A Manifesto” from 2001 is a strong criticism of the in-between paradigm in relation to Turkish-German authors because it wrongfully assumes an “absolute cultural divide” 22 between the two countries, reaffirming highly problematic binary distinctions between cultures and very simplistic, monolithic ideas of identity. Adile Esen’s 2009 dissertation “Beyond ‘In-Between’: Travels and Transformation in Contemporary Turkish-German Literature and Film” provides a useful breakdown of Adelson’s critique in relation to Turkish-German cultural production. While the critique of in-between is valid in such cases where it crystallizes cultural divides, in-between can refer not just to cultural but to physical, bodily transitions that are also perceived as ‘in-between’, where individuals do not meet normative prescripts of bodily identities. Jay Prosser’s \textit{Second Skins: the Body Narratives of Transsexuality} instructively articulates the transition in-between material and conceptual bodies, with the concomitant corporeal, psychic and social changes such transitions bring. This transition is a passage through space, a kind of journey from border to border, which should not be diminished by denigrating it as affirming monolithic divisions, but can be read as confusing the stability of the binary categories since this transition is neither one nor the other.
zustellen, als ob man sonst vergäße, wer man ist” (“On board such a ship, everyone begins putting together a brief autobiography, as though he might otherwise forget who he is”; 69; 124). Feeling lost and disoriented the passengers attempt to assert their identity in relation to home, which is then “a location signifying roots and accompanying notions of essential identities” (Kraenzle, “Mobility, Space, Subjectivity” 84).127

As the passengers pass through Siberia, however, it becomes clear in this borderland that ideas of essentialized, national identities are difficult to sustain when they are subverted by an awareness of the spatial relativity of their borders. Even as a young girl the narrator questioned the legitimacy of exclusionary/inclusionary models of territorially constructed identities, stating:


When I was a little girl, I never believed there was such a thing as foreign water, for I had always thought of the globe as a sphere of water with all sorts of small and large islands swimming on it. Water had to be the same everywhere. Sometimes in sleep I heard the murmur of the water that flowed beneath the main island of Japan. The border surrounding the island was also made of water that

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127Banoun’s “Words and Roots” illuminates Tawada’s broader program of uprooting seemingly natural and fixed connections between identity and language, place, nation or body. In reference to the scene from “Das Fremde aus der Dose” when the narrator expresses her disgust with the comfort native speakers have in their own tongue, Banoun comments “the opposition between native and foreign languages and, beyond that, between native and foreign lands thus shows itself to be unfruitful, and the idea that one territory is superior to another, that some great potency is to be found in a sense of rootedness in a particular place and that there are benefits to be drawn from this umbilical connection, is also rendered illusory” 127.
ceaselessly beat against the shore in waves. How can one say where the place of foreign water begins when the border itself is water? (122-23)

The narrator here is indicating the difficulty of fixing identities to borders when the borders themselves are fluid and continually shifting. Not only are liquid and bodily borders fluid but so too are the land borders that seem so fixed and defined. The narrator notes, “seitdem die Überreste der sibirischen Mammute in Japan gefunden wurden, wird behauptet, dass früher eine Landbrücke zwischen Japan und Sibirien existierte. Die Menschen sind vermutlich auch von Sibirien nach Japan gewandert. Japan war also Teil von Sibirien gewesen” (“Since the remains of Siberian mammoths were discovered in Japan, there have been claims that a land bridge once linked Japan and Siberia. Presumably, human beings also crossed from Siberia to Japan. In other words, Japan was once part of Siberia”; 71; 127). Again the notion of a fixed, homogenous identity based on territory and nation is disrupted by the apparent lack of stability of the criteria on which the identities are founded, suggesting then that “the way we create borders has nothing to do with ‘natural’ external limits, but is intimately connected with the limits of our own identities” (Kraenzle, “Mobility, Space, Subjectivity” 87).

The relativity and contingency of these borders is further highlighted in the confusion which arises out of the very question as to where Europe begins. The narrator believes it begins in Moscow because that is what her parents had always told her, while a young Russian tells her that the Ural Mountains are in fact the signifier of Europe’s beginning. However, this assertion is emphatically rejected by a Frenchmen who states “Moskau [ist] NICHT Europa” (83). Europe then becomes not a fixed area built on geography and mapping but rather an idea that shifts and transforms according to the perspectives and perceptions of individuals. In this in-between zone of Siberia the fixity of Europe and Asia as models of identity are questioned by the uncertainty as to where one stops and the other begins. In between Japan and Moscow, in between East and
West, the stability of a homogenous identity is unsettled through movement and dislocation in “Wo Europa anfängt,” and where new possibilities for plural identities are formulated through an understanding of the hybrid and contingent nature of human subjectivity.

While identities premised on seemingly natural and immutable territorial models are complicated and uprooted in “Wo Europa anfängt” due to the malleability and mutability of the borders needed to contain and separate them, as mentioned above these fluid borders not only serve as spatial representations in Tawada’s texts but also bodily ones. All three texts investigated in this section, namely “Eine Hautnahme, Das Bad and “Wo Europa anfängt” share a focus on impressionable, vulnerable and impermanent borders that conceptually conflate material and metaphorical skin and landscapes. Despite being malleable and pervious, these boundaries that connect inside and out are nevertheless consequential for the subjects who inhabit them. The following section will now further develop the figure of the skin as a psychosomatic surface that is constitutive of identity in relation to Das Bad.

3.8 PUNCTURING THE BODILY ENVELOPE: THE VULNERABILITY OF SKIN AS MATERIAL AND METAPHOR

This chapter has, for the most part, analyzed the discursively constituted and culturally coded deployment of skin in Tawada’s texts. However, as the above passages from “Eine Hautnahme” indicate, and the following textual examples will further demonstrate, there is a very real, material, corporeal Haut represented here as well. It is a skin that acts as a boundary and communicative surface with the outside world, but also one that is constituted by, and constitutive of, the unconscious and subjectivity. The distinction between psyche and soma are being complicated in this poem, and it is impossible to say whether the “[m]ikroskopische Schmerzen” present on, or under, the skin in this text are the result of physical or psychical influences, but both can produce the visible traces and markings that become seen and felt on the
bodily surface. Whether it is in the form of tattoos, scars, scabs, wrinkles, stretch marks, birth marks, warts, acne, psoriasis, alopecia, eczema or other dermatitides, the visible markings wilfully, physiologically or unconsciously produced that cover the bodily surface influence a subject’s self-identification, as the skin that is both seen and felt is very much formative of the subject’s sense of identity. This sentiment is reminiscent of Freud’s thesis that the ego is “first and foremost a bodily ego” (26), a concept that profoundly influenced the Lacanian trained (and I mean he literally trained with Lacan) psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu to formulate the notion of the ‘skin ego’, ‘le moi-peau’, or ‘Haut-ich’.

But Anzieu’s concept of the ‘skin ego’ that “takes the body’s physical skin as the primary organ underlying the formation of the ego,” and which figures skin as “the key interface between self and other, between the biological, the psychic, and the social” (Prosser 65) is substantially different from Lacan’s idea of the unconscious that is ‘structured like a language’. Crucially and conversely, for Anzieu “the unconscious [is] structured like the body” (Skin Ego 43).

In “Eine Hautnahme” the line “(Deine Oberfläche ist tiefer als)” is conspicuously set apart from the lines above and below by its encasement in parentheses, making it visually analogous to what it semantically suggests: skin is a surface and border that separates, but also connects, the interior and the exterior, what is above and what is below, of the body. The

128 Didier Anzieu (1923-1999) was a Lacanian trained French psychoanalyst (prior to his training with Lacan Anzieu’s mother was actually Lacan’s patient) who, along with fellow members of the Association Psychanalytique de France Daniel Lagache and Jean Laplanche (AFP) broke with Lacan’s l’École Française de Psychanalyse (EFP) over numerous differences: from analysis and treatment to fundamental contrasts in what the ‘ego’ even is. Anzieu, disenfranchised with Lacan’s obsession with structuralism and the unconscious as structured like a language, develops against the grain of post-structurally informed psychoanalysis a concept that puts the body’s physical exterior, namely the skin as a lived, felt, experienced surface, as the primary organ that underlies the development of the ego.

129 Anzieu’s development of the ‘skin ego’ is expansive, so for an instructive and condensed version of the ‘skin ego’ see Benthien’s Skin 243-45 n. 5. Benthien breaks down eight functions of the skin ego: 1) maintenance of the psyche; 2) acts as a container, providing the image of the skin as a bag; 3) functions as a protective shield against stimulation; 4) takes on the function of individuation, meaning that it gives the self a sense of its own uniqueness; 5) function of intersensoriality, meaning that it connects all the other sense organs; 6) it supports sexual excitation, which is initiated by skin pleasure; 7) libidinally recharges the psyche; 8) registers tactile sensory traces. Steven Connor, in his Book of Skin, distinguishes nine functions of the skin ego, summarized as “supporting; containing; shielding; individuating; connecting; sexualizing; recharging; signifying; and assaulting/destroying” 49.
comparative in this line, moreover, is left glaringly indeterminate, suggesting that while skin may be a thin border, its influences and effects stretch far deeper than can be measured. What happens on the surface of the body, be it a conscious act of the subject like a tattoo or self-mutilation, or a physiological development outside of one’s control like a birth mark or wrinkle, or the temporary manifestation of shame or excitement like blushing or Gänsehaut, has significant impact on how the subject views him or herself and how others view this subject. This influence is not uni-directional, as interior factors can materialize on the skin surface. Jay Prosser highlights this with:

Many skin conditions are accepted among medical workers as psychosomatic: not ‘made up’ but somatized, the body’s manifestation of, its bringing to the material surface deep psychic disturbance. Even skin conditions with certain organic causes are thought to be exacerbated by psychic stress. In turn skin conditions bring with them their own psychic distress. Psychotherapy is thus often indicated as a treatment to alleviate if not the skin disorders themselves, at least their psychological costs. On all levels the psyche is firmly correlated to the skin. (71-72)

Skin then becomes seen as a site of mutual interaction between inside and out, where the surface informs and formulates the ego, but is also vulnerable to and influenced by psychic factors taking place from beneath the surface.

Ashley Montagu, who describes the psychosomatic approach to the skin as ‘centrifugal’, meaning development proceeds outward from the mind to the skin, instead favours, as Anzieu also does, a ‘centripetal’ approach: “from the skin to mind” (19). This centripetal approach to the relationship between skin and self is perhaps most precisely articulated in Anzieu’s proposition that “the ego is the projection on the psyche of the surface of the body” (A Skin for Thought 63),
rather than what might be more intuitively thought as “…of the psyche on the surface of the body.” Whereas earlier in this chapter, in relation to Verwandlungen, skin was referred to as a Leinwand or projection surface (“Ein Gesichtsfeld … kann wie eine Leinwand Bilder empfangen und zeigen”), highlighting its presence as a bearer and reflector of semiotic meaning, it should also be viewed as a Berührungsbildschirm, a touch-screen that reciprocally feels and communicates. Like all borders, boundaries and limits in Tawada’s texts, the idea of skin as an impermeable line of separation is being refigured as a pliable, mutable and porous membrane, one that both tactilely registers and remembers as a material surface, and one that is more metaphorically seen as a bearer of significations. It is essential to remember though that it is also a surface that can cause the subject physical and psychical pain. Pain, discomfort and the skin are almost coterminous at times in Tawada’s texts, especially considering the corporeal pain and discomfort subjects experience is frequently directly tied to their skins. However, the physical pain experienced is no more severe than the psychical pain and alienation they confront. Pain, be it physical or psychical, is often a result of the exclusion and abjection Tawada’s subjects experience through, and because of, their dermal exterior – an exterior that also embodies these external and internal influences.

Possibly the most explicit examples of the skin in crisis, but a crisis that leads towards self-becoming, in Tawada’s work can be found in the text I focused on earlier in this dissertation: Das Bad. Just as the cover of this text prefigures the thematic and theoretical crux of the work with regard to the place of photography and representational practices throughout, so too does it

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130 This idea of relating skin to a touch-screen comes from Phillip Sarasin’s essay “Touch-Screen 1850: Die Haut im 19. Jahrhundert als Medium. Eine Skizze.” In this article Sarasin describes how in the nineteenth century the skin came to represent one of the central components of hygienischen Gesundheitskonzepte. Hygienists emphasized the importance of le flux et reflux, or the porous nature of skin that allows the passage of unwanted substances out, while simultaneously allowing it to ‘breath’ in, 221.

131 For analyses in secondary literature on depictions of pliable and permeable borders in Tawada’s texts, see Andrea Krauß “Talisman – Tawadische Sprachtheorie”; Kari van Dijk “Arriving in Eurasia;” Jeremy Redlich “Reading Skin Signs: Decoding Skin as the Fluid Boundary Between Self and Other in Yoko Tawada;” Monika Schmitz-Emans “Fließende Grenzen und rätselhafte Verwandlungen: Yoko Tawadas Visionen von Europa.”
introduce the centrality of skin, and more accurately a skin in turmoil and transition, that drives its plot. As mentioned, the image adorning this cover is of a young, naked, Asian female whose chest and forehead are partially covered by written text, and whose lower half is fully concealed by a drawn rendering of a fish. Already in this cover image do we witness the disputable suggestion that there is an authentic subject covered and obscured by a dermal mask, represented here by the fish scales, which could be revealed if only the mask were removed. Of course, as we know from “Das Fremde aus der Dose,” the image on the packaging is not necessarily naturally or eternally tied to the referent contained inside. However, it is more the prevalence of the fish scales depicted on the cover, and featured throughout the text, that I would like to address in the following pages. I am focusing on these fish scales since they figure so prominently in the protagonist’s daily ritual of self-containment and stylization, but also in her self-identification and how she is identified by others.

The crucial opening lines of this text, as already stated, relate the image of an interminably transformative body contained within a fluid and permeable integument that is subjected to a daily routine of self-surveillance and policing. The passage states in full:

Der menschliche Körper soll zu achtzig Prozent aus Wasser bestehen, es ist daher auch kaum verwunderlich, dass sich jeden Morgen ein anderes Gesicht im Spiegel zeigt. Die Haut an Stirn und Wangen verändert sich von Augenblick zu Augenblick wie der Schlamm in einem Sumpf, je nach der Bewegung des Wassers, das unter ihm fließt, und der Bewegung der Menschen, die auf ihm ihre Fußspuren hinterlassen.

Neben dem Spiegel hing in einem Rahmen eine Portraitaufnahme von mir. Mein Tag begann damit, dass ich beim Vergleich des Spiegelbilds mit der Fotographie Unterschiede entdeckte, die ich dann mit Schminke korrigierte. (Das Bad 7)
Eighty percent of the human body is made of water, so it isn’t surprising that one sees a different face in the mirror each morning. The skin of the forehead and cheeks changes shape from moment to moment like the mud of a swamp, shifting with the movements of the water below and the footsteps of the people walking above it.

I had hung a framed photograph of myself beside the mirror. The first things I would do when I got up was to compare my reflection with the photograph, checking for discrepancies which I then corrected with makeup. (“The Bath” 3)

Represented in this quotation, and also mentioned in “Eine Hautnahme,” is an elastic skin that is caught between providing, on the one side, stability to the subject’s body and identity, and on the other, constant and often involuntary change. Andrea Krauß effectively summarizes the impact of these opening lines with:

Das Ich bewegt sich also im stetigen Fluß, als oszillierender Wasserkörper, dem keine eigene, innere Form gegeben ist, der sich überdies wandelt gemäß den Spuren, die Menschen ihm einprägen. So enthüllt das Gesicht, genauer die Haut als ‘Trennungslinie zwischen Innen- und Außenwelt’ und damit äußerlich wahrnehm bare, nackte Körperfläche, nicht die eindeutige Identität, wie sie jeder Personalausweis festzuhalten vorgibt. (58)

The I moves in continuous fluidity, as an oscillating body of water, without its own, inner form. It transforms according to the traces imprinted on it by humans. Thus the face, or more precisely the skin, reveals itself as the ‘line of separation between inside and outside worlds’, and as the externally perceivable, naked bodily surface, and not the unambiguous identity that every personal identity card professes to encapsulate.
Krauß, who is making reference here to Sabine Fischer’s article “Wie der Schlamm in einem Sumpf,” highlights the prominence of the subject in flux as an oscillating body of water who cannot be fixed to an inner essence.

While the Tawada quote above undoubtedly depicts an elastic skin that stands in contrast to the protagonist’s appropriation of a highly rigid and normative gendered body image achieved, at least symbolically, through a quotidian application of cosmetics, it is in the lines that follow in this text that we witness a very real, corporeal struggle between the protagonist and her skin. Immediately following this self-correction the text relates the protagonist’s rather startling realization that her skin is covered in fish scales:


Ich entschloß mich sie im Bad erst aufzuweichen und dann abzureiben. (Das Bad 7-9)

I held up the candle to look more closely, I saw that my skin was covered with fine, overlapping scales, smaller than the wings of tiny insects. Carefully I inserted one long thumbnail beneath a scale and flicked it off. In this way I was able to strip off the scales one at a time. When I unbuttoned my pajama top, I saw the scales covered not only my face but my chest and arms as well. If I began
removing them one by one, I would be late for work. I decided to take a bath to soften the scales and then rub them off. (‘The Bath’ 4)

Considering the text depicts a Japanese female living in Germany, and the fact that it was originally written in Japanese but first published in German, it can be read as already in dialogue with two specific literary and cultural contexts implicitly and explicitly present here, particularly with regard to the image of the Schuppenträgerin, Meerfrau or Fischfrau represented above. In relation to the Japanese context, Sabine Fischer notes:

In der japanischen Mythologie verkörpern Frauen, die sich in Fische verwandeln, auf komplexe Weise ‘das Andere’. Ihre Wandlungsfähigkeit läßt sie teilhaben an einem Element, das einerseits ein Symbol der Fruchtbarkeit und des Wohlstands ist, andererseits Gefahr bedeutet ... Der Fisch gilt außerdem als Symbol für Sexualität, so daß die Fischfrau zum Symbol weiblicher Triebhaftigkeit wird, die im Gegensatz zur patriarchalischen Rationalität steht. (“Wie der Schlamm” 66)

In Japanese mythology women who transform into fish embody ‘the other’ in a very complex way. Their transformability connects them to an element that, on the one hand, is a symbol of fertility and prosperity, but on the other hand indicates danger … The fish also serves as a symbol of sexuality, so that the fish woman becomes a symbol of feminine emotionality and stands in contrast to patriarchal rationality.

Ruth Kersting, on the other hand, considers the place and significance of the female body in conjunction with a fish body from a European perspective with the following:

Die ‘klassische’ Kombination aus Frauen- und Fischkörper deutet in Europa nicht nur auf den literarischen Undine- bzw. Melusinenstoff hin und läßt an beliebte Gestaltungen dieser mythischen Frauenfiguren im Jugendstil oder etwa in
Ingeborg Bachmanns “Undine geht” denken. Die Nymphen, Nixen und Wasserfrauen stehen für die Kombination von Wasser und Weiblichkeit, Sehnsucht und Verführung, Lust und Schrecken, Tod und Eros. Mittlerweile geht eine internationale Vermarktung des Stoffs in Film, Fernsehen und Werbung mit der zunehmenden Trivialisierung der Wasserfrau zur Werbeträgerin einher. (135)
In Europe the ‘classic’ combination of women’s and fish bodies points to the literary representations of Undine and Melusina, and to the beloved mythical female figures in Art Nouveau or in Ingeborg Bachmann’s “Undine Departs.” The nymphs, nixes and mermaids stand for the combination of water and femininity, desire and seduction, passion and horror, death and love. More recently this subject has been internationally marketed in film, television and advertising with an increasing degree of trivialization.
While both of these passages place the protagonist in Das Bad within a broader field of cultural relevance with respect to the fish-like, mermaidesque woman as either symbolic of sexuality and sexual drives, or as an image currently commandeered for marketing purposes, it is more the specific bodily experience, and especially the process of shedding, excoriating, and in a certain sense flaying, that I am attending to in my analysis. First off, these scales covering the protagonist’s face, chest and arms that she attempts to initially remove with her thumbnail, and then submerge in the bath in the hope that softening them will make them easier to peel off, function as a kind of second-skin in this novella. The protagonist, however, takes great pains to remove these scales, which is telling of their significance. The fact that she expends such effort to shed these scales indicates, at least in the beginning, that she perceives herself as inhabiting the ‘wrong’ body, as obviously this growth on her bodily surface is an incessant source of suffering and anxiety. In this opening sequence of the text then, there is a sense that both the body image
and the material body are in turmoil, for it is not only the mirror and photographic representation
and the protagonist’s identification with these external images that is causing distress, but also
her physical body is in trouble here.

The Schuppen themselves, as implied by the statement that they are “winziger als die
Flügel kleiner Käfer” (a Käfer of course being the insect Gregor Samsa wakes up as in Die
Verwandlung), are central to the protagonist’s process of metamorphosis that unfolds throughout
the text. From one perspective these scales can be seen to provide the protagonist’s skin with a
certain toughness, or a second layer of cover that connotes impenetrability. However, it seems
more consistent with the development of the text to read these scales, and the act of shedding that
accompanies them, as both a kind of “euphemistic reinterpretation and metaphorization of the
gruesome flaying ritual” (Benthien 83), but also as a kind of extreme symbolic materialization of
the protagonist’s experience of suffering through her stigmatized skin.

Of course the shedding of scales depicted in Das Bad is very different than the visual and
literary representations of flaying so popular in sixteenth and seventeenth century anatomical and
Christian or mythical painting and texts,\(^\text{132}\) especially with respect to the myth of Marsyas, the
martyrdom of the apostle Bartholomew, or the killing of the corrupt judge Sisamnes in the
Persian legend. For whereas in these visual and literary depictions there is often a bodysuit-like
skin detached from its dying, muscular inner-self, in Das Bad it is by no means a singular,
violent, and torturous unsheathing of the dermal dress. Unlike Ovid’s Metamorphoses, where it

\(^{132}\)For two extensive readings of the place of ‘flaying’ in European literature and art in especially the 16th and 17th
centuries, but also in nineteenth and twentieth century literature, I recommend Claudia Benthien’s Skin 63-82 and
Steven Connor’s Book of Skin 13-32. The prevalence of rather gruesome scenes of skins detached from their bodies
can be witnessed time and again, especially with regard to Marsyas, in literary works by Plato, Herodotus, Ovid and
Hyginus, but also in paintings, such as: Gerard David’s The Flaying of Sisamnes (1498); Dirck van Baburen’s The
Flaying of Marsyas (ca.1623); Melchior Meier’s Apollo with the Flayed Marsyas and the Judgment of Midas
(1581); Giovanni Stradanus’s Apollo Flays Marsyas (ca. 1580-1600); Titian’s The Flaying of Marsyas (1575-6); and
of course Michaelangelo’s fresco The Last Judgment (1537-41) where Piero Aretino holds the skin of St.
Bartholemew - a skin whose face bears a curious resemblance to the artist himself. For a useful and recent study on
Häutung in the Marsyas and Apollo legend, but also in relation to contemporary performance art by Joseph Beuys
and Orlan, to name a few, see Stéphane Dumas’s “Der Mythos des Marsyas.”
states “[b]ut in spite of [Marsyas’s] cries his skin was torn off the whole surface of his body: it was all one raw wound” (6.382-391), in Das Bad it is rather a more or less constant self-excoriation executed by the subject on her own body as a means of concealing an epidermal aberration. Revealing her scaly skin could potentially cause her to experience even more exclusion than she already confronts, while the act of removing these scales can be positively recoded and viewed as a kind of symbolic act of transformation, regeneration and self-becoming.

In contrast to the flaying of Marsyas, the shedding of the outer bodily layer portrayed in Das Bad suggests that in this text, as Benthien describes, “[f]laying changes from a singular act that destroys the subject into a conscious and transforming act of will; it is semantically recoded from a final into a transitory moment. There is no single skin that constitutes humanness, individuality, and vitality; rather, beneath the skin are ever-new layers to discover” (84). From this perspective the constant shedding of skins outlined in Das Bad echoes the culminating scene in “Das Fremde aus der Dose,” where the protagonist is presented as ceaselessly opening the outer packaging of the can, “um eine weitere Verpackung darunter zu entdecken.” As both texts underscore, the interminable process of removing the outer layers never reveals an internal authentic ‘self’, but rather only more layers.

At the risk of stating the obvious, a skin covered in fish scales would not be considered ‘normal’ by most prevailing conceptions of normality. Thus the bodily border in this text is already being recast as a transgression, or subversion, of the boundaries or limits of acceptability, despite the protagonist’s best efforts to manipulate her appearance in accordance with the regulatory imperative. And as is the case with most borders and boundaries in Tawada’s texts, the bodily boundary, as a material and symbolic space of separation, is also a site of connection. In the case of Das Bad this connectivity is articulated through the fluidity, shedding, permeability and transformative qualities of the skins depicted. If we assume that the body, as
Mary Douglas states, is “a model which can stand for any bounded system,” and whose boundaries “can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious” (*Purity and Danger* 116), then against this model we can read the notion of an inviolate and unassailable skin as literally and metaphorically under attack.

The very deployment of fish scales as the covering surface in the text is indicative of the complex duality of skin that has been discussed throughout this chapter. Tawada addresses this complexity in her interview with Brandt in the lines “fish are animals that live in the water, and because of that, their bodies have to be firm, not *absolutely* firm, but a fish body has to be firm enough so as not to disappear or dissolve in the water” (“Ein Wort, Ein Ort” 10). On the other hand, during a conversation I had with Tawada, when expressing her interest in skin, and especially fish skin, as a material, she highlights its permeability with “die Haut sollte eigentlich die Trennung sein, zwischen Außenwelt und Innenwelt, aber bei [einem] Fisch ist es durchlässig, ein bißchen, Wasser kann kommen und gehen” (“skin should actually be the separation between outside and inside worlds, but in the case of a fish the skin is actually a bit porous – water can come and go”; Redlich, “Personal Conversation”). Fish skin is, in fact, quite permeable, for while it serves as the barrier that keeps a fish from losing its structural integrity, it is also a pervious membrane that constantly absorbs water and expels water and wastes in order to maintain an internal equilibrium. Seen in the context of a porous boundary that can be shed, and even punctured, the representation of skin in *Das Bad* can be read as problematizing the fixity and permanence of borders which serve an exclusionary identity politics that enables some, while foreclosing others.

David Harradine, in his “Abject Identities and Fluid Performances: Theorizing the Leaking Body,” points to the transgressive potential of rethinking the skin as border and bearer of identity with “the margins of the body – the skin and its orifices, dark places, crevices, cracks
and holes – are particularly representative of the fragility of any bounded system, and the traversing of these margins … foregrounds the vulnerability of these systems and their ultimate incapacity to maintain themselves as such” (74). This essay employs and recontextualizes Kristeva’s notion of the abject and abjection, meaning “the state of abjecting or rejecting what is other to oneself – and thereby creating borders of an always tenuous ‘I’” (McAfee 46).

Theorizing abjection for Harradine is used as a means of highlighting the instability of boundaries “precariously constructed around identities” (Harradine 74). In this process of exclusion that establishes the border between subject and object, between self and other, there must be something that is expelled or rejected from the body, something deemed dirty and unacceptable. In the case of Das Bad, it is the bath itself that is being figured as the symbol of cleanliness, where the skin is being cleansed and the unwanted and undesirable are expunged, and which in this case is represented by the protagonist peeling the scales from her body.\textsuperscript{133} The scaly body here is symbolic of those bodies that are excluded from normality, while the ‘clean and proper’ body that emerges from the bath can pass as belonging to the normative order. Because the ‘dirt’ has been washed off, and the border has thus been policed and maintained, this body can pass as socially permissible.

The stability of the bodily border is only an illusion in this text, however, as once the protagonist softens and removes her scales, a new difficulty presents itself:

Ich stieg aus dem Bad. Die Schuppen waren ganz weich geworden – mit einem Bimsstein schabte ich sie ab ...

\textsuperscript{133} The role of the bath as the site of bodily maintenance is highlighted later in the text when the protagonist visits the home of a woman who has been severely burnt and is, in all likelihood, dead. The text describes this bathing scene as “[s]ie schöpfte nochmals Wasser und wiederholte ihre Dusche. Es sah aber mehr wie die Häutung einer Schlange als wie eine Dusche aus. Das Wasser war eine transparente Haut, die von ihrem Körper glitt. ‘Wenn ich das nicht tue, kann ich meinen Ekel nicht vergessen. Statt laut zu schreien, friere ich den Schrei ein und streife ihn ab’” 67. This bathing ritual then is required for her to forget her ‘disgust’, and the bath water is described as falling from her body ‘like a snake shedding its skin’.
Die Schuppen waren verschwunden, stattdessen hatten sich auf der Nase viele Bläschen gebildet, die kleiner waren als die Köpfe von Ameisen. Ich zerdrückte sie zwischen den Spitzen meiner Fingernägel, Weißes quoll heraus. Es roch wie ranzige Mayonnaise ...

Ich zerdrückte das letzte Bläschen. Das Ergebnis war keine glatte Haut, sondern eine von welken Luftballons übersäte menschenleere Wüstenlandschaft. (15)

When I got out of the bath, the scales had softened, I scraped them off with a pumice stone. They came off with relatively little effort … When I returned to the mirror, the scales were gone, but on my nose I saw a large number of tiny blisters smaller than ants’ heads. I popped one with my nail, and a greasy white substance came out. It smelled like rancid mayonnaise … When I had popped the last of the blisters, what remained was not smooth skin but a desolate desert landscape scattered with deflated balloons. (6)

The precariousness and fragility of the body is emphasized here with the opening of the skin surface (represented by the popping of the blisters) and the release of the internal puss to the external world; a release that can be viewed as a kind of symbolic act of boundary transgression that undercuts the stability, and even the possibility, of the desired identitarian system, but also the sense of inner drives pushing outwards, breaking free, “overflowing their assigned passage” (Prosser 71).134 Despite her efforts to conform to an idealized image of skin that would allow inclusion within the preferred order, this ideal invariably proves illusory, as the peeled skin is replaced with blisters, which are replaced with a desert landscape, which she attempts to correct with a special lotion. But even when she is successful in this self-preservation, it is only a

134 In his Second Skins 67-90 Jay Prosser notes how, in several autobiographies of transsexuals, the theme of excoriations and shedding of skins constantly appear, pre-transition, to underline the sense of inhabiting the wrong body, but also how metaphors of punctured and opened skin through blisters feature as a means of articulating the material overflow of psychic disturbances.
temporary victory. In whatever form the fluid and permeable body is articulated in this text, be it as the skin as swamp or the body consisting of eighty percent water, or as a skin-covering that can be removed, or as a perforated surface that leaks liquid, these performances of the fluidity of the abject body, as Harradine describes, “attest undeniably to the possibility that … identities remain open to re-articulation and resignification, which might enable the exposure of the fragility and constructedness of a hegemonic order that attempts to valorize them as concrete, immutable and real” (83-84).

While later in the text the protagonist comes to terms with her scaly skin, and even embraces this skin as a kind of marketing technique in the vein of *Teen Wolf*, being marked as aberrant by one’s skin can prove to have very real, detrimental social and psychical consequences in this text. For example, the mysterious woman whom the protagonist visits in a rat infested apartment, and whom we later find out is actually dead, is described as having a severely burned body. The text describes the woman’s skin with, “[d]ie Brandwunde zog sich vom Gesicht über ihren ganzen Rücken. Man sagt, dass ein Mensch stirbt, wenn ein Drittel seiner Haut verbrannt ist. Bei ihr war mehr als ein Drittel der Haut verbrannt” (“They say that if over a third of your skin is burned, you will die, but this woman’s burns appeared to cover far more than a third of her body”; *Das Bad* 65; “The Bath” 22). While these burns were likely caused during the fire that claimed her life (whether her death was caused by suicide, murder or accident is left open), from the warning she imparts to the protagonist there is a clear indication that this ghost-woman experienced, during her own life, the extremes of society’s reaction to

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135 *Teen Wolf*, the 1985 comedy starring Michael J. Fox as Scott Howard, is the story of a high school male who comes to discover that he inherently carries a were-wolf gene that surfaces during full moons and periods of extreme excitation/irritation. At first Scott attempts to conceal his were-wolf side, fearing ridicule and marginalization, but once he becomes (temporarily) exalted for his difference, he embraces his otherness and even, with the help of his best friend Stiles, markets and profits from it. And as was the case for the ‘Teen-Wolf’, so too would it be for the protagonist in *Das Bad*, as she is warned: “Am Anfang werden alle deine Schuppen bewundern. Man wird dich darum beneiden, und du wirst glücklich sein. Eines Tages wird jemand plötzlich sagen, dass er dich umbringen wird, alle werden unversehens anfangen, dich zu hassen. Du wirst große Angst haben, und dein Rückgrat wird weich werden und sich nicht mehr gerade halten können” 101.
marked, scaly skin (recast in death as burned skin). These reactions, the text tells us, ranged from admiration to hate. The dead woman even points to the possibility that someone will eventually murder the protagonist because of her conspicuous skin:


At first everyone will praise your scales and envy them, and you’ll feel glad. But one day suddenly someone will say he’s going to kill you. Suddenly they’ll all hate you. Out of terror, your backbone will go soft, it will not hold itself erect.

(14)

The lived reality exemplified in the social marginalization and threat of violence that comes from inhabiting a skin marked as other or aberrant is juxtaposed in Das Bad to a much more politically and socially productive skin represented as fluid, porous, leaking, and resistant to containment and forever in a process of becoming. The text describes a body that cannot contain itself, one that is messy, leaking and in need of control, but one that also becomes fetishized because of its marks of difference. Living in an open system, the protagonist’s body and identity are clearly beholden to the laws of entropy, as despite her efforts to self-patrol and self-control, there is a clear move towards disorder.

Towards the end of the text, the protagonist finally decides to cash-in on her body that she cannot tame, and that is out of control. The protagonist utilizes her conspicuous and divergent skin as a means of gaining employment, even accentuating the erotic allure of her mark of otherness rather than concealing it. The text reads, “ein Zirkus suchte Schuppenträgerinnen.
Eine solche Chance, dachte ich, kommt für mich nicht wieder. Ich strich mit den Fingerspitzen über meine Wangen und versicherte mich, dass meine Schuppen fest und frisch waren. Ich zog eine dünne ärmellose Seidenbluse und einen kurzen Rock an, um zu zeigen, dass mein ganzer Körper mit Schuppen bedeckt war” (‘Wanted: woman with scales’. A local circus was hiring women with scales on their skin. It was a unique opportunity for me. I stroked my face with a fingertip to make sure my scales were firm and in their best condition. To show I had scales all over, I put on a thin sleeveless silk blouse and a miniskirt”; 111-13; 38). While it is suggested that this circus scene turns out to be a dream sequence, her experience as the ‘scaly woman’ at the circus is really no more surreal than the protagonist’s reality. Considering the overall trope of blurring and complicating borders that propels this text, such a move towards dovetailing dream and reality should come as no surprise. However, what is especially noteworthy with respect to the protagonist’s skin as on-display for an audience is, and this echoes a point made in the chapter on photography, here again ‘difference’ is being commodified and marketed as a spectacle for public consumption. Against the prospect of becoming a marketing ploy, the protagonist is presented with the double-bind of either remaining invisible, or selling herself as nothing but visible. Like most of Tawada’s texts, there is no real resolution or logical finality to Das Bad apart from the fact that most of the roles the protagonist occupies throughout the work are negated in the end, and all that remains is a ‘transparent coffin’. Skin, eventually, ceases to be the central focus only at the story’s conclusion. As the next chapter will demonstrate though, the concept of transparency, as unmarked skin, plays a crucial function in maintaining certain types of skin as the normative standard in several historical and cultural contexts.
3.9 CONCLUSION

I hesitate to use the word ‘transparent’ in connection to Tawada’s texts. Even though transparent appears with relative frequency in the content, in terms of cohesive, logical plot developments or verifiable thematic threads that can be drawn out, transparent, clear or obvious are hardly appropriate terms to define this reading experience. Nonetheless, as I have underlined in this chapter, when considered as a kind of network of texts in dialogue with, and reflecting upon, one another, there are some very discernible and profoundly illuminating conceptual trends and theoretical insights embedded throughout Tawada’s writing that become transparent when linked together. The short poem “Eine Hautnahme,” for example, was analyzed as a kind of lynchpin that anchors the skin concepts and theory found throughout Tawada’s oeuvre, and thus I used this poem as a kind of point of departure for entering her other texts.

In this chapter I have addressed a number of Tawada’s texts, some fictional, some essayistic, some well-known, some not, in order to emphasize the diverse and provocative deployment of skin that has hitherto been relatively ignored in secondary research. What becomes immediately clear from this analysis is that there is, and can be, no singular, universal and all-encompassing understanding or definition of skin as a literary metaphor, cultural construction or visually verifiable, biological fact. Instead, as the texts I considered illuminate, skin is an exhaustingly diverse and contradictory concept that can serve as the cause of an individual’s marginalization and physical and psychical suffering, but it can also be re-figured as a potentially liberating symbol towards inclusion, self-becoming and regeneration. Tawada is again questioning the common-sense and taken-for-granted acceptance of skin as something that just is by puncturing it, peeling it, making it leak and re-writing it altogether, and therefore an extensive, theoretically diverse and close textual reading was necessary to expose skin’s complexities.
Looking at texts like “Der Schriftkörper und der beschriftete Körper,” Verwandlungen and “Das Fremde aus der Dose,” this chapter viewed Tawada’s representations of skin as a surface of inscription and legibility that can perform as the site and marker of an individual’s otherness if it is read through habitual and limited codes of intelligibility. “Das Fremde aus der Dose” considers how this foreignness inscribed on the protagonist’s skin is appropriated as a marketing technique by totalizing and packaging an easily consumable semantics of otherness into a canned commodity. Yet, as Tawada demonstrates in her subversion of Lavater’s physiognomic interpretation, the external packaging is no one-to-one representation of an internal essence. There is no outward projection of a ‘true self’ inside, but rather beneath the layers are only more layers, or more signifiers that are not attached to a core signified. Likewise, Tawada’s depictions of masks that are inscribed onto the faces of foreign subjects by the external expectations of observers also undercut the notion of an authentic self hiding beneath the masks.

In a similar sense to Butler’s concept of gender performativity, texts like Das Bad and Verwandlungen present the seemingly irreconcilable tension between performing identities within the limited and rigid regulatory frame of discourse and normativity, and the possibility of disrupting and undermining this repetitive process by revealing gender, but also racial and sexual identities, to be imitations, citations or copies of an original that does not exist.

“Eine Hautnahme,” “Wo Europa anfängt” and Das Bad all work in concert to produce a multivalent conceptualization of skin as symbolic of fluidity and change, and as a boundary and landscape metaphor that is historically and culturally contingent but also susceptible to discourses of power that work to naturalize it as rooted in nature. Finally, this chapter detailed how skin is portrayed as a surface vulnerable to psychical influences from beneath, but also proves to be constitutive of subjectivity itself. The skin in Tawada’s texts is discursive and
material, it is paradoxically a boundary that can include and exclude, it can be stubbornly fixed or pierced and flayed, and the only thing it cannot be is unequivocal.
CHAPTER FOUR: (UN)SETTLING BOUNDARIES: INTERROGATING SKIN COLOUR, RACE, AND ETHNICITY IN SELECT TEXTS BY YOKO TAWADA

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The following, penultimate chapter redirects the preceding focus on skin towards representations of skin colour, race, and ethnicity, and their relation to spatial and conceptual boundary formations in Yoko Tawada’s short story “Bioskoop der Nacht” from the collection Überseezungen, and the short essayistic text “Eigentlich darf man es niemandem sagen, aber Europa gibt es nicht” from Talisman. The first of these two works represents a double-sided departure for Tawada, as it, like the texts already discussed, features a narrator/protagonist who voyages to another country and reflects on her position vis-à-vis this foreign culture. However, unlike Tawada’s other texts this new cultural/spatial context is not European, but rather South African. With the exception of “Bioskoop der Nacht” and the short works in the “Nordamerikanische Zungen” section of Überseezungen, the vast majority of Tawada’s German-language writing is situated in a German, or at the very least European, cultural frame of reference and literary and intellectual history. “Bioskoop der Nacht,” on the other hand, is a narrative of a female Japanese protagonist who travels to Cape Town, South Africa in order to learn Afrikaans, and to discover why she has recently been dreaming in this foreign language that is totally alien to her. South Africa, in this text, serves as a specific historical, political, linguistic and cultural context for the narrator’s engagement with the legal construction of race as the determinant of national belonging during the apartheid era. By referring to two lengthy textual examples, I will show how Tawada represents public spaces as integral in the construction, conceptualization and segregation of populations based on their assigned race, even though members of a particular racial category have historically, linguistically, culturally or spatially little to no connection to fellow group members. South Africa also operates on a more universal level in the sense of Barthes’s Japan (or Garabagne) in Empire of Signs - as a free-
floating stage for the author to represent and interrogate racial interpellations and race as a performative category, rather than accept it as a biological given or, in its more modern form, as the naturalized marker of cultural heritage and sign of incompatibility between social groups.

Tawada’s engagement with the African continent as a context or background for any of her literary works is limited, as are analyses of “Bioskoop der Nacht” relative to investigations of her other texts. In their ‘Afrika’ glossary excerpt from the 2011 special edition of Text+Kritik, Ivanovic and Matsunaga note:


For Tawada, who in the 90’s was intensively occupied with the theme ‘Europe’, two African journeys (2000 to South Africa and 2002 to Senegal) trigger a broadening of the conceptual world ‘Europe’ and perhaps even a bit of its relativization. Her stay in Cape Town and engagement with Afrikaans is reflected in “Bioscope of the Night.”

Written in Japanese, her Lower Saxony trilogy from 1998 contains the short story ‘The Shadow Man’, which deals with the African scholar Anton-Wilhelm Amo
(1703-1756). He was an African raised in Braunschweig, and later became a professor of philosophy.

What this brief sketch of Tawada’s literary connection to Africa does not mention is that nearly an entire chapter of her dissertation Spielzeug und Sprachmagie in der europäischen Literatur: Eine ethnologische Poetologie from 2000 centers on the French surrealist ethnographer Michel Leiris and his 1934 diary Phantom Africa (L’Afrique fantôme), which relates an ethnographic expedition (1931-33) he undertook with Marcel Griaule from Dakar to Djibouti. While Tawada’s analysis of Leiris’s text centers on representations of masks, dolls and gift exchange and offers very little in terms of analysis of the ethnographic perspective of its author, the focus on Phantom Africa and Leiris as exemplary for her study of an ethnological poetology can shed light on Tawada’s own fictive ethnographic African expedition articulated in “Bioskoop der Nacht.”

The differences between Tawada and Leiris’s projects, however, are far more numerous and consequential than the similarities: the when, where, for whom and especially why they went to Africa and wrote texts (one an ethnographic account, the other a fictional short-story), which convey their voyages are all entirely incommensurable – quite simply, their motivations bear no resemblance. Michel Leiris is a telling choice for Tawada’s study though, as the surrealist poetics subtending his realist account of the African cultures, rituals, and subjects he observed mean that a distinctly fictive element undercuts any pretense of scientific objectivity or rigour in his ethnographic technique. Sean Hand, in his thorough study Michel Leiris: Writing the Self that details Leiris’s development from surrealism to ethnography, and from psychoanalysis to existentialism, highlights how, even from the beginning of Phantom Africa, “the relative nature of identity, the calling into question of values and civilizations, and the introspective preoccupations underlying the surface of objectivity of an ethnographic science, are all apparent”
(54). Peter Phipps relates how *Phantom Africa* works as an incisive criticism of ethnography and colonialism, stressing how “Leiris develops a critique of the Mission’s fieldwork practices and of his own culture more generally as a result of his lived position in the field,” which shows “the potential of the participant-observation method to be turned against empiricism as a method, and imperialism as an embodied mode of mutual oppression” (“Michel Leiris: Master of Ethnographic Failure” 187). Further to the point, Phyllis Clarck-Taoua suggests that from Leiris’s ethnographic approach, with its “remarkably subjective filter as an observer of Africa,” a reader actually “learns as much, if not more, about Leiris’s inner world … than about the peoples and cultures of Africa that he encountered along the way” (“In Search of New Skin” 479). Readers of Tawada’s text(s) unequivocally *do not* learn more about the author than about the characters depicted, yet there is certainly an analogous destabilization of representational reliability, and a subversion of authentically portraying the cultural, racial or ethnic other from an objective perspective.

Moreover, Leiris’s overt obsession with dreams and the language of the unconscious that feature throughout his African diary is a theme directly reflected in “Bioskoop der Nacht.” As mentioned above, the connecting thread in this text is the narrative switch between dream and reality, and the protagonist’s subsequent investigation into the language of her unconscious is what motivates her voyage to South Africa. Tawada’s fictive ethnographic narratorial technique then, with respect to this particular text, aims not to *observe* and represent cultural and ethnic differences in an African context, but rather to *interrogate* the processes and forces behind constructing racial differences from an unstable and self-reflexive narratorial perspective. In other words, the texts serve to reveal processes of othering and boundary construction between social groups instead of empirically presenting those groups *as they are*. Visual perception and the eye as the classifying organ of ethnic and racial difference that traditionally have represented
groups ‘as they are’ in ethnographic research (and especially ethnographic photography) are questioned in the two Tawada texts I analyze in this chapter. And unlike the common claim that ethnographic writing attempts to make the other more familiar by ‘finding the self in the other,’ the Tawada texts I am analyzing in this chapter serve to dismantle the very logic of this binary distinction (and as Derrida stresses, binary constructions are rarely neutral),\(^\text{136}\) and underscore how the categories of differentiation are open to modification and rearticulation.

While “Bioskoop der Nacht” and “Eigentlich darf man es niemandem sagen, aber Europa gibt es nicht” are very different texts in terms of content, length and cultural and spatial context, they are connected first by Tawada’s counter-ethnographic literary approach, and second by a focus on representations of skin colour - namely black and white as dichotomous categories. But even these representations of skin colours and the contexts in which they are depicted, the circumstances of their production, and the consequences of their reception are far from identical in these two texts. They will therefore also be contrasted with each other in order to underline Tawada’s approach to evolving perceptions of skin colour and race, and the more subtle examples of how racialized thinking still directs social interactions. Skin colours, in spite of their monolithic simplicity, still metonymically signify racial, ethnic and even national differences. As Peggy Piesche puts it, “color does not really play a role in discussing ethnic difference, and yet it is always there” (Tautz, Colors 24), as part of the codification of the body that allows it to be read and classified according to the least complex visual criteria. In Race, Colour and the Processes of Racialization, Farhad Dalal emphasizes how “in the history of ‘race’ as a category, the use of colour to refer not only to the races but also to name them remains consistent; colour becomes synonymous with the notion of race” (18), thereby making the body the referent and truth-effect of racial discourse and racial differentiation.

\(^{136}\) Derrida notes how in binary oppositions like an ‘us/them, black/white, male/female’, “we are not dealing with the peaceful coexistence of a vis-à-vis, but rather with a violent hierarchy. One of the two terms governs the other, … one has the upper hand” (Positions 41).
From a German-language literary studies perspective, Tawada’s texts can be positioned in relation to recent critical anthologies detailing the multifaceted, culturally and historically contingent, and constantly developing dialogue and interrogation of skin colour, race and ethnicity, especially with respect to late twentieth and early twenty-first century Germany as an increasingly multicultural, multiracial and multilingual nation struggling to come to terms with its cultural heterogeneity. Birgit Tautz’s *Colors 1800/1900/2000: Signs of Ethnic Difference* from 2004 is an instructive compendium of articles detailing the development of race in Germany as a category of difference and hierarchy from Kant to Chamisso, from Africa to China, and from National Socialism to contemporary Hamburg, in philosophical, literary, ethnographic and sociological texts. Other relatively contemporary texts like Oguntoye, Ayim/Opitz and Schultz’s *Farbe bekennen* (*Colour Confession*) considers, through biographical, historical and anecdotal writings, the interconnectivity of skin colour, race and ethnicity from the perspective of female African Germans and how their status as ‘black’ Germans colours their relation to concepts of Germanness, and how they are received and perceived through their cultural heritage and racially signified appearance. With regard to Tawada scholarship in particular, however, while questions of identity in relation to (primarily) language, but also nation, gender and even ethnicity have been well researched, race has been relatively omitted.

Later in this chapter I will highlight the secondary sources that investigate skin colour and/or

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137 There are numerous relatively recent and valuable texts focusing on the development and intellectual and popular understanding of race in Germany, especially in relation to eighteenth century philosophy, German colonialism, National Socialism and contemporary German multiculturalism. *The Imperialist Imagination: German Colonialism and its Legacy* by Friedrichsmeyer, Lennox and Zantop; *Colonial Space: Spatiality in the Discourse of German South West Africa* by Noyes; *Enlightenment or Empire: Colonial Discourse in German Culture* by Berman; *Colonial Fantasies* by Zantop; and *Schwarze Deutsche* by El-Tayeb are among the most widely-known, comprehensive and insightful investigations of the conceptualization of race in German literature, philosophy and cultural production. The foci of these texts range from eighteenth and nineteenth century colonialism, to twentieth century politics and society, and then to contemporary migration and European inter-boundary population movements. In terms of more focused literary analysis studies, Gelbin, Konuk and Piesche’s *AufBrüche: Kulturelle Produktionen von MigrantInnen. Schwarzen und jüdischen Frauen in Deutschland*; Breger’s *Die Ortslosigkeit des Fremden. Zigeuner und Zigeunerinnen in der Literatur um 1800*; and Tautz’s *Reading and Seeing Ethnic Differences in the Enlightenment* are three excellent studies of the literary production by German authors on representations of ethnic and racial difference from the Enlightenment to today, or by so-called minority or marginalized writers writing in German or a German cultural context.
race in connection to “Eigentlich darf man es niemanden sagen,” but because no secondary source considers the representation of skin colour, race and racial formation in “Bioskoop der Nacht,” I will use this text as my central focus of attention. In my analysis of these two Tawada texts, which exemplarily depict the repetitive and interpellative process of racial construction and the naturalized perception of skin colour as race and ethnicity, but also as a signifier of incommensurable and ineluctable separation, I will concentrate on the most explicit textual examples that are in fact more complex than their black and white theme would indicate.

My approach to Tawada’s texts recognizes that skin colour, race and ethnicity are by no means co-terminous with one another, nor do any of these individual terms denote a static, stable and ahistorical meaning that uniformly exists across cultural, national, and class boundaries. Ethnicity for example, as David Theo Goldberg outlines in his seminal study “The Semantics of Race,” “tends to emphasize a rhetoric of cultural content, whereas race tends to resort to a rhetoric of descent” (555). It is key to remember though that neither are fixed conceptualizations; Goldberg stresses that “like race, ethnicity may be cast and managed as much in terms of inherent as deeply historical identities, either of which may be claimed as the basis of sedimented and immutable differences” (555). Ethnicity is often coupled with race and the ‘nature or essence of a people’ to anchor its slippery meaning. Anne-Marie Fortier notes however (contrary to popular belief), that in more recent discourse, “as ‘race’ is culturalized, ‘ethnicity’ is naturalized” and buttressed with a “pseudobiological underpinning” (“Ethnicity” 219-20).

Skin colour is seemingly the most superficial of the three concepts, rarely operating independently, but rather in combination with “physiognomy, blood or genes, descent or claimed kinship, historical origin or original location, language, and culture” (“Semantics of Race” 560), as a means of formulating one’s racial and ethnic identity as visibly recognized in society and law. Skin colour, on the one hand so seemingly trivial and anachronistic a concept for
categorization, nevertheless has been, and continues to be, “a defining aspect of understanding race, despite our ever increasing, more refined descriptions of ‘race’ as a category that synthesizes, among others, social, economic, cultural, biological and psychological components while traversing and erasing each of these categories at certain historical junctures” (Tautz, Colors 19). Race and ethnicity as concepts and identities, of course, are far more complex than types of skin colour as visible signs, yet skin colour likewise connotes profound ideological investments and historically and hierarchically constructed boundaries between social groups that exceed its physically differentiating capacity. Race has never been about skin colour, but rather social differentiation, power and control. That being said, skin colour still operates as an organizing principle and visible reflection of raced ideologies. All three of the concepts – race, ethnicity and skin colour – are fluid and flow into one another, morphing over time and reflecting the various cultural, national and class contexts in which they are understood. Conversely, all three are also crucially complicit in the construction of boundaries and hierarchies of difference – they all serve to horizontally and vertically differentiate – and are key components in the internalization and naturalization of identities.

My readings of Tawada’s texts will again be framed within the fictive ethnological perspective in order that this fictional travelling narrator can reveal and engage with the processes of racial formation in an apartheid South Africa context, rather than define the empirical differences between racial and cultural groups. I will also detail in these texts how race and ethnicity are co-opted in establishing actual and symbolic boundaries necessary for group membership and exclusion in contexts not necessarily specific to one nation. This does not mean, however, that I am suggesting these texts forward race as a mere fiction that can be simply discarded in some post-racial, colour-blind Utopia if only its insidious logic is revealed. The following analyses of Tawada’s texts are informed by contemporary approaches that do not
merely dismiss race as an ideological illusion, but seek to understand the complex processes of racialization that construct race as a persistent, albeit malleable and fluid, concept. For example, I consider David Goldberg’s “Semantics of Race” that, in speaking of racial constitution, recognizes race as necessarily contingent on prevailing historical conditions and as reflective of dominant social and political discourses. Secondly, I build on Mirón and Inda’s conception of race in “Race as a Kind of Speech Act,” which understands race as a performative category that constitutes the subject itself through reiterative practices that then procure and maintain a naturalized effect. Thirdly, I am informed by Omi and Winant’s work “Racial Formation,” which views race not “as an essence, as something fixed, concrete and objective, ... a biological datum,” but neither as an “an illusion, a purely ideological construct which some ideal nonracist social order would eliminate” (123-24). Especially in relation to “Bioskoop der Nacht,” I am following Omi and Winant’s focus on the sociohistorical process of racial formation; that is, how “racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed” (124) and unequivocally not fixed in meaning. Building on examples from Tawada’s text I then demonstrate how race, as a matter of social structure and cultural representation, persists in producing and maintaining social stratifications underwritten by an essentialist logic.  

While today there is a fairly prevalent acceptance in academic discourses that race is not a biological given, and thus appeals to ‘biology’ as the justification for racial differentiation no longer hold, nevertheless, the more modern conceptualization of race as socially constructed and culturally produced has not eliminated its strength as a naturalized and visually verifiable guarantor of insuperable difference. The turn away from biology is not necessarily accompanied by a return to an essentialist understanding of race.

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138 Omi and Winant articulate the understanding of essentialism with which I am working as “belief in real, true human essences, existing outside or impervious to social and historical context” 143.

139 The Omi and Winant, Mirón and Inda, and Goldberg articles mentioned all underscore that a biological basis for racial differentiation has long been discarded in academic discourse, though it does hold some vestigial caché. See also Henry Louis Gates Jr.’s “Introduction: Writing ‘Race’ and the Difference it Makes” and Anthony Appiah’s “The Uncompleted Argument: Du Bois and the Illusion of Race” in the seminal collection ‘Race’, Writing and Difference for further examples in this vein, or Ashley Montagu’s Man’s Most Dangerous Myth for a comprehensive debunking of race as a system of classification.
by a disavowal of essentialism, or an end to racist approaches to viewing foreigners. Etienne Balibar outlines this new form of racial differentiation as “a racism whose dominant theme is not biological heredity but the insurmountability of cultural differences, a racism which, at first sight, does not postulate the superiority of certain groups or peoples in relation to others but ‘only’ the harmfulness of abolishing frontiers, the incompatibility of life-styles and traditions” (“Is there a Neo-Racism?” 21). It is these frontiers and boundaries, as spatial and conceptual divisions generated by an ideology of incompatibility and oppression, that Tawada is representing and interrogating in these texts, and thus it is my task to analyze and accentuate the politics behind the poetics.

The first of Tawada’s texts that I will be addressing is the short story “Bioskoop der Nacht” from the collection Überseezungen. Several secondary sources have analyzed the numerous texts that comprise Überseezungen, although only Brandt and Schyns’s “Neu vernetzt: Yoko Tawadas ‘Bioskoop der Nacht’ auf Niederländisch,” Christina Kraenzle’s “Travelling without Moving,” and Yasemin Yildiz’s “Tawada’s Multilingual Moves” provide detailed analyses of the collection’s longest short story, “Bioskoop der Nacht.” Always in consideration of the historical context and the apartheid policies that frame this text, my analysis will consider topics like: why South Africa acts as the context for this narrative; why the focus is on Afrikaans as the language of the protagonist’s dreams; what do the representations of skin colour and race in this text tell us about the construction, and instability, of race as a form of classification and identity; how are public spaces used to create conceptual and spatial racial inclusion and exclusion; and also in what ways does this text force readers to reflect on the

140 Although many of these sources will be examined throughout this chapter, here is an abbreviated list of works that deal with Überseezungen: Susan Anderson’s “Surface Translations;” Hiltrud Arens’s “Das kurze Leuchten unter dem Tor;” Bettina Brandt and Désirée Schyns’s “Neu vernetzt;” Julia Genz’s “Poetik des Übersetzens;” Christine Ivanovic’s “Aneignung und Kritik,” “Vernetzt oder verletzt?” and “Jenseits des Vergleichs;” Christine Ivanovic and Miho Matsunaga’s “Tawada von zwei Seiten;” Linda Koiran’s “Vergangenheitsspuren;” Christina Kraenzle’s “Travelling without Moving” and “The Limits of Travel;” Monika Schmitz-Emans’s “Fliessende Grenzen;” and Yasemin Yildiz’s “Multilingual Moves.” Only Brandt and Schyns take “Bioskoop der Nacht” as the focal point of analysis.
ideological foundations of skin colour and racial identity in Japan and the West. Even though race has never existed as an undisputed system of scientific categorization, and even since the early 1940s was discarded by Ashley Montagu in the aptly titled *Man’s Most Dangerous Myth*, race in its adaptive guises and everyday deployments still operates as a powerful means of human differentiation, and is often used as the justification for establishing incommensurable difference that is visible on the body. And while race is always far more than skin colour, the visibility and immediacy of *chromatism*, to borrow Spivak’s term, is not so easy to dispense with as logic might suggest, especially considering it has become a commonplace and naturalized characteristic of identity that is undergirded by a biological myth and the silent power of common-sense.

By sketching the colonial roots and development of, often bizarrely ambivalent, apartheid law in South Africa, my research outlines the historical, political and cultural context in which Tawada situates “Bioskop der Nacht” as a means of highlighting the processes involved in constructing race as a retroactive unifying category. At the same time, these texts emphasize the very real, material ramifications of reifying colour as a principle for belonging and exclusion. I focus on textual examples that most explicitly demonstrate Tawada’s engagement with both the power and ambiguity of racial ideologies, namely: representations of segregated public toilets and a ‘white’s only’ public bench. These passages are exemplary of the power that discourse and its material manifestations wield in constructing, rather than reflecting, social groups, identities and one’s sense of belonging. I then suggest that the particularities of this text, in terms of racial constitution and race as a performative category, can be expanded to broader theoretical and cultural contexts, such as Japan, Europe and North America. After this transition to a more Western context, I will also consider how *Das Bad*, and its companion and commentary essay

141 In *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* Spivak considers how to “revise racial discrimination based on chromatism, the visible difference in skin color … This nomenclature is based on the implicit acceptance of ‘white’ as ‘transparent’ or ‘no-color’, and is therefore reactive upon the self-representation of the white” 164-65.
“Eigentlich darf man es niemandem sagen, aber Europa gibt es nicht,” can fit into this discourse on skin colour, race and their implications in mechanisms of power. To accomplish this I will be centering on a lengthy passage from Das Bad depicting a dialogue between the first-person narrator/female, Japanese protagonist and her German boyfriend/photographer Xander which I omitted from the discussion in chapter two. The spirited dialogue represents the polarized positions of constructionists and essentialists in discourses over the constitution of subjectivity, and in this instance especially racialized subjectivity, but also the construction of conceptual boundaries and incompatibility between subjects that stubbornly maintains us/them, black/white, and male/female binaries of differentiation.

4.2 TONGUES IN YOKO TAWADA’S AFRICAN TEXTS

As I noted above, even though it is true that the vast majority of Yoko Tawada’s texts are located in either European (mainly German), or East Asian (predominantly Japanese) spatial, cultural and linguistic contexts, the 2002 collection of short ‘stories’ Überseezungen is an exception to this trend. This text is split into three sections titled (and appearing in order) “Euroasiatische Zungen,” “Südafrikanische Zungen” and “Nordamerikanische Zungen.” The section titles reflect the work’s overall thematic and theoretical focus on language, space and identity, and their roles in differentiating populations, and can also be traced to, and identified with, the author’s actual excursions to Cape Town, South Africa in 2000, a residency as Max Kade Distinguished Visitor at MIT in Boston in 1999, and a visit to the International Festival of

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142 Überseezungen was first published in 2002 but was reissued in 2006 as a “korrigierte Neuauflage.” It is difficult to label the contents of this text, so ‘stories’ is placed between quotation marks here because a ‘story’ in the sense of a ‘short story’ connotes some kind of Ereignisfolge or Geschichte. However, in the predominantly first-person narrative texts that comprise this collection, though they are fictional narratives, there is something very a-typical about them that displaces them and makes it awkward to put them under a conventional label like ‘story’. Mousel Knott takes a similar approach, though with ‘Roman’, and in reference to Ein Gast. She notes “‘Roman’ wird hier deswegen in Anführungszeichen gesetzt, weil der Text von Tawada Ein Gast als solches von Konkursbuch Verlag gekennzeichnet wird. Näher betrachtet ist Ein Gast eher ein experimentelles Schreiben, welches absichtlich mit der Form eines Romanes spielt” 570.
Authors in Toronto in 2001. These visits are, of course, in addition to her now two-decades long stay in Germany. That is not say, of course, that this is a biographical work in the sense that the events related in the narrative represent events that actually occurred to the author in ‘real’ life. The fact that this text is indicative of Tawada’s fictional ethnographic literary approach already proscribes a biographical or objectively observational reading. It seems improbable, for example, that the author really had a friend named Zoltan whose penis exploded into an ejaculatory shower of fluid letters as described in the collection’s first piece titled “Zungentanz,” or that the recurring figure of a murdered girl’s ghost in fact sat with Tawada in her Cape Town language class, as we read in “Bioskoop der Nacht.” The tempting invitation to equate author and narrator as a kind of ethnographic observer is consistently disrupted in this text, as it is in all of Tawada’s works, through a technique that sets up the pretense of verisimilitude rooted in biographical correlations, but then fractures this illusion through fictional, fantastic, surreal and allegorical narratives.

Rather than viewing these visits to South Africa and North America in relation to the author’s personal history, they can be more productively read as spatial and historical contextualizations for a broader political and social commentary implicitly and explicitly represented therein and throughout her oeuvre. In choosing South Africa, the United States and

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143 Biographical details for the years and locations provided above can be found throughout Tawada scholarship. The official Yoko Tawada website at http://yokotawada.de/ details all of Tawada’s residencies; Christina Kraenzle’s “Travelling Without Moving” on page 2 note 6, provides the source for Tawada’s visit to the writers festival in Toronto; and Ivanovic and Matsunaga’s glossary of terms “Tawada von zwei Seiten” 108 outlines, under the heading “Afrika,” how Tawada visited South Africa in 2000 and later Senegal in 2002. There she attended a conference at which she became acquainted with the term ‘exophony’.

144 In keeping with the ubiquitous deployment of skin throughout Tawada’s texts, “Zungentanz” features a male friend of the narrator whose skin becomes transparent. The first person narrator notices a ‘n’ on Zoltan’s upper thigh, but this is no tattoo, says Zoltan, but rather is the product of nature. In a response that speaks to the overarching theme of the meaning of skin as nature or culture, as constructed or essentialized, the narrator comments “[d]as kann doch nicht bloß mit der Natur zu tun haben” 13.

Germany as the rhetorical, spatial, historical and cultural loci for the short stories in Überseezungen, in combination with content that concerns the interweaving of identity, race and their relation to skin and skin colour, but also how the meanings of race and skin colour exceed embodiment, Tawada embeds a political undercurrent to her writing that demands more thorough and engaged attention in critical reception. More specifically, and bluntly expressed, the representation and problematization of race as a historically, culturally, scientifically and linguistically constructed phenomenon and system of categorization has remained largely omitted in secondary scholarship on Tawada. Therefore, the following will outline the limited extent to which secondary sources have considered the depiction and engagement with race in Tawada’s texts, but also add to the discussion some thoughts on how Tawada’s texts criticize, interrogate and problematize race as a fixed, natural boundary between groups and individuals. My focus is on how subjects are racially constructed through everyday social and institutional practices and discourses in Tawada’s texts, and how these repeated or reiterative constituting techniques suggest that racialized identities and hierarchies are susceptible to being reconceptualized.

Because it is one of the least veiled of Tawada’s representations and investigations into the topic of skin colour, race and racial ideologies in her texts, the coming pages will first consider the short story “Bioskoop der Nacht,” which is the only piece that comprises the section “Südafrikanische Zungen” in Überseezungen. “Bioskoop der Nacht” literally occupies the central position of this collection of short stories, and as is evidenced by the spatial signifier ‘south’ in the section’s title, and the ‘north’ signifier in the subsequent section’s title, Tawada is shifting the focus in this text from the bifurcated east-west (Euroasiatisch) dyad as the familiar context in her writing, and in its place looks to a new geographical, historical and cultural

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146 For a recent and useful discussion of the reconfiguration of east/west polarizations in Tawada’s texts read Dennitza Gabrakova’s “‘A Hole in the Continent’. The Geopoetics East/West of Tawada Yoko” 639-49. This article
point of reference. Christine Ivanovic reflects on the text’s three ligua-spatial headings “Euroasiatische Zungen,” “Südafrikanische Zungen” and “Nordamerikanische Zungen” with:

Es verschwindet hier nämlich nicht nur die historisch wie politisch kodierte Ost-West-Spannung; es verliert sich in der kontinentalen Masse Euriasiens auch der Gegensatz zwischen ‗westlicher‘ und nicht-westlicher Welt, während das Nord-Süd-Gefälle kontinental verschoben wird in die Gegenüberstellung Amerika-Afrika, auch dies eine politische Akzentuierung, in welcher nicht zuletzt der historische Konnex zwischen beiden Kontinenten mitangesprochen scheint. (“Vernetzt oder verletzt?”

Not only does the historically and politically coded East-West dichotomy disappear; in the continental masses of Euro-Asia there is also a loss of the opposition between ‘western’ and non-western worlds. A north-south axis has been inserted in which the confrontation ‘America-Africa’ and all the accompanying political accents and historical connections enter the conversation.

This change of location, this dis-placement, bears noting since the short story “Shadow Men” is, in fact, the only other example in Tawada’s writing in which Africa plays a role (apart from the focus on Michel Leiris in her dissertation), and even in “Shadow Men” the context is primarily a German one. In the case of “Bioskoop der Nacht” and its setting in post-apartheid South Africa, while Tawada is specifically reflecting on the explicit system of racial classification built on constructed categories of white and black that served to pre-determine an individual’s access to, or denial of, developmental opportunities and personal freedoms, she is simultaneously referencing the racializing structures and power relations operating subtly in contexts more familiar in her writing, like Japan and Germany.

focuses on Tawada’s Wo Europa anfängt, Das nackte Auge but also her short text “U.S.+ S.R.” from the collection Sprachpolizei und Spielpolyglotte, and brings together Tawada’s aesthetic and creative strategies with geographic and geopolitical issues in the context of the post-Cold War world.
As was mentioned in the previous chapters with regard to how Tawada’s texts self-reference and reflect upon one another in an attempt to enact the net metaphors so prevalent throughout her collected works as a kind of literary praxis, so too is “Südafrikanische Zungen” already in dialogue with one of her earlier, lesser-known pieces. The bi-lingual Japanese-German *Nur da wo du bist, da ist nichts* quietly houses a short poem titled “Afrikanische Zunge” that serves to set the thematic stage for later creations, and, not that more evidence is required to foil the biographical red-herring, was written even before the author travelled to that continent. Moreover, as is the case from cover to cover in *Überseezungen*, so too does “Afrikanische Zunge” feature a mobile tongue as symbol and synecdoche of the inextricability of language and body, the sense of one’s identity and social status as tied to language and linguistic competence, but also the refusal that this link is permanent and static, or that one’s identity and language are necessarily singular or bound to a core essence.

With titles like “Afrikanische Zunge” and *Überseezungen*, it should come as no surprise that tongues and tongue metaphors, and by extension the topic of language, identity and the *loss* of identity, occupy a central position in the field of Tawada scholarship. Doug Slaymaker, accurately emphasizing the anti-essentialist move Tawada makes with respect to tongues and identity, gives a broad summary of the author’s use of tongues in *Überseezungen* with:

> *Überseezungen* may mean ‘overseas tongues’, but Tawada certainly wants us to form pictures of those tongues, in how many mouths, which have been transported across oceans in boats and planes. And *Überseezungen* may also mean

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147 It may seem commonplace and anachronistic to highlight the need to separate author from narrator, but it is a significant matter in the reception of Tawada because of the interplay between fiction and reality present in these texts. I mentioned in the chapter on photography how author photos can work to influence reader reception, and Tawada underlines the potential for conflation in “Tawada Yoko Does Not Exist” with “[s]ome books carry a picture of the author. People say to me: ‘You look like the person in the photograph’. This seems to me another example of how disconcerting it is to have the author appear before one, and the reader feels the need, like at passport control, to compare the photograph of the author with the actual author” 16. There is an interaction here among three levels of Tawada: the person, the person represented in the photo, and the person who creates the literary product. These three Tawadas are neither self-identical nor mutually exclusive.
‘tongues across the water’: perhaps the physical tongue forms the bridge that allows us to cross chasms, bodies of water and link places and people. Tongues grow to represent subjectivity. The tongues we speak (with) stand in for identity cards: ‘To declare one’s linguistic ties is thus akin to producing identity papers’ writes Kraenzle. Tongues take on the characteristics of a parent – the mother (tongue). The possibilities and layerings that attend the imagery of the mother tongue all tie to the essentialist assumptions that Tawada so clearly chafes at ... in *Exophony*, and in the imagery that accompanies her numerous writings on dreams and dream-language (“Introduction” 8-9)

In the “Zunge” section of their “Tawada von zwei Seiten,” Ivanovic and Matsunaga provide an extensive overview and analysis of the variegated deployment of tongues in Tawada’s texts, but especially with regard to *Überseezungen* (“Zunge” 151). They note how, unlike depictions of the eye in Tawada’s texts, “die Zunge [ist] eine Organ, das – tastend, schmeckend – sowohl aufnehmen wie auch – als Sprechorgan – produzieren kann. Sie ist ein sinnlich-erotisches Organ und – lingua – Inbegriff der Sprache selbst” (“the tongue is an organ that touches and tastes, receives and (as a speech organ) produces. It is a sensual and erotic organ and is literally [as lingua] the embodiment of language itself”; 151). The tongue represents belonging and exclusion for Tawada’s protagonists, and especially in contexts where Tawada’s characters travel to other countries and speak foreign languages, there is always the threat of losing the tongue, in a sense akin to the eye in Freud’s castration complex. Thomas Pekar also focuses on representations of the tongue in Tawada’s *Überseezungen, Das Bad*, and “Eigentlich darf man es niemandem sagen,” but with particular stress on the latter of those texts. Pekar notes, “[d]ie Zunge wird weiter ein Organ der Weltwahrnehmung konzipiert, so dass man hier von einer kognitiven

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148 In *Das Bad*, “Porträt einer Zunge,” “Zungentanz,” “Die Zweischalige,” and “Bioskoop der Nacht,” the tongue is either removed, or the character becomes entirely a tongue, or the tongue is represented as symbolic of belonging or exclusion.
Dimension der Zunge sprechen kann, die sich bei der Begegnung mit einer ‘fremden’ Kultur
(hier mit der von Japan aus gesehenen ‘fremden’ europäischen Kultur) bewähren könnte” (“the
tongue is conceptualized as an organ that perceives the world, meaning that one can speak of the
tongue’s cognitive function – underscored in particular during the engagement with a foreign
culture [here represented by the Japanese view on the ‘foreign’ European culture]”; “Zum Motiv
der Zunge” 232), and as support he quotes Tawada: “Ich möchte Europa mit meiner Zunge
wahrnehmen. Wenn meine Zunge Europa schmeckt und Europa spricht, könnte ich vielleicht die
Grenze zwischen Betrachter und Objekt überschreiten” (“I would like to perceive Europe with
my tongue. If my tongue tastes Europe and speaks Europe, perhaps I could cross this border
between observer and object”; “Eigentlich darf man” 50). Without explicitly naming it, Pekar is
making a connection to Tawada’s overarching fictive ethnological approach here, especially
when he states:

Wenn hier die ‘Grenze zwischen Betrachter’ – d.h. also ‘Subjekt’ – und ‘Objekt’,
überschritten werden soll, womit Tawada ein (sprach-)philosophisches
Grundproblem anspricht, dann wird hier eine ganzheitlich-sinnliche, an die Zunge
gebundene Weltwahrnehmung und Sprache projektiert, die sicherlich nicht zu
verwirklichen ist. Damit hat die Zunge eine weitere, utopische Dimension, die
sich mit einer ästhetischen verbindet, insoweit das Sprechen in einer fremden
Sprache einem Zungen-Experiment gleicht, welches durchaus künstlerische, z.B.
aus ‘Verfremdung’ entstehende Produkte entbinden kann. (“Zum Motiv der
Zunge” 232-33)

If, as it states in Tawada’s text, the ‘border between observer’ (or in other words
‘subject’) and ‘object’ is to be transgressed, which Tawada is approaching as a
linguistic-philosophical foundational problem, then there is a rather impossible
projection of world-perception and language being made upon the tongue. But the
tongue actually has a wider, utopian dimension connected with an aesthetic one,
insofar as speaking in a foreign language is comparable to a tongue experiment,
which can deliver thoroughly artistic products of alienation

As Pekar makes clear, the tongue also represents a crucial turn towards a new form of cultural
perception that is not reliant on visuality, and this dimension will be addressed later in the
chapter in relation to “Eigentlich darf man es niemandem sagen.”

Doug Slaymaker’s aptly named *Yoko Tawada: Voices from Everywhere*, which is the
only anthology of Tawada scholarship written entirely in English, also features a number of
articles that focus on the tongue, and especially the mother tongue, as problematically linked to
fixed and essentialist notions of identity. Hiltrud Arens’s “Das kurze Leuchten unter dem Tor”
and Yasemin Yildiz’s “Tawada’s Multilingual Moves,” for example, both consider the ‘dream-
language’ Tawada develops in “Bioskoop der Nacht” and the move towards a de-naturalization
of language and identity. In their articles, Doug Slaymaker, Keijiro Suga and Reiko Tachibana
all connect Tawada’s tongues with the concept *exophony*, which is the title of Tawada’s 2003
collection of essays that was published in Japanese. Keijiro Suga’s “Translation, Exophone,
Omniphony,” for instance, describes *exophony* as “the use of a foreign language as a medium of
both daily interaction and artistic creation” (26). While this is not a new concept in literature
(although it is not the norm and the terminology is recent), what is significant with respect to this
concept is Tawada’s own thoughts on these translational poetics. In the text *Exophony: Journey
to Stepping Out of the Mother Tongue (Bogo no soto e deru tabi)* she states “today a human
subject is a place where different languages coexist by mutually transforming each other and it is
meaningless to cancel their cohabitation and suppress the resulting distortion. Rather, to pursue

149 Exophonic writing is likewise the topic of Chantal Wright’s “Exophony and Literary Translation” and “Writing in the ‘Grey Zone’: Exophonic Literature in Contemporary Germany,” and Ottmar Ette’s “Über die Brücke, Unter den Linden.”
one’s accents and what they bring about may begin to matter for one’s literary creation” (trans. and qtd. in Suga 27-28). These internal and possibly unconscious interactions and exchanges between languages and ways of thinking are unavoidably present in the author’s literary production, and these ‘accents’ and ‘distortions’ can be seen as productive rather than something that needs to be corrected. Reiko Tachibana’s “Tawada Yoko’s Quest for Exophony” notes how Tawada exists as a foreigner in her native and non-native tongues, and strives to dismantle the ‘ultranationalistic’ concept of a ‘beautiful’ Japanese language.\textsuperscript{150} The article then demonstrates “Tawada’s resistance to the nationalistic ideology that has been wrapped around the language (\textit{kokugo}) since the Meiji era …” and then shows how Tawada “problematizes Japan’s modernity and ethnocentrism” (154). Tawada’s critical poetics and politics then are not exclusively directed at Europe, as Tachibana illustrates above. Moreover, as I will demonstrate in the following pages, her attempt to disconnect one’s ‘native’ language from a singular, internal essence also reflects her approach to \textit{de}-essentialize and \textit{de}-naturalize race and ethnicity.

While the tongue as symbol and synecdoche has often been analyzed in connection to \textit{Überseezungen}, \textit{Verwandlungen} and \textit{Das Bad}, so far there have been no references made to Tawada’s short poem “Afrikanische Zunge” in secondary scholarship. Despite the similarity its title bears with the “Südafrikanische Zungen” section from \textit{Überseezungen}, in terms of its content and theme it actually bears more resemblance to \textit{Das Bad}. Because the poem is relatively short and unknown, I will quote it in full:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Afrikanische Zunge} \\
Eine afrikanische Zunge schwimmt im Meer \\
und wird zu einer Makrele
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{150} Tachibana makes a similar point in “Nomadic Writers of Japan,” especially when she quotes Tawada, who states: “the purpose of my writing in German is to create a language different from the native speakers’. By doing so, I also attempt to destroy the notion of the ‘beautiful’ or fine Japanese (if such a thing ever exists) when I write in Japanese. That is, I don’t intend to be a writer who skillfully manages both languages. Nor do I intend to abandon one language to grasp another” 414. Tachibana then reflects on this point, suggesting that “reconstructing both languages while deconstructing them is her aim in writing in German and Japanese” 414.
schwimmt geradeaus
schlüpft zwischen dem Tang hindurch
wirft die Muscheln durcheinander
Auf jeder Schuppe klebt ein Kinderfoto
Die Kinder wollen schreien, weil das Wasser so kalt ist,
ihre Stimmen werden zu Blasen, zerplatzen
Die Makrele wird müde
Ihr weicher Bauch streift die Steine auf dem Grund
-Tschi tschi –
Die Haut reißt auf, Stück für Stück
-bi bi-

Seither heißen die Steine Tschitschi, das Blut färbt unter dem Namen Bibi den Ozean rot. Da ist dem eurasischen Kontinent überrascht der Kopf ins Genick gefallen. (93)

African Tongue

An African tongue swims in the sea
And becomes a mackerel
Swims straight ahead
Slips through the seaweed
Topples over the mussels
Attached to every scale is a child’s photo
The children want to scream, because the water is so cold,
Their voices become bubbles and pop
The mackerel becomes tired
Its soft belly brushes against the stones on the ground
-chi chi-
The skin tears off, piece by piece
-bi bi-

Since then the stones are called chi chi, under the name bi bi blood colours the ocean red. Surprised, then the head fell into the neck in the direction of the Eurasian continent

The similarities with Das Bad are hard to miss: the tongue serves as literary fulcrum, but whereas in Das Bad it is the tongue’s absence that drives the ‘plot’, here it is the subject as nothing but tongue that anchors the piece. There is also the ubiquitous inclusion of transformation; here it is presented as transformation into a fish, as the tongue that swims in the

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151 Because it was not really the subject of analysis in the previous chapters, the significance of the tongue in Das Bad has gone largely unmentioned. Two of the most expansive and insightful commentaries on this topic can be found in Thomas Pekar’s “Zum Motiv der Zunge in einigen interkulturellen Texten und besonders bei Yoko Tawada” 225-29, and in Ivanovic and Matsunaga’s “Tawada von zwei Seiten” under the heading “Zunge” 154-56.
ocean becomes a mackerel that, analogous to the protagonist in *Das Bad*, is covered in fish scales. Finally, these fish scales are represented as co-terminous with *Haut*, insofar as they are the body’s external covering and can be torn open, punctured and peeled *Stück für Stück*. This is comparable to *Das Bad* where the protagonist enters a bath so that she can soften her scales, remove them one at a time, and then open the blisters that replace the scales to produce a kind of perforated skin and liquid discharge.¹⁵²

In “Afrikanische Zunge” though, there is the conspicuous presence of the onomatopoetic ‘tschi tschi’ and ‘bi bi’ to account for, which in Japanese have no semantic meaning, but rather only represent the sound of brushing up against something (chi chi), and tearing or puncturing a thin material (bi bi), which in this case is skin. In the Japanese version of this poem, both ‘bi bi’ and ‘tschi tschi’ are written in *hiragana* instead of in *kanji* (which would fix the meaning, though there are several possible *kanji* with the sound ‘tschi’), or in *katakana* (which would be more appropriate for the onomatopoetic function). Furthermore, ‘tschi tschi’ and ‘bi bi’ resemble sounds that an infant would make, which is also connoted by the use of *hiragana*, and thus provide a stark contrast between cute, though semantically meaningless, baby talk, and the rather violent and painful image of skin rubbing against a rock in an excoriating and piercing action. The presence of Japanese sounds within a German language poem titled ‘African Tongue’ creates a very dislocating and disorienting effect for its reader, as there is no stable point of reference except for its similarity to *Das Bad*. The tongue and skin link the two texts, and skin in both “Afrikanische Zunge” and *Das Bad* is figured as vulnerable and mutable, but also as susceptible and even prone to violent acts, both in the discursive and material sense.

¹⁵² We can also see hints in this poem of the allegory described in *Das Bad* in which a young mother becomes a *Schuppentier* and is forced to live in the sea because she eats a fish without offering to share it with her neighbors in spite of their hunger. Her son’s plan to save her involves smashing her body against a rocky cliff, which succeeds in removing the scales, but unfortunately causes her bare skin to be exposed and she bleeds to death.
Beyond the vulnerability demonstrated by this description of torn skin and unanswered cries though is an image of mobility and metamorphosis that is common to Tawada’s literary strategy of disturbing fixed, natural and essentialized links between subject and conventional identitarian markers. Christina Kraenzle points out in “The Limits of Travel: Yoko Tawada’s Fictional Travelogues” that travel is “not simply transgressive: it can also be conservative, linked to wealth, power, and to imperial interests.” In reference to texts like Talisman, “Wo Europa anfängt” and Überseezungen, Kraenzle is skeptical of celebrating “the subversive potential of displacement,” and instead highlights “the limits of travel” (246). It is necessary to temper the sometimes overly exuberant and optimistic valorization of movement and travel as inherently productive or subversive tropes in contemporary postmodern literature, as Kraenzle effectively does in this article. However, from my perspective it is more in the metaphors of fluidity, disruption and a resistance to stasis rather than any innate political transgression to moving through spaces that are crucial to Tawada’s poetics. In the poem this tongue is in transit, its form mutates, and as it moves through water its own borders are opened up in an act that defies containment and fixity. The image generated by the ‘African tongue’ (as the poem’s title) suggests an imbrication (like the overlapping fish scales) of language (tongue) with a national, racial, ethnic and cultural (African) identity, but conversely also figures ‘African’ as a construct of language, as ‘tied to a tongue’, as the product of discourse rather than a naturally occurring, pre-discursive given. The development of this interconnectivity between language, skin, race and identity is considerably more elaborate and coherent in the “Bioskoop der Nacht” segment of “Südafrikanische Zungen,” though the image of the ‘Afrikanische Zunge’ helps introduce the theoretical impulse behind the later text.

Intentional as the ambiguity undoubtedly is, what is unclear in the reception of this short poem is how, and to what end, is this tongue marked as ‘African’, apart from the fact that it is
labeled as such? As a complex and multifarious signifier of location, race, history and culture, the ‘African’ descriptor in “Afrikanische Zunge” frames the poem and directs its reading, suggesting that there is potentially a political comment or critique present that requires unpacking. Perhaps the photographic images of children screaming that are stuck to the mackerel’s scales reflect the more than a century old colonial and ethnographic practice of representing ‘Africa’ through visual imagery for a Western audience. Or the photos could connote the legitimate suffering due to famine, drought and war that marks the plight of certain African regions in need of more immediate and urgent attention, but where in reality these pleas, the children’s voices, become bubbles and ‘pop’ into nothingness (Die Kinder wollen schreien, weil das Wasser so kalt ist, / ihre Stimmen werden zu Blasen, zerplatzen). On the other hand, without any discernible connection between the poem’s content and its explicitly ‘African’ label, there is a disappointment of expectations, and a resultant reflection on why these expectations were made in the first place.

The very notion of a singular, homogenous, and coherent ‘African’ tongue that could either represent or connect to one national, racial, linguistic, historical or cultural identity is complicated by this complicating poem. The overly general ‘Afrikanische’ is combined with the specifically singular ‘Zunge’ in this poem, whereas with “Südafrikanische Zungen” there is at least a more meaningful spatial context being connected with plural ‘tongues’, which then approaches the reality of South Africa’s linguistic plurality (South Africa has eleven official languages: Afrikaans, English, Zulu, North-Sotho, South-Sotho, Xhosa, Tswana, Swazi, Venga, Tsonga and Ndebele). Yet the ‘African’ identity marker seems to be more of an empty sign than a descriptor of a place or a people, since there is nothing in this poem that is specifically linked to Africa, with the possible exception of the juxtaposition between the poem’s location and the ‘Eurasian continent’ mentioned in the final line. It is therefore perhaps more productive to read
this poem in relation to Tawada’s other texts and literary techniques rather than as a discrete and
self-contained unit. And while it by no means receives the amount of attention, reflection,
subversion and sophistication in Tawada’s texts that ‘Europe’ as “eine Summe von Bildern”
(“Eigentlich darf man es niemandem sagen” 50) does,\(^\text{153}\) Tawada endeavors, in her African texts,
to disrupt the east-west dyad in her poetical and political program by shifting the focus south,
and provide a less familiar context for her literary creations. Although there have been as yet
relatively few analyses of this (dis)placement of the cultural, spatial and linguistic focus and
locus in Tawada’s writing, here manifested in an ‘African’, and more specifically in regard to
“Bioskoop der Nacht,” South African, frame of reference, there are a handful of relevant sources
which I will explore below.

4.3 LANGUAGE AS BOUNDARY AND BELONGING: THE ROLE OF AFRIKAANS IN
“BIOSKOOP DER NACHT”

While the connection between the representation of a tongue and any discernible
national, ethnic, racial or linguistic identity is at best elusive in Tawada’s short poem
“Afrikanische Zunge,” in the short story “Bioskoop der Nacht” located in the sub-section
“Südafrikanische Zungen” from Überseezungen, the link between language, identity, belonging
and exclusion is explicitly detailed throughout the text. As the language of the protagonist’s
unconscious, the specifically South African tongue ‘Afrikaans’ plays a central role insofar as it
disturbs the fixity of the protagonist’s rooting in a linguistic and nationalist essence. This
complicates the security of her identity, but Afrikaans also serves to connect the protagonist to a

\(^{153}\) A number of secondary works address Tawada’s short yet rich essay “Eigentlich darf man es niemandem sagen,
aber Europa gibt es nicht,” its reflection on Das Bad, and its overall representation of Tawada’s political platform,
though with little reflection on its depiction of skin colour and race. This chapter will later focus on the few primary
and secondary texts that consider these concepts. The following sources, at least to a certain extent, address
subjectivity, skin colour and/or race in “Eigentlich darf man es niemandem sagen:” Petra Fachinger’s “Cultural and
Culinary Ambivalence” 46-47; Fischer’s “Verschwinden ist schön” 102-05 and “Durch die japanische Brille
gesehen” 62; Ivanovic’s “Hybridisierung und Polyphonie” 130-32; Ruth Kersting’s Fremdes Schreiben 144; Monika
Schmitz-Emans’s “Fließende Grenzen” 319-27; and Miho Matsunaga’s “Ausländerin, einheimischer Mann,
Confidante” 257.
cultural and historical context completely unfamiliar to her. Confusing and complicating linguistic, national, ethnic and racial identities, and especially binary concepts of belonging, is central to Tawada’s literary program, and Überseezungen is no exception to this rule. Yasemin Yildiz stresses this move towards disrupting binaries in a non-European context with:

[Überseezungen] marks a step beyond the heretofore dominant East-West axis in Tawada’s writing and towards a reorganization of her imaginary topography that now includes an engagement with the North-South axis. [In “Bioskoop der Nacht”] Tawada explodes the binary of existing either in the mother tongue or in the foreign language. Her turn to dream-language in general and to Afrikaans in particular has implications for imagining transnational subjects and their historical entanglements. (“Tawada’s Multilingual Moves” 78-79)

In the case of “Bioskoop der Nacht” there is a rupturing of the notion that one exists either in a ‘mother tongue’ or in a ‘foreign language’, that a person can be only one or the other, and that belonging is established based on this binary criteria. Doug Slaymaker, with reference to Tawada’s own thoughts on the relation between dream language and a true identity, writes:

“I am often asked,” Tawada writes in Exophony, “what language do you dream in? It is a question that gets to me every time. The question suggests to me an implicit assumption: If a person speaks more than one language then their true nature cannot be known. One may be the truth, but the other must then be false.” Her frustration and anger is directed towards the implicit assumptions that there is a ‘true’ and ‘basic’ subjectivity, that the individual is one, and that one can only truly inhabit a single language … The concern about language and a perceived tie
to a stable, nation-based, language-rooted identity is reflected in these questions.

(“Writing in the Ravine” 48)

While it is by no means unique for an individual to speak two or more languages, there is still a persistent belief that speaking a second language is akin to a mask, an inauthentic performance, and that a single, original core language inevitably determines belonging to a linguistic community. As Tawada emphasizes throughout her writing, language, like race, gender, and nationality, can be a powerful marker of acceptance and exclusion from social groups.

In order to most clearly underline how Tawada complicates and subverts binary models of belonging in “Bioskoop der Nacht,” I will briefly say a few words on its content without rehashing the text in detail. “Bioskoop der Nacht” is one of the longest of the short stories in this collection, and is in fact two parallel narratives: one is a dream narrative that, due to the obscurity of Tawada’s style, is not immediately apparent as such; and the other expresses the protagonist’s reality, evidenced by the fact that the narrator is able to reflect on her dreams as dreams. More specifically, the text develops a protagonist first-person narrator’s search to find the language in which she dreams (Afrikaans), her subsequent stay in Cape Town where she attempts to learn Afrikaans, and then the protagonist’s engagement with the legacy of racial segregation in post-apartheid South Africa through reflections on currency, the hypocrisy of foreign government sanctions, and the seemingly banal structures that functionally legislated racial and racist hierarchies in addition to those prescribed in law. These banal structures are most explicitly materially manifested in the text as encounters with segregated public toilets and a ‘white’s only’ public bench. Representations of segregated public spaces and the implications they pose for constructing racialized identities will occupy a central position in my analysis to

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154 Tawada also disputes links between the language of the unconscious and one’s “cultural allegiances,” to quote Kraenzle. She addresses this topic in Verwandlungen, stating “es gibt eine beliebte Frage zur Sprache im Traum: ‘In welcher Sprache träumen Sie?’ Es ist aber nichts Besonderes, wenn man im Traum eine fremde Sprache spricht. Die gesprochene Sprache kann schnell in den Mund hineinschlüpfen und wieder aus ihm herausspringen. Man muß sich eine Sprache nicht einverleiben, um sie in einem Traum verwenden zu können” 39.
follow, but first I will attend to the significance of the form and function of the protagonist’s dream language that motivates her journey to South Africa.

Dreams and reality, as they so often are in Tawada’s texts, run along seamlessly side by side in this piece. Even in the text’s title, “Bioskoop der Nacht,” there is an indication that both hyper-reality and the unconscious will figure prominently in the narrative structure. In one of the few secondary sources that analyzes “Bioskoop der Nacht,” Bettina Brandt and Désirée Schyns suggest, from an intermedial technological perspective, that this parallel narrative device of dream and reality reflects the technical processes of Skladanowsky’s original bioscope. Their argument reads:


155 The reflection on, and utilization of, film, film theory or cinema space in “Bioskoop der Nacht” is scarce. For a much deeper and sophisticated engagement with film consider Tawada’s 2004 novel Das nackte Auge. While slowly
The short story’s plot is assembled analogously to Skladanowsky’s bioscope process, in which a film projector with two film strips shows a silent film. During the projection of the first image (from the first film strip) there is a switch to an image from the second film strip – each image nevertheless remains shielded until its projection. Because the order of images projected from the first and second strips constantly alternates, an effect of ‘moving images’ is simulated. Similarly, the ‘conceptual images’ in “Bioscope of the Night” present a first story (about a German speaking Japanese first-person narrator in South Africa) and the ‘conceptual images’ of a second story (which deals with a murdered girl whose bones were found buried outside of Cape Town. The suspected murderer was never caught because he belonged to the ruling order) which are then intertwined with a dream narrative/stip. Hence the title “Bioscope of the Night.”

While this technical relation to the text’s literary structure is illuminating, there is also a relevant socio-cultural significance to the bioscope in relation to segregated viewing practices implied therein, suggesting that the focus is on the significance of the space in which films were shown rather than on the content of the film itself; and even more importantly, how the delineation of space according to racialized populations is being introduced in the text’s title. The term ‘bioscope’, which seems antiquated because after the Lumiere brothers introduced their technically superior ‘Cinematographe’ the word ‘cinema’ or ‘Kino’ was adopted in most languages to denote the theatre space, was actually still used in Dutch (bioscoop) and Afrikaans (Bioskop) in the twentieth century to denote a cinema venue. The bioscope was at first itinerant,

more and more secondary scholarship is appearing that analyzes this text, so far three of the more expansive articles are Schmitz-Emans’s “Entgrenzungsphantasien” 199-201; Hansjörg Bay’s “Mediale Übersetzungen in Yoko Tawadas Das nackte Auge” 553-68; and Petra Fachinger’s “Postcolonial/Postcommunist Picaresque and the Logic of ‘trans’” 297-308. Similar to “Bioskoop der Nacht,” the Schmitz-Emans and Fachinger articles emphasize how film is deployed to blur the borders between reality and imagination in this novel. Andrea Krauß’s “Talisman – Tawadische Sprachtheorie” is still the most complete analysis of the osmotic exchange between dream and reality in Tawada’s texts, as Krauß especially focuses on the function of skin and water metaphors and their relation to displacement (Verschiebung) and condensation (Verdichtung) in Tawada.
but after the 1930s also became a static entertainment and social space. During the first half of the twentieth century in British colonial Africa, the bioscope was often a symbolic microcosm of ever-present racial antagonisms. Particularly in South Africa, because of its large white settler population, not only were audiences segregated but separate theatres were built to accommodate separate races. Yet these theatres were also vibrant urban spaces of social interaction for many Africans at the time, where despite economic and social disparities they were able to gather and engage with one another as the collectively marginalized, and watch, albeit several months later, the same films as ‘whites’ did. The ‘Bioskoop’ then, from the perspective of analyzing Tawada’s text, is symbolically provocative of the interplay between space and race, and how space could serve a constitutive function in the structural organization of racial categories, but simultaneously and paradoxically act to undercut the possibility of maintaining absolute separation and difference. The two lengthy textual examples from “Bioskoop der Nacht” that I analyze below detail how public spaces (the public washroom and public benches) in coordination with racial discourse are enlisted to construct racial categories and racial boundaries, rather than refer to pre-given, naturally occurring population groups.

Looking now more specifically to the details of the text, the narrative begins seemingly in medias res, or more specifically in the middle of a dream, with the narrator’s first introduction to Afrikaans and its grammatical peculiarities that she understands as a kind of distorted German. In the opening lines she meets a man who points to himself and says “die Mann,” to which she responds “Sind Sie feminine?” (“Are you feminine?”; 61) The singular use of the feminine article, and also the rather awkward sounding double-negative (“Sie muss-nicht es tun nicht,” “Sie spricht nicht unsere Sprache nicht” [“You must not not do it;” “She doesn’t not speak our

156 While there is relatively scant literature available in English on the history of the bioscope in Africa, let alone South Africa, James Burns’s “The African Bioscope? Movie House Culture in British Colonial Africa” is one source that investigates the cultural and social significance of the theatre space rather than the actual films that were shown there.
language”; 83]), are the linguistic markers that reveal to the narrator that she is dreaming in Afrikaans. This is a language to which she has never been exposed, although she does speak German, and she mentions having spent time in Holland. The story then transitions between dreams that take place in South Africa and in Afrikaans, and a ‘reality’ in which she attempts to discover what language makes up her dreams. When she eventuallydoes learn that it is Afrikaans, she decides to travel to Cape Town in order to establish some explanation for why South Africa and Afrikaans are so prevalent in her unconscious. For Tawada, Afrikaans is a fitting dream language because for German speakers it delivers a sense of displacement, as though it should be familiar but it is not. In an interview with Bettina Brandt Tawada explicitly details the significance of this feeling of displacement when she is asked “[i]n ‘Bioskoop der Nacht’ you have inserted Afrikaans as a crucial facet of the story. In this tale you take issue with the presumption of a stable, nation-based, language rooted identity … What would you say is the relation between dreaming and Afrikaans?” Tawada responds to this question with:

… [I]n Dutch, as in a dream, German speakers can get the sense that we know what is happening, that we somehow know the image. Or perhaps more accurately that at least we should know it but that nevertheless we do not, and cannot understand it all … [I]n the case of Dutch and German, it was for me rather important that these languages are so closely related; precisely because this similarity could and did produce the feeling of a dream language. This is also true of Afrikaans; Afrikaans is again, once more, displaced. As a writer I can play with that displacement …” (“Ein Wort, ein Ort” 6-7)

Tawada plays with this displacement, as a literary technique, by again attempting to defamiliarize certain common-sense or habitual assumptions about subjectivity and social relations by utilizing a very different historical and cultural context that forces readers to reflect
on situations closer to home. More importantly, it is against, and through the lens of, this highly charged and volatile historical, political and social context connoted by Afrikaans and South Africa that Tawada stages this narrative, and therefore it is vital to historicize this narrative in order to determine and evaluate its critical purchase.

With regard to the few secondary sources that do attend to this short story, the vast majority of them focus on the (displacing) role that Afrikaans occupies in the protagonist’s sense of self. In the cases of Brandt and Schyns’s “Neu vernetzt” and Yildiz’s “Tawada’s Multilingual Moves,” however, there is an explicitly historicized, though mildly apolitical, angle. Yildiz points in general to the politically-charged commentary of the text with:

Afrikaans as the third term displaces the German-Japanese binary. Yet because of the language’s inextricable association with colonialism and racism, this displacement does not lead to an untainted alternative. In the story, the displacement offers an occasion to reflect on the legacy of apartheid. It prompts the narrator, for example, to recall high school discussions on Japan’s relationship to the apartheid regime and its implication in it. The narrator’s journey to post-apartheid South Africa further highlights the aftermath of racist policies, as in a visit to a township. The question of how Japanese people would have figured in the racial categorizations of apartheid preoccupies the protagonist repeatedly.

Would she have been one of the Blankes, the Whites? (“Multilingual Moves” 84) Kraenzle indicates the text’s potentially political charge, arguing that “‘Bioskoop der Nacht’ considers how linguistic identities can be as powerful as national ones and, consequently, how multilingual individuals can become objects of particular scrutiny or even suspicion” (“Limits of Travel” 259). Afrikaans certainly demands attention considering it breaks the familiar Japanese-German (Asian-European) dichotomy so prevalent in Tawada’s writing. But importantly,
Afrikaans requires closer scrutiny because it is presented as the language of the narrator’s dreams, which is significant since, according to a woman in the text, “[m]an träumt doch in der Sprache des Landes, in dem die Seele wohnt” (“one dreams in the language of the country in which the soul resides”; 70). As Yildiz points out, “[a]ccording to this logic, the dream reveals the soul’s true residence in such a way that language, territory, and soul correspond to each other and profess a singular and clear-cut affiliation” (83), which is unequivocally not, neither in this text nor anywhere in Tawada’s writing, the message being promoted. Tawada recoils at the notion that there is a true, single, stable, nation-based and linguistically-rooted identity that an individual simply is rather than does - continually, repetitively, and on a daily basis.

In the beginning pages the protagonist is confronted on multiple occasions with the question, posed either by others or to herself, as to what language she dreams in (63, 65, 69). The fact that she has never been to South Africa nor even studied Afrikaans is disturbing for the protagonist’s acquaintance who believes in a connection between the soul and the language of dreams. For the protagonist, however, this one-to-one link is a harmful fiction. This skepticism is prevalent elsewhere in Tawada’s texts; for example, in Verwandlungen Tawada articulates this complication of the language of dreams in relation to identity with “es gibt eine beliebte Frage zur Sprache im Traum: ‘In welcher Sprache träumen Sie?’ Es ist aber nichts Besonderes, wenn man im Traum eine fremde Sprache spricht. Die gesprochene Sprache kann schnell in den Mund hineinschlüpfen und wieder aus ihm herausspringen. Man muß sich eine Sprache nicht einverleiben, um sie in einem Traum verwenden zu können” (“There is a popular question regarding language in dreams, namely: ‘In which language do you dream?’ It is nothing special to speak a foreign language in a dream. The language spoken can quickly slide into the mouth then jump out. You don’t have to absorb a language into your body in order to be able to use it in a dream”; 39). In “Travelling without Moving” Kraenzle notes how this presence of an alien
dream language “problematizes the commonly held notion that dreams reveal the degree of a 
subject’s connection to a particular language,” and therefore disturbs the “expectation that identity should reside firmly in one language” (8). The protagonist then responds to the question regarding language and soul with “[i]ch habe viele Seelen und viele Zungen” (“I have many souls and many tongues”; 70). It is irrelevant in this context whether or not one believes in a soul. What is being disputed here is the idea that there can be one, single language organically rooted in, and bound to, a mystical and ineffable essence that, recast in the spiritual vernacular, can also be labeled a ‘soul’, and which pre-determines a subject’s identity and sense of self.

Kraenzle further remarks on this troublesome connection between soul and home with:

In “Bioskoop der Nacht” Tawada counters the notion that the self must choose a linguistic home, opting instead for the travel between places, languages, and identities ... Despite the narrator’s desire to embrace multiple linguistic identities, however, many people she encounters insist that one language must prevail over all others. The narrator’s contention that she in fact has “viele Seelen und viele Zungen” is repeatedly discounted and mistrusted. (“Travelling without Moving” 10)

The presence of many souls and many tongues suggests that there is a high degree of contingency connected to the enactment, or performance, of the protagonist’s identities, depending on where, with whom, and under what circumstances she is speaking and being perceived. This requisite pluralism of language, soul and identity contained within a single subject shatters the necessary homogeneity of linguistic essentialism, thereby undermining the logic of one’s native language as an expression of the singular and (nationally or ethnically) unique soul. The following section will outline the foundationalist rhetoric and unifying principle
of language as the outward expression of an internal essence, and how Tawada’s texts are overtly critical of this exclusionary linkage.

While the presence of Afrikaans situates “Bioskoop der Nacht” within a South African historical and political context, this focus on the language of the unconscious can actually serve as a springboard to interrogate the exclusionary relation between language and identity in Tawada’s more familiar national frames of reference. In fact, German, Japanese and Afrikaans are three telling examples of how language has historically been co-opted to build cohesion and a sense of belonging within an otherwise culturally and spatially disparate population, though in each case it has also been necessary to articulate an essence to the language that provides it an exclusionary, as well as inclusionary, strength. For example, from a Japanese cultural-historical perspective the evocation of a direct bond between language, soul and spirit noted above in Tawada’s text conjures notions of the Japanese *kokugo*, or national language, that was promoted during the Meiji Restoration in the late nineteenth century. But perhaps even more applicable here is the Japanese concept of *kotodama*, which is a more ancient notion that language is alive with the spirits and souls of concepts and people. The development of a link between language, soul and identity was highly influential in constituting the concept of a unique Japanese *essence* in pre-war Japan so necessary for establishing conceptual borders between the Japanese and the perceived ‘other’, which existed both inside and outside the country, though the concept still resonates today. Tawada’s emphasis in “Bioskoop der Nacht” that she possesses ‘many souls and many tongues’ is representative of the anti-essentialist theoretical thread that runs throughout her texts, as the seemingly self-evident and naturally occurring characteristics of identity like race and gender are, for Tawada, historically contingent, socially and discursively constituted, prone to complications and subversions, and are neither a-historical nor transcendental. And while the context she is explicitly referencing in “Bioskoop der Nacht” is white-supremacist apartheid
South Africa, she is also implicitly reflecting on Japanese history and narratives of exclusionary belonging.

The Japanese context upon which Tawada is reflecting is, considering that country’s lengthy history, relatively recent. In response to centuries of fragmented and localized linguistic disunity during the Tokugawa Shogunate (1604-1868), Imperial Japan sought to establish a verifiable link between its shared language and the ethereal concept of Japanese-ness, or the collective mind and soul of the Japanese people. With the ‘scholarly’ support of a young professor of linguistics, Dr. Kazutoshi Ueda, who had spent nearly four years in Europe (mostly in Germany), Japan developed its own conceptualization of a national language comparable to that constructed in Germany that was founded in, and expressive of, a national soul. Tachibana quotes an illustrative passage from a lecture Ueda delivered on the introduction of the term *kokugo* to a Japanese audience:

> If we can talk about the national language of Japan (*nihon no kokugo*), the Japanese language (*nihongo*) can be said to be the spiritual blood of the Japanese people. Japan’s *kokutai* (as ideology, meaning the national polity and essence of Japanese nationalism) is mainly supported by that blood … the language is not only the *kokutai*’s sign (*hyoshiki*), but also a sort of educator, like a kindhearted mother. (Tachibana, “Tawada Yoko’s Quest for Exophony” 155)

The ideological underpinning of a national language rooted in, and spawned from, a transcendental essence becomes problematic when it prescribes the basis of inclusion and exclusion, especially since this belonging is based on birth, blood and origin that exist prior to social determinations, meaning that it resides in nature rather than culture. In her article “Nomadic Writers of Japan” Tachibana highlights how the Japanese government, even in recent years …

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157 Tachibana’s “Quest for Exophony” 154-57 outlines Ueda’s contribution to Japan’s development of a national language, and then how both Mori Ogai and Tawada react vis-a-vis this concept.
years, has attempted to establish a discourse of Japanese homogeneity by creating the myth that Japan is “inhabited by one race, one language, and one culture. This ‘trinity’ myth has led the Japanese to believe that their language is for ‘authentic’ Japanese people only, to the exclusion of non-Japanese gaijin” (407).

In post-war Japan, the organizational terminology for collective unity has varied from language, race, ethnicity and nationality to all of the above. Yet, as Michael Weiner points out, the faith in an authentic or ‘essentialized identity’ is the persistent link that continues to prevail. He states “although there have been divergencies in the representation of ‘Self’, expressed variously in terms of ‘race’, ethnicity or culture, all have been grounded in notions of an essentialized identity which distinguishes the Japanese from other populations” (Weiner XII). Even though the pre-war promotion of the racial concept of the Japanese as the Yamato people (minzoku) has transitioned away from an explicitly biological or physiological rhetoric towards a culturally-based collectivity, the myth of a Japanese essence that underwrote this concept nevertheless persists, and ensures that marginalized groups like the Ainu,158 Ryukyu/Okinawan Islanders, Korean- or Taiwanese-Japanese, and burakumin remain Japanese only in name, if they are even granted that.159 Kosaku Yoshino suggests that the key to Japanese racial differentiation lies in a sense of property, or ownership of qualities that are transmitted through blood:

158 See Richard Siddle’s “The Ainu and the Discourse of ‘Race’” for a detailed account of how the Ainu were constructed as indelibly other and primitive in racial discourses in Japan in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Defining Ainu inferiority was particularly necessary for justifying Imperial Japan’s colonization of Hokkaido and the systematic destruction of Ainu traditions.
159 The hisabetsu burakumin have been a stigmatized and marginalized group in Japan since the Edo Period (1603-1868), but not because they are visibly different from other Japanese, but simply because of their occupations, bloodline and place of residence. According to Yoshiko Yokochi Samuel, the burakumin, or “the people of the hamlet subject to discrimination,” are “the invisible inner Other” because of their positions as undertakers, butchers, hide-tanners and foot-wear makers, and not because of any external physical or racial characteristics. They are still, today, a marginalized group and taboo topic in Japanese society. They still face every conceivable kind of discrimination, even though they can only be identified by their place of origin that is written in their family registries. The Buraku Liberation League (BLL) estimates that there are approximately six million Japanese today who are labelled as buraku. See Yoshiko Yokochi Samuel’s “The Marvellous in the Real: Images of Burakumin in Nakagami Kenji’s Kumano saga” 181-196 for an outline of the burakumin’s current plight and examples of their literature.
The notion of ‘property’, that is possession, is a more accurate rendering of the Japanese sense of their uniqueness; exclusive ownership of certain aspects of Japanese culture is claimed. The essential characteristic of the Japanese racial discourse lies in the perception that particular cultural traits should belong to, or are the exclusive property of, a particular group with distinct phenotypical and genotypical traits. This ‘racially exclusive possession of a particular culture’ may be contrasted with genetic determinism. (“Discourse on Blood and Racial Identity in Japan” 204)

The Japanese language is one such property often seen as the exclusive property of authentic Japanese, and is a crucial factor in gaining access to group membership.

It is against this sense of ownership and exclusive possession of culture and language that Tawada is reacting in her texts, especially in “Bioskoop der Nacht” and the short story “Die Ohrenzeugin” from Überseezungen. Reflecting on the idea of possessing a language, but this time from a German context, the narrator states:

In Deutschland würden die meisten Menschen nicht behaupten, dass die deutsche Sprache von anderen nicht geschrieben werden darf. Aber indirekt geben sie einem immer wieder zu verstehen, dass die Sprache ein Besitztum sein muss. Sie sagen zum Beispiel, dass man eine Fremdsprache nie so gut beherrschen könne wie die Muttersprache … Meiner Meinung nach ist es überflüssig, eine Sprache zu beherrschen. Entweder hat man eine Beziehung zu ihr oder man hat keine. Andere sagen, nur in der Muttersprache könne man authentisch seine Gefühle ausdrücken, in einer Fremdsprache lüge man unwillkürlich. Sie fühlen sich bei ihrer Suche nach dem authentischen Gefühl gestört, wenn sie ihre Sprache auf fremden Zungen sehen. (“Die Ohrenzeugin” 110)
In Germany very few people would say that the German language cannot be written by others. But indirectly you get the sense that language is in fact a kind of property. For example, they say that it’s not possible to command a foreign language as well as the mother tongue … In my opinion it’s superfluous to command a language. Either you have a connection to it or you don’t. Others say that you can only express your feelings authentically in the mother tongue, whereas in a foreign language you unintentionally lie. In their search for authentic feelings they feel disturbed when they see their language coming from foreign tongues.

One does not possess a language as though it were a fixed object that can rightfully and naturally belong to an owner, but rather one negotiates language and mediates through language. In “Bioskoop der Nacht,” multiple languages mean multiple selves. The single, organic thread that connects language and identity, as though there were some kind of authentic self tied to, and expressive of, a core essence, has been tangled, complicated and frayed by the presence of an unfamiliar, alien language residing in the protagonist’s unconscious. Doug Slaymaker stresses this complication and problematization of the authentic self with, “Tawada asserts that if such a thing as an ‘actual self’ (hontō no jibun) exists, then that is the self that speaks/thinks/dreams in multiple languages … the insistence on a single, stable identity denies the messy complexity that constitutes the individual subject who is not, in the end, comprised of pure categories, but of multiple minds and positions” (“Writing in the Ravine” 49).

In “Bioskoop der Nacht,” Afrikaans proves to be a provocative choice for this language of the unconscious because, from one historical perspective, it elicits the brutal, racist policies of South African apartheid and its history of racial hierarchies rooted in biological, historical, cultural, visible, and most importantly, irreducible and insuperable differences. From another
perspective though, it also connotes “a site of heterogeneity” (Yildiz 85) anathema to such prescriptive and restrictive models of identity. Yildiz highlights this unsurprisingly heterogeneous (considering the nature of most languages) construction of Afrikaans with:

Though derived from Dutch, Afrikaans is actually a hybrid language which has incorporated lexical and syntactical structures of German, English, Portuguese, Malay, Xhosa, and various other African languages … [T]his language which is inextricably associated with a racially purist regime, is in fact hybrid. Its linguistic elements record its history. (“Tawada’s Multilingual Moves” 85)

Brandt and Schyns’s “Neu vernetzt: Yoko Tawadas ‘Bioskoop der Nacht’ auf Niederländisch” provides a useful overview of the settlement and subsequent colonization of South Africa with the arrival of the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oostindische Companie or V.O.C) and Jan van Riebeeck in 1652, but also the development of Afrikaans as a pastiche of languages. The authors note that “[i]n der Entstehungsgeschichte der afrikaansen Sprache spielen, wie historische Sprachwissenschaftler gezeigt haben, nun nicht so sehr fremde Sprachen als die Sprecher solcher Sprachen eine Rolle, gerade weil besonders die Fehler im Erlernen und Gebrauch des Niederländischen das werdende Afrikaans geprägt haben” (“as historical linguists have shown, in the developmental history of Afrikaans it is not so much foreign languages but

160 It is worth noting that van Riebeeck’s image adorned the banknotes of South Africa’s currency, the Rand, from the introduction of the notes in 1961 until they were replaced with the phasing out of apartheid, the introduction of democratic reforms and the success of the ANC and Mandela’s presidential victory in the 1990s. The language of the notes was Afrikaans and English, and the language appearing first would alternate from denomination to denomination. In “Bioskoop der Nacht” the narrator expresses how she eagerly awaits finding out who will be featured on the Rand when she exchanges her DM currency before travelling to Cape Town. However, she is surprised to see that it is not a person that adorns this currency, but rather a selection of South Africa’s most iconic wildlife. Anticipating Mandela, Nadine Gordimer or “ein Held aus dem Burenkrieg,” she instead finds a leopard, a water buffalo, a lion and an elephant, 70-71. Nobel Peace Prize winning Mandela and Nobel Prize winning Gordimer are of course symbolic of the fight against apartheid and for the eradication of endemic and systemic racism in South Africa, while van Riebeeck and the ‘Boer War hero’ represent the history of colonialism, oppression and ‘separate and not equal’ that Afrikaner rule developed in South Africa, especially after the success of the National Party in 1948 and the formal, legal articulation of apartheid policies.

161 Brandt and Schyns’s article details a number of Malay words that have been incorporated into Afrikaans, but also how Tawada’s text plays with this hybrid nature by interweaving Afrikaans, German and English unreflectively into the text. Two helpful works referenced by the authors that outline the formation of Afrikaans are Fritz Ponelis’s The Development of Afrikaans and Edith H. Raidt’s Einführung in Geschichte und Struktur des Afrikaans.
rather the speakers of these languages that play such a consequential role, especially with respect
to the errors in learning and use of Dutch that have shaped Afrikaans”; 542). Afrikaans then is
being represented as a conceptual paradox of simultaneous homogeneity and separation,
 juxtaposed to connotations of hybridity and integration developed over centuries by multiple
voices from various backgrounds. It is the interweaving of Europe, Africa and Asia, and has
evolved and changed due to the combination of foreign influences and the repeated errors of its
users. Monika Schmitz-Emans even considers Tawada’s representation of the separation between
German and Afrikaans in this text as a “permeable membrane,” comparable to the narrator
herself who “als asiatische Sprachschülerin wird sie daraufhin gleich von zwei Fremdsprachen
durchdrungen” (“as an Asian language student she is simultaneously pierced by two languages”;
“Fließende Grenzen” 333).

While Afrikaans is certainly perceptually provocative, from a recent historical
perspective, however, it is also highly symbolic of very real and consequential events that
exemplify the violence and ideological structuring of South African apartheid. For example, the
official report into the infamous Soweto uprising from June 16, 1976 to February 28, 1977, in
which nearly two hundred black South Africans, mostly students, were killed by white
authorities, states that the cause of the protests was primarily the Afrikaans Medium Decree of
1974. This decree forced all black schools to introduce Afrikaans, together with English, as the
fifty-fifty languages of instruction. In most eyes of the black majority, Afrikaans was viewed as
the language of the oppressor, and even though the language issue was only a small part of the
larger problems of state-sanctioned discrimination and subordination predicated on constructed

162 The Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Riots at Soweto and Elsewhere from the 16th of June 1976 to
the 28th of February, 1977 (104) points to the significance that imposing Afrikaans as the medium of instruction in
black schools had in causing the uprising, but also how this uprising promoted and crystallized solidarity among
black students based on their shared ‘race’ and marginalization. The report states, “as a cause of rioting, the sense of
solidarity was frequently one of involvement with everything symbolized by the name Soweto. And this was Black
solidarity. Many of the rioters fully realized that they were thus identifying themselves with the struggle for the
Black man’s liberation that would come with the overthrow of the existing system of government” 640.
racial hierarchies, it nevertheless was the spark that ignited the Soweto backlash. This uprising would ultimately raise the profile of apartheid’s violent and inhumane policies onto the international stage in a manner akin to that of the Sharpeville Massacre of 1960,\textsuperscript{163} and the rejection of Afrikaans as the language of instruction would become symbolic of the fight against the immoral white-supremacist system.

Opinions vary on the real role that imposing Afrikaans in African schools played in triggering the uprising. There is, however, a convincing case to be made that this ‘language issue’ was more than just a precipitating factor and excuse to revolt, but rather was viewed by black students as a menacing ideological instrument of the state imposing itself into the everyday lives and consciousness of the repressed African majority population. In her book on the Soweto uprising titled “\textit{I saw a Nightmare…}” \textit{Doing Violence to Memory}, Helena Pohlandt-McCormick stresses both the symbolic and material effects wrought from forcing Afrikaans on African subjects. She notes that the “imposition of Afrikaans in black schools was … as much part of state violence as police actions were, for it sought to exclude the vast majority of the population from politics, economics, society and culture” (Ch.5-5) by articulating these topics in a language that was not their own, and in which they were normally less comfortable than their native tongue. The famous South African anti-apartheid activist and founder of the Black Consciousness Movement Steve Biko outlined the significance and harm that this imposition of Afrikaans into black schools brought, stating:

\begin{quote}
I am not complaining against the language, I am merely explaining how language can help in the development of an inferiority complex … [U]nfortunately in the learning process this is really what happens, you do not grasp enough and therefore you cannot be articulate enough, and when you play side by side with
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{163} Both the Soweto and Sharpeville events loom large in South African historical memory. June 16\textsuperscript{th} is now a public holiday commemorating the lives lost in the Soweto uprising, while Sharpeville was the location chosen by Mandela to sign into law the constitution of South Africa in 1996.
people who are more articulate than you, you tend to think that it is because they
are more intelligent than you … unfortunately again, Afrikaans has got certain
connotations historically that do provoke a rejection from the black man, and
these are political connotations. (I Write What I Like 107-08)

This move to instill the language of the oppressor in African schools was an audacious and
calculated attempt at furthering the power discrepancy already in place with apartheid’s laws of
segregation, but this time by intruding on the heart of the subject’s consciousness. Pohlandt-
McCormick asserts that this language imposition “was an assertion of power whose structures
and ideology sought to disempower and create perpetual minors of Africans” (Chapter 5-5). Yet
it was this move of the state authority into the African classroom that served to mobilize
resistance and raise awareness of the kind of quotidian, and potentially incisive, psychological
intrusion the Afrikaner government was making into African lives.

I am by no means suggesting that there is anything inherently racist or prejudicial in the
Afrikaans language, or that all speakers of Afrikaans supported apartheid policies of racial
segregation and oppression – that would be an entirely unfair and naïve assertion. There is even a
rather under-recognized history of anti-apartheid literature in Afrikaans by reputable authors like
André P. Brink, Breyten Breytenbach, Etienne Leroux, Jan Rabie, Ingrid Jonker, Adam Small
and Bartho Smith that undermined the mostly pro-nationalist tenor of Afrikaner literature, and
which were susceptible to the harsh censorship laws implemented after 1954. On the other hand,
Tawada could have chosen any language as the language of the protagonist’s dreams, and thus it
is reasonable to assume that Afrikaans was selected because of the enormously influential role it
assumed in constructing a unified concept of Afrikaner community, but also because of its
symbolic status and actual role as the language of the oppressor in a system of racial segregation.
As I have shown above, Afrikaans, despite its inextricable connection to Afrikaner nationalism
and the policies of apartheid South Africa, is also a hybrid, heterogeneous pastiche of languages assembled into one, and in its construction already undermines its essentialist links to a singular, core and racially exclusive Afrikaner identity. The following section will now transition from the role that language has played in unifying otherwise disparate population groups into perceiving themselves as a cohesive community, to the deployment of racial categories as a comparable form of invented and imagined community.

4.4 SPACE, RACE AND SEGREGATION: CONSTRUCTING DIFFERENCE THROUGH RACIAL POLICIES OF APARTHEID IN “BIOSKOOP DER NACHT”

For the narrator in “Bioskoop der Nacht,” the heterogeneity and morphing morphology of Afrikaans is contrasted to its historically ideological connotations and the monolithic binaries of apartheid’s system of classification; a system of course intimately connected with Afrikaans as its medium of articulation. This language also proves to be the primary impulse behind the narrator’s visit to South Africa, as she states “[i]m Sommer 2000 buchte ich eine Reise nach Kapstadt. Die Sprache, in der geträumt wird, muss besucht werden” (“in the summer of 2000 I booked a trip to Cape Town. The language in which one dreams must be visited”; 67). South Africa as the context for this short story provides the opportunity for the narrator to reflect on this country’s racially charged history from the fictional, hypothetical perspective of a Japanese narrator. This is not to say that there is anything essentially Japanese about the perspective itself, but rather that the narrator connects historical and political details from the South African context to Japan’s relationship with the apartheid system. By extension then readers are forced to make the implicit link between South Africa’s discriminatory policies based on race, and Japan’s own, though much more subtle, inequitable racial and ethnic social stratifications. Though it is clear that the specifics of the systematic legislation of apartheid policy premised on race is unique to South Africa, the underlying structure to this understanding of race, and the processes
involved in constructing race as both a unifying and exclusionary category of colour-coded belonging or cultural incompatibility, transcend borders, and invite readers to consider analogous constructions in both Western and Japanese contexts.

Within the context of “Bioskoop der Nacht,” Derrida’s “Racism’s Last Word,” for all of its contentious points, provides a productive and thought-provoking point of entry for a discussion of Tawada’s reflections on skin colour, race and the apartheid system. For Derrida, the basis of apartheid lies in its indefinable ‘essence’, and in a faith of separation that is sanctioned by nature. In the following passage, note Derrida’s stress on the necessarily abstract essence (heid) so crucial in undergirding the conceptualization of incommensurable difference that made apartheid possible. Furthermore, the enlistment of ‘quasi-ontological’ origins emphasized at the end of the paragraph, which allows the segregation and resultant subordination of the majority population to be attributed to natural laws, is a vital component of apartheid’s success for forty years. Derrida comments on the system’s name in the following passage:

APARTHEID: by itself the word occupies the terrain like a concentration camp. System of partition, barbed wire, crowds of mapped out solitudes. Within the limits of this untranslatable idiom, a violent arrest of the mark, the glaring harshness of abstract essence (heid) seems to speculate in another regime of abstraction, that of confined separation … By isolating being apart in some sort of essence or hypostasis, the word corrupts it into a quasi-ontological segregation. At every point, like all racisms, it tends to pass segregation off as natural – and as the very law of the origin. (“Racism’s Last Word” 331)

Derrida’s claim supports the notion that the law of apartheid is rooted in both the divine and the natural, which he suggests are never mutually exclusive, and therein lies the source of legitimacy for a policy of irreconcilable difference. Rooting racial categories in a rhetoric of origins and
nature pushes race outside of discourse and culture, and naturalizes, normalizes and fixes race as transhistorical, pre-given and inevitable. However, by reflecting on the select textual passages from “Bioskoop der Nacht” in relation to its historical and theoretical context, what becomes apparent is how this segregation based on indelible difference was a processual and retroactive construction of difference based on unstable, mobile and highly contingent categories. Thus, the following examination will serve to drain the essence and ontological foundation from this naturalized concept.

In “Bioskoop der Nacht,” the narrator’s first overt engagement with the everyday reality of apartheid is presented in the form of a memory, in which as a child she saw a photo of separate toilets for separate races. She recollects:


I didn’t know very much about South Africa. What immediately came to mind was a photo I had seen in a school book as a child. The photo showed two doors at a public restroom. On one door was written ‘For whites’ and on the other ‘For the others except Japanese’. We were therefore not allowed to enter either restroom.

Readers are presented a scene of the mundane reality of racial segregation in apartheid through a kind of multi-mediation, in the sense that a fictional narrator is relating the memory of a photograph she saw as a child. Tawada is not articulating first-hand observations of humans separated by barbed wire and three meter high walls, or the violent conflicts between white
police officers wielding truncheons and water canons with black protesters that often comprise the visual media and historical memory of apartheid. She instead represents the commonplace, institutional and discursive scene of racial segregation and racial interpellation, insofar as the signage hails or interpellates subjects according to an ideology that classifies, differentiates and subordinates human bodies based on racial categories. It is a twist on the usual public toilet space in which subjects are categorized according to two established, seemingly stable genders, but also serves as a conceptual boundary space and public hailing that constitutes subjects through their repeated identification as either white or other, as either one or the other. Entrance through one door means access to inherited privileges and freedom from subjugation, while entrance through the other door means more or less the opposite. This public toilet scene is symbolic of a kind of play on Butler’s ‘girling of the girl’, in which through a long series of performatives a female subject is constantly made and regulated by language, social practices and delineated public spaces, though in the case of public toilets in apartheid South Africa subjects perform their racial, rather than their gendered, identities. This scenario, moreover, has become common in recent Queer Theory, where the public toilet is investigated as a space in which gender performances and homo- and heterosexual identifications frequently take place.\textsuperscript{164} The public toilet, as a space that does not just name a subject according to a pre-given identity, but operates in the production and naturalization of that category of belonging itself, is figured as one small example of the quotidian, ritualistic and regulatory discursive norms which subjects are compelled to enact.

While shifting the focus from a European to a South African context, Yoko Tawada has simultaneously moved from representations of the performative construction of gendered identities that I outlined in the previous two chapters, to a focus on processes of racial

\textsuperscript{164} See in particular Gershenson and Penner’s \textit{Ladies and Gents: Public Toilets and Gender} for an overview of prominent scholarship in the field, including Butler’s notion of performativity and Kosofsky Sedgwick’s work on homosociality.
performativity in “Bioskoop der Nacht.” The differentiation of subjects according to the racial categories ‘white’ and ‘other’ assumes that racial identities are visually self-evident, natural and beyond question, when in fact this public toilet scene is symbolic of how bodies are made meaningful in the act of assigning them different places within a classificatory system. Bodies are not meaningful, but rather are made meaningful in accordance with ideologically motivated political interests. Mirón and Inda, in their work “Race as a Kind of Speech Act,” outline the power of discourse and its material instantiation in social spaces to compel a subject to assume and appropriate a racialized identity through the repeated performance of, and adherence to, racial norms. They outline how:

Race, rather than being a biological truth, is a kind of speech act, a performative that in the act of uttering brings into being that which it names. It resolutely does not refer to a preconstituted subject. It is simply a name that retroactively constitutes and naturalizes the groupings to which it refers. Race … works performatively to constitute the racial subject itself, a subject that only procures a naturalized effect through repeated reference to that subject. This suggests that, what might be called racial performativity, is not a singular act of racial subject constitution, but a reiterative practice through which discourse brings about the effect that it names. It is only through the force of reiteration that the racial subject acquires a naturalized effect. And it is only through the continued interpellation of the racial subject that this naturalized effect is maintained. (99)

Though the authors do not state it explicitly, I suspect they are indebted to Goldberg’s “Semantics of Race” for their development of race as a kind of speech act. Goldberg underlines how he is “tempted to say that race is whatever anyone in using that term or its cognates conceives of collective social relations. It is, in this sense, any group designation one ascribes to oneself as such (that is, as race, or under the sign), or which is so ascribed by others. Its meaning, like its forces, therefore, are always illocutionary. In using ‘race’ and the terms bearing racial significance, social subjects racialize the people and population groups whom they characterize and to whom they refer” 560.
Discourse does not only exist as language or linguistic phenomena, but also as, and in, practice – it is embodied in institutions, everyday rituals, and public spaces. A space like a public toilet can be consequential in producing a subject’s identification with a racial category, over time sedimenting this identity as a naturalized and normalized fact of nature that seemingly never required constituting in the first place. Yet the profound difficulty, even fatal flaw, of the binary system of classification outlined by the “Für die Weißen” and the “Für die anderen außer Japanern” signage is that the binary will inevitably fail to conveniently distinguish social groups based on such crude, visual criteria. Eventually, as the text later demonstrates, identities, and the labels that define them, reveal themselves to be malleable, contingent and prone to subversion and modification.

Furthermore, what the above quotation from “Bioskoop der Nacht” immediately illustrates is the central position that the reified category ‘white’ occupies as the standard of measurement against which subjects self-identify and are identified. Those who do not fit this designation are labeled ‘die anderen’, and thus they are made to identify with what they are not. In order to establish and confirm the racial borders of the white subject and the perception of an immutable difference, there must be an ‘other’ against which whiteness is contrasted, and thereby constituted. Ann Pellegrini notes that “racial difference, like sexual difference, provides one of the instituting conditions of subjectivity. It helps to set limits between self and other, precariously identifying where the ‘I’ ends and the unknowable other begins. Whiteness, for example, defines itself in opposition to blackness; the ‘I’ knows itself by what it is not” (Performance Anxieties 7). To establish a cohesive unity among whites as a group sharing a common identity, there needs to be an opposition group that will serve to affirm this commonality, especially considering the antagonistic feelings members of this white group hold for each other.
With respect to apartheid South Africa more specifically, as a means of establishing a clear power discrepancy, this homogenization of whiteness and otherness as viable categories for identification is critical in the development of apartheid. This is particularly true when we consider the measures taken by the government to unify disparate, and historically hostile, ethno-cultural groups like the English and the Afrikaners under the white banner, while simultaneously fomenting the fragmentation and sub-fragmentation of the ‘others’ so as to minimize the potential for consolidated resistance. Juxtaposing white and Japanese also serves to bring together racial, ethnic and national categories into the same discussion, which is exactly the move the apartheid state made in creating a system of ‘separate development’. This official terminology ultimately meant nationalizing race and racializing the nation. White is rarely perceived as reflective of a national characteristic, however powerful it is as a category of inherent privilege. Yet in the case of South Africa whiteness became the bonding agent and prerequisite for citizenship and enfranchisement, and thus conversely became symbolic of the denial of citizenship for non-whites based on state-appointed racial classification.

Colour communities and colour consciousness though are neither ready-made nor self-evident – whiteness needs to be created. Therefore it was up to the Afrikaner government to valorize and fortify racial categories through law, customs, institutions and language. Michael MacDonald notes that, “[i]f citizens were to be identified on the basis of race, they had to have, and to be perceived to have, color in the first place; the state had to have some way of determining who could and could not participate in the political institutions that soon were to define race formally” (Why Race Matters in South Africa 46). The protagonist’s encounter with separate toilets for separate races provided above is indicative of the state’s attempt to racialize and concretize historically otherwise fluid categories into fixed binaries. In other words,
segregated toilets were the metaphorical and material manifestation of state power infusing colour with meaning.

For the Japanese narrator, the additional complication that she is neither white nor other according to the categories presented in the above quotation is indicative of the failure of all binary models of belonging, but also somewhat ironically intimates the post-war Japanese narrative of ‘victimized’ that replaced discussions of its role as ‘victimizer’.166 Any sense that the Japanese are even more marginalized or victimized than the ‘others’ mentioned in the quotation above is quickly debunked, however, when subsequently in the text Japan’s complicity in the apartheid regime is revealed, and its status as ‘honorary whites’ exposed. The ambiguity of the South African government’s relationship with Japan before, and especially during, apartheid is underscored in the partly comical, partly accurate, racial classification provided through the public toilet signage. The Japanese were, depending on the applicable apartheid law, attributed with an ‘honorary white’ status if it was considered to be to the advantage of white South Africans. For example, the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act that legislated the segregation of public facilities (like public washrooms) made whites-only toilets available to the Japanese because it was seen to be in the interest of white businesses to do so. Masako Osada, in his book length study of Japan and South Africa’s relationship before and during apartheid, and especially the origins and mythology of the ‘honorary white’ label, states:

White South Africans, especially those in liberal urban cities such as Cape Town and Johannesburg, let Japanese use whites-only facilities. The South African government did not object to the use of whites-only facilities by the Japanese, for

166 For a complete analysis of the tension between narratives and memories of Japan as victimizer or victimized during the Second World War, James Joseph Orr’s The Victim as Hero: Ideologies of Peace and National Identity in Postwar Japan is a thorough and insightful study of the development of a common narrative and collective consciousness in Japan. This narrative and collective consciousness, which emphasizes Japan as a model of peace and demilitarization with its Article 9 and abhorrence of the bomb, conveniently white-washes, or at least significantly minimizes, Japan’s role as aggressor, colonizer and victimizer during the war.
they realized that otherwise Japanese businessmen could have had tremendous difficulty in conducting business with white South Africans. (*Sanctions and Honorary Whites* 153)

Although it was recognized as economically advantageous to exempt the Japanese from the segregation and subordination that all non-whites, including comparable Asian groups like the Chinese, were made to experience, with respect to several other apartheid laws the Japanese were just as restricted as their fellow ‘coloureds’ (this is the label of the category in which the Japanese were grouped). For instance, Japanese were prohibited from becoming permanent residents in South Africa and from marrying whites, suggesting that the extent to which the Japanese in South Africa truly benefited from this ‘honorary white’ designation was exaggerated. This ambivalent racial designation, which was neither an official nor legal status, but rather from 1930 was recognized as a kind of gentlemen’s agreement between the South African and Japanese governments, was enacted when it served the trade interests of the Afrikaner government. The government’s hand was forced because from the 1960s to the 1980s it was increasingly feeling the material repercussions of international sanctions and condemnation. This concession in an otherwise rigid racial classificatory system was done in order to continue doing business with one of its most lucrative trading partners: Japan. However, it was in both countries’ interest to keep this ‘honorary white’ status low key, considering that in South Africa “treating an apparently non-white race as whites … could have undermined the meticulously constructed system of apartheid” (Osada 169) by proving racial borders to be malleable and contingent, especially when it came to advancing financial interests. On the other hand, Japan, a nation notoriously reluctant to condemn white-supremacist South Africa or even curb its appetite for their diamonds and gold, desperately needed to maintain at least the perception among the
U.S. and other African nations that its economic ties with South Africa were not as close as reality would suggest.\textsuperscript{167}

After recalling the blatantly ambivalent racial categorization of the Japanese in South Africa represented by the segregated toilets, the narrator in “Bioskoop der Nacht” then recollects how financial interests occasionally served to destabilize the sincerity and rigidity of the country’s racialized system of apartheid. She flippantly stresses the actual severity of the situation with “[i]ch hatte nicht den Mut, den Lehrer zu fragen, warum es im Interesse der Apartheid sei, unsere Notdurft auszusperren” (“I didn’t have the courage to ask the teacher why it was in the interest of apartheid to prevent us from using the toilet”; 68). While this comment is made by the narrator as a child, and is thus reflective of a plausible naïveté, it also hints at the seemingly insipid, but in reality genuinely consequential, everyday and all-encompassing ramifications of apartheid laws. The text then continues with a dialogue between the narrator’s teacher and a classmate that is indicative of both the ambiguity of the apartheid system, but also the Japanese government and general population’s rather indifferent perspective on South Africa’s policies of racial inequity. The quote reads:

Zum Glück fragte aber ein Klassenkamerad, wie das Foto zu verstehen sei ... Der Lehrer verstand seine Frage nicht richtig und erklärte uns, dass die südafrikanischen Politiker die Japaner zu Weißen erklärt hätten, um die wirtschaftlichen Beziehungen zwischen beiden Ländern zu retten.

“Ah, dann sind sie gar keine echten Rassisten. Sie denken nur an das Geld,” sagte der Junge abschätzig.

\textsuperscript{167} Osada indicates two predominant factors that dictated Japan’s South African policy between 1960 and 1991: “the United States and black Africa. Relations with the United States dominated Japan’s post-World War II foreign policy, and Japan was constantly servile to the will and demands of the United States. Black Africa had a specific significance for Japan; first as a vast pool of votes at the UN General Assembly, which were needed in order for Japan to obtain high-ranking positions such as a seat on the Security Council, and second, as a provider of natural resources” 208.
“Sonst hätten sie solche Kompromisse abgelehnt, selbst wenn sie deshalb verhungert wären.”

Der Lehrer sagte daraufhin, wir müssten uns eher für die japanische Regierung schämen, die weiterhin mit der Apartheids-Regierung eine intensive Beziehung aufrechterhalten wolle. Diese Beziehung war außergewöhnlich intensiv, kein anderes Land kaufte so viel von Südafrika wie Japan. Platin, Diamanten, all die unterirdischen Schätze lockten die Menschen in eine abgründige Freude. (68) Fortunately a classmate asked how the photo is to be understood … The teacher didn’t really understand his question. Instead he explained to us how the South African government had declared the Japanese as whites in order to salvage the economic relationship between the two countries. “Ah, then they aren’t really racists. They are only thinking about money,” said the young man dismissively. “Otherwise they would have refused to make such a compromise, even if they would have starved.” The teacher then said that we ought to be ashamed of the Japanese government who seek to maintain such a close relationship with the Apartheid government. This relationship was extraordinarily tight, as no other country bought as much from South Africa as Japan did. Platinum, diamonds – people were deeply enticed by all these treasures from beneath the earth’s surface.

As Richard Payne highlights in his “Japan’s South Africa Policy: Political Rhetoric and Economic Realities,” despite the strong official position the Japanese government finally took in the mid-1980s condemning the minority regime’s apartheid policies, advocating for the release of Mandela and other political prisoners, and urging that the National Party negotiate with the ANC, these hollow gestures were really meant to “deflect international criticism of the extensive economic ties between the two countries” (177). Even though, as Payne makes clear, Japan was
the “first major industrialized country to prohibit its citizens from directly investing in South Africa,” the presence in apartheid South Africa of firms like Toyota, Mitsubishi, Isuzu, Mazda, Bridgestone, Yokohama, Sony, Sharp, and Pioneer, in addition to numerous others, proves that these restrictions were easy to circumvent (173). Ultimately, economic prosperity silently trumped political rhetoric and morally-motivated action. Nevertheless, the narrator’s classmate’s claim that the South African minority regime’s power holders were “gar keine echten Rassisten. Sie denken nur an das Geld ... Sonst hätten sie solche Kompromisse abgelehnt, selbst wenn sie deshalb verhungert wären” misses the reality of apartheid South Africa, in spite of the seemingly problematic acknowledgement of the Japanese as ‘honorary whites’. The Japanese, and to a certain extent Jews as well because of South Africa’s trade with Israel and Israel’s own position vis-à-vis Palestine, were the exception in apartheid’s vertically organized system of racial constitution and classification. The Japanese were only granted inclusion when it served the financial interests of white South Africa. The mutability and contingency of the racial categories, however, were highlighted by the inclusion of an Asian race within the dominant order, and thus the vulnerability of the colour-coded boundaries of classification was exposed.

It is crucial to read this seemingly innocuous, yet profoundly illuminating, representation in “Bioskoop der Nacht” of the narrator’s encounter with everyday apartheid in South Africa in combination with the historical realities of this colour-coded system. An understanding of the specifics of racial constitution in apartheid policy will help to better comprehend both the system’s inhumanity, but also the pliability, contingency and fragility of this system of racial categorization that would seem almost comically ridiculous if it were not so very true. More generally speaking though, the representation of the segregated toilets in “Bioskoop der Nacht” is also explicitly illustrative of how race as a category of classification and separation is a process that reflects the prevailing political and sociohistorical environment in which it is made
intelligible. Tawada’s text then can be read as evocative of the general and the specific processes of racial constitution, and how this constitution is necessarily an ongoing practice.

As a means of contextualizing the policies which Tawada is referencing, I will next briefly sketch some of the relevant racial laws and categories from apartheid South Africa. First of all, although it was labeled ‘petty apartheid’, a term used to refer to, among its many other manifestations, the segregation of public facilities, the separate toilets for separate races represented in “Bioskoop der Nacht” is illustrative of the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act that existed from 1953 until its repeal on November 16, 1989 under President F.W. de Klerk.168 The legalization of the racial segregation of public spaces, services and transit meant that enforcing and reinforcing, both physically and psychically, the necessary racial hierarchy was executed from the most commonplace rituals of everyday life, like choosing which washroom to enter. This escalated up to ostensibly more consequential legislation (so-called ‘grand apartheid’) that prohibited interracial marriage or sexual relations, that required non-whites to carry passes allowing them to cross into white territory to work, and that ensured whites and non-whites would live in spatially and qualitatively separate areas.

Of course, forcibly and legally separating racially constructed populations who share the same geographical space and nationality from co-existing as equals is not unique to South Africa, as Germany and the United States have proven relatively recently – albeit with differing...

168 While Tawada does not mention former president de Klerk by name, she does make concrete references to other key South African figures and events, such as Mandela, Nadine Gordimer, the Boer War, and Apartheid laws and racist policies. Even though de Klerk is absent from this text, his legacy is present. I previously remarked that Nelson Mandela is a Noble Peace Prize winner, but it should also be noted that Frederik Willem de Klerk shared the award together with Mandela in 1993 for his contributions to the gradual abolition of apartheid, ending the ban on the ANC, and the democratization of South Africa in the 1990s. Until he took over for P.W. Botha as president of South Africa in 1989, de Klerk was staunchly conservative and supportive of apartheid policies, making his selection as co-recipient of the Noble Peace Prize quite controversial. Even though Mandela worked closely with de Klerk and they were publicly cordial, sharing the stage with de Klerk in Stockholm was deeply disturbing for Mandela, as he suspected that de Klerk was privately stonewalling reforms. On the other side de Klerk was no great fan of Mandela, as he later suggested that his successor was a bully who gave him no credit for his contribution to ending racial segregation. Anthony Sampson’s *Mandela: The Authorized Biography* and F.W. de Klerk’s autobiography *The Last Trek – A New Beginning* are the two most insightful resources documenting the opinions these two men held of one another.
conceptions and histories of race. In “Bioskoop der Nacht,” the representation of separate toilets for separate races, and the representation of a public bench designated for ‘whites only’ that I will discuss below, bring to mind visual images of racial construction, separation and oppression at its worst: namely, Nazi Germany and racial segregation in the American south. From German and North American perspectives, it is hard not imagine the signage from National Socialist Germany under the Nuremberg Laws that designated public spaces ‘nur für Juden’, and the common images of segregated drinking fountains and public spaces under Jim Crow laws in the south. But in an era of increasing decolonization, in the aftermath of the extremes of the Second World War and the Holocaust, and during the time of the gradual abolition of Jim Crow laws, South Africa’s move to so emphatically and comprehensively develop a blatantly racist national policy of incommensurability seems utterly bewildering. Yet, this development also makes it an illuminating context for Tawada to interrogate skin colour, race and the construction of physical and conceptual boundaries between social groups in “Bioskoop der Nacht.” Thus, in connection to passages from Tawada’s text, I will show how the creation and articulation of “indelible difference” (MacDonald 11), in combination with a self-evident sense of superiority rooted in nature, served as the ballast to apartheid’s existence, and how it was imperative that so-called white people think in terms of their racial cohesion rather than their disparate ethno-cultural backgrounds in order to crystallize and entrench apartheid praxis.

As noted above, the representation of a segregated public space like the public toilets (and as I will outline later, public benches) is exemplary of the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act, which is a small, though instructive, manifestation of the invention and practical application of racial categories meant to unify the minority, and marginalize and fracture the majority. This commonplace example is symbolic of the processes of what David Theo Goldberg calls ‘race creation’ and ‘racial constitution’, which he explores with the following:
Race creation emerges out of the creations, the fabrications, of real social actors in their constructed reproductions and transformations of given discursive formations and expressions. These creations are products of actual relations: it is real people, after all, who express themselves by means of a given discourse or set of discourses, who make meaning and history. Yet these social (self-) creations come as though given, fixed from on high, seemingly natural phenomena imposed almost unchangingly upon an innocent and so non-responsible social order. Racial constitution is what gives one racial identity, what makes one a racial member, what identifies one racially in society, in law, and gives substance to one’s social being. In short, it is what partly locates one as a social subject. (‘‘Semantics of Race’’ 561)

The crux of Goldberg’s argument is that race is first and foremost a political category and a political practice that always serves to classify, value and order social groups. However, despite their apparently natural origins, these groupings need to be constructed through discourses and social and institutional practices and spaces, and the identification with these categories of identity must be constantly repeated in order that the identity be internalized and naturalized as axiomatic. Goldberg articulates the process of naturalizing race with:

The minimal significance that race bears in itself is not of biological but of naturalized group relations. Race serves to naturalize the groupings that it identifies in its own name. In articulating as natural ways of being in the world and the institutional structures in and through which such ways of being are expressed, race both establishes and rationalizes the order of difference as a law of nature … Thus, race gives to social relations the veneer of fixedness, of long duration, and invokes, even silently, the tendency to characterize assent relations
in the language of descent. As such, group formation seems destined as eternal, fated as unchanging and unchangeable. (560)

Recognizing the various processes of racial constitution is relevant to Tawada’s “Bioskoop der Nacht” because she has carefully framed her representations of race and racial construction within a very explicit and charged political and historical context of racial segregation. In order to better comprehend the context of racial formation and the construction and naturalization of colour-coded difference, but also the ambivalence and malleability of these seemingly fixed categories, the following will briefly outline some of the particular developments of relevant apartheid law that “Bioskoop der Nacht” is referencing.

To begin, it is important to bear in mind that the segregation of the populations of South Africa based on racial differences had been omnipresent during this country’s development long before the National Party surprisingly took power in 1948, but it was especially after the second Anglo-Boer War that the gradual erosion of non-white legal, labour, and democratic rights became government sanctioned. For example, legislation prohibited African miners from striking and from forming unions or using collective bargaining, and later prevented them from being apprenticed or promoted to skilled or even semi-skilled positions in the mining industry. All of these measures were taken in an effort to ensure that the labour market would be fixed in favour of the white minority, and would guarantee continued success of white development while maintaining African financial and social subordination.\(^\text{169}\) The Native Land Act and the Representation of Natives Act passed between 1913-26 made it illegal for ‘natives’ (blacks) to purchase land outside of the reserved areas – reservations that comprised some thirteen percent

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\(^{169}\) Especially under the administration of former Afrikaner generals Louis Botha, Jan Christiaan Smuts and J.B.M Hertzog, South Africa enacted legislation that would transition mere segregation into a government policy. The Native Labour Regulation Act of 1911; Master and Servant Laws, Mines and Works Act of 1911; The Natives Land Act of 1913; Native Trust and Land Act and the Representation of Natives Act, and the Apprenticeship Act of 1922; Native Urban Areas Act of 1923; the Industrial Conciliation Act of 1924, among many others, were brought into law even before 1948.
of the land in the Cape region. In some cases these territories would later transition from a status as homelands to the more politically contentious status as separate nations in order to justify the termination of South African citizenship for its native subjects. The logic of forcing the natives into these homelands, designating these homelands as sovereign nations, and restricting movement outside of these nations with the Pass Laws was a calculated, long-term plan to not only separate whites from non-whites spatially, economically, socially and culturally, but also conceptually, insofar as citizenship is a concept and characteristic of self-identity.

It was really after the National Party’s 1948 victory that apartheid became an all-encompassing way of life in South Africa though. Subsequent legislation driving blacks out of urban areas and requiring ‘pass’ documents to travel into white-designated territory would secure as little interracial co-habitation and interaction as possible. Nevertheless, it would still take even more extreme, systemic policies of apartheid to make absolute separation a reality. Some of the most consequential legislation pertaining to these apartheid laws officially enacted after the ascension of the Afrikaner led National Party in 1948 are represented in the following examples. Especially in connection to “Bioskoop der Nacht,” the first to consider is the Population Registration Act of 1950, which officially established a racial classification system complete with identity cards that explicitly stated to which racial category one belonged. There were four official classifications (though with the exception of white, each category contained a number of subcategories) which were: black, white, coloured, and (introduced later) Indian. A number of criteria were considered when classifying a subject’s race, and not all of them depended on outward appearance, such as native language (especially if it was Afrikaans), socioeconomic

170 These classifications are official designations rather than adjectives describing empirically verifiable visible characteristics. However, for the sake of readability, they are not capitalized or placed in quotation marks in the body of the text. Blacks, who were first known as Natives, and then Bantus, were subdivided according to their ethnic descent. The Coloureds were subdivided into seven categories in 1959: Cape Coloured, Malay, Griqua, Chinese, Indian, Other Asiatic, and Other Coloured. Indian was later designated its own category. Whites, despite the historical hostility and antagonism between its most powerful components, English and Afrikaner, were not subdivided. This proved to work to the advantage of all the various groups that made up this category.
status and even eating habits. Because of the subjective nature of classification, it was possible for an individual to be assessed and re-classified by the Office for Race Classification. Officially designating an individual’s racial classification was, of course, necessary in order to have recourse when policing and enforcing the other laws of apartheid. Without a state sanctioned ‘identity card’ that defined subjects as white or non-white, belonging and exclusion would be ambiguous and difficult to patrol. Shortcomings of this system became apparent though when members of the same family were classified differently, which was certainly not uncommon, and was often the impetus for appealing one’s racial status. The very idea that race needs to be adjudged and prescribed, or that it can be appealed and repealed, is evidence of the fluidity and contingency of race that Tawada is playing with in the textual examples provided. The fact that race as a category needs to be constructed, imposed, policed and repeated indicates that it is vulnerable and open to reconceptualization, and not as fixed, pre-determined and interminable as it was historically perceived to be.

The racial registration of the population based on highly pliable criteria was crucial to the development and enforcement of one final apartheid law that I will outline and connect to Tawada’s text. The Group Areas Act of 1950 that designated areas for white habitation and separate areas for non-white residence required the population to be grouped into easily discernible, visual categories. This act led to some of the famous forced removals of coloureds

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171 Steven Debroey’s *South Africa under the Curse of Apartheid* outlines the key apartheid legislation in the chapter “Foundations of Apartheid” 195-222, although the legislation discussed above can be found in any print or online source addressing apartheid policies. Like Tawada, Debroey underscores the bizarre ambivalence, fluidity and expediency of the racial classificatory system, noting that in order to appeal one’s racial classification, a £10 deposit needed to be paid in advance that would be lost were the complaint to be found groundless; see page 200 in Debroey. The monetary requirement was more a deterrent than a necessity for the administration, considering the financial circumstances of many Africans and coloureds would not allow them to utilize this option. Unable to pay, they remained bound to a social status that legally separated them from the employment or education needed to earn the fee for appeal. Quoting a Survey of Race Relations from 1986, Debroey provides a scope for this reclassification: “387 African to Coloured; 9 African to Indian; 35 Coloured to African; 10 Coloured to Chinese; 81 Coloured to Indian; 314 Coloured to White; 63 Indian to Coloured …” These numbers indicate that, in terms of the explicitly vertical structure of the racial hierarchy, both upward and downward movement was possible in re-classifying race. Appeals were not always successful, however, as Adrian Guelke notes in *Rethinking the Rise and Fall of Apartheid*. In 1986, for example, of the 1624 applications for reclassification, 522 were denied. See page 26.
and blacks (and occasionally whites) from their homes, establishing townships and the larger, state-equivalent homelands (Bantustans), outside of white urban areas. These relocations were nearly always done to the advantage of the white minority and to the extreme disadvantage of the non-white majority. For example, from 1968-82 the expulsion of the 60,000 coloured and black inhabitants of District Six in Cape Town, to which Tawada makes reference in “Bioskoop der Nacht,” and upon which Richard Rive’s novel Buckingham Palace, District Six, David Kramer and Taliep Petersen’s famous District Six – The Musical, and the Neill Blomkamp film District 9 are all based,\textsuperscript{172} was executed under the Group Areas Act. This lucrative land near Table Mountain and within view of the harbor was razed and rebuilt for whites only, while its former residents were relocated twenty-five kilometers away to the sandy and inhospitable Cape Flats.

Although the reference to this forced expulsion in “Bioskoop der Nacht” is only implied, it is nevertheless illustrative of the historically specific context to which Tawada is relating. The reference comes during a taxi ride when the narrator is observing a desolate stretch of flat land. She comments:

\begin{quote}
Von einem flachen Land erwartet man nichts. Das Wort flach gebraucht man abwertend, ohne zu wissen, was Nachteile flacher Dinge sind. “Das ist Cape Flats, hierher wurden die Schwarzen und die Coloureds früher zwangsumgesiedelt,”
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{172} I mention these internationally renowned texts and performances to demonstrate the kind of cultural production and context with which “Bioskoop der Nacht” is aligned, and to suggest that District Six is a focal point for interrogating racial apartheid in fictional works. District 9 for example, directed by Neill Blomkamp and produced by Peter Jackson, is a 2009 South African film based on the forced expulsions of places like District Six, although this was certainly not the only example of such expulsions. The film is located in Soweto and Johannesburg rather than Cape Town, and instead of coloured and black residents being forced from their homes it is literally ‘aliens’, also known as ‘prawns’ due to their appearance, who are being forcefully re-located under the ruse of ‘better conditions’. The film parodies the danger of miscegenation and the need for separation that underwrote the apartheid narrative, as the protagonist Wikus van de Merwe (an Afrikaner government official) accidentally becomes infected by an alien substance, and subsequently begins to transform into ‘one of them’, literally losing his white, Afrikaner identity in the process (if we consider that identity is tied to external characteristics). He is then falsely portrayed in the media as sexually perverted, proven in the fabricated story that he secretly has sex with ‘aliens’, and is therefore a traitor to his species/race. The rationalization of the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages, the Immorality Act and Group Areas Act are all parodied in this film.
sagte der Taxifahrer … Plötzlich ragte ein riesiger Esstisch in den Himmel, The Table Mountain, und verschwand wieder. (71)

You don’t expect much from flat land. The word flat is used derisively, without really knowing what the disadvantages of flat land are. “That there is Cape Flats; it’s where the blacks and coloreds were once forcibly relocated,” explained the taxi driver. Suddenly a giant dinner table shot up into the sky, The Table Mountain, and then disappeared.

Cape Flats was known as the ‘dumping ground’ of apartheid, where coloured and black residents were forced to relocate in order to remove them from the urban areas designated for white inhabitants. The Table Mountain reference, which was where District Six was located, is connected in this quotation to a dinner table and images of food and prosperity, in contrast to the Cape Flats area which was unfruitful owing to the scarcity of arable land. The logic of this forced separation through expulsions and the development of homelands for Native Africans was partly premised on the same logic that motivated the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages of 1949 and the Immorality Act of 1950, which prohibited interracial marriage and sexual relations between members of different races respectively. The simple logic was that close proximity would lead to interaction, temptation, lascivious behavior, and offspring who were not white. More broadly put, propinquity and miscegenation could lead to integration, cooperation and assimilation, which was exactly what apartheid was created to prevent.

The representations of segregated public spaces based on racial differentiation (spaces Tawada presents as public toilets and, as I will show below, public benches), the ambiguous classification of the Japanese during apartheid as ‘honorary whites’, and the implied event of forced expulsions from District Six in Cape Town, are all fairly trivial textual details without the necessary context of South Africa’s apartheid policies. By recasting the public toilet space as
productive, rather than reflective, of racial classification and identification with a racialized identity, Tawada is proposing in this text that raced identities are performatively enacted through discourses and their material embodiments in an unceasing process of repetition. The authoritative discourse and its material embodiments were the product of apartheid policies detailed above that sought to racially codify bodies as a means of securing conceptual, insuperable and indelible boundaries between the minority whites and the majority non-whites. These laws were necessary not only in order to have legal recourse to upholding hierarchical social stratifications, but also because the orders of difference were far from self-evident, and the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion required daily and ubiquitous constitution and re-confirmation. I have outlined some of the most relevant apartheid laws, like the Separate Amenities Act and the Population Registration Act, as a means of highlighting how race can be utilized to consciously and retroactively unify otherwise historically, linguistically and culturally disparate populations of people in the service of political ends, as though they were natural and beyond question. However, as the ability to appeal and repeal racial classification underscores, it is apparent that racial demarcations, and especially racial binaries, are forever vulnerable to being reinterpreted and rewritten.

4.5 MAKING ‘WHITENESS’ VISIBLE: THE POWER OF (IN)VISIBILITY IN “BIOSKOOP DER NACHT”

While ethnographic accounts have traditionally privileged vision or visual perception as the preferred modality for observing, describing and producing knowledge of a cultural group, in Tawada’s fictionally ethnographic approach the power of the paradoxical invisibility and hypervisibility of skin colour becomes the site of investigation and subversion. Similar to the narrator’s previous reflection on how public toilets were labeled “für die Weißen” on the one side and “für die anderen außer Japanern” on the other, “Bioskoop der Nacht” later relates a
subsequent encounter with the segregation of commonplace public spaces under apartheid using visual criteria as the identity marker. However, in the following excerpt there is a focus and reflection on the concept and category ‘white’ as a symbol of race as ideology rather than a feature of biology or visuality, and how whiteness has accrued meaning far exceeding itself as a visually verifiable or objective characteristic.

After having arranged with her language instructor, Frau Taal, to meet in a Cape Town train station, the text describes in a dream-like fashion the narrator’s interaction with ‘petty apartheid’. In the passage below, it is the indeterminacy of words like “scheinbar” and “wahrscheinlich,” together with the sense that she is not sure when or where she is that suggests the narrator is articulating a dream. Of course, the fact that in ‘reality’ the protagonist is visiting post-apartheid South Africa that no longer segregates public spaces, tells us unequivocally that the narrator is conveying a dream. The text reads:


A wooden bench appeared before my eyes. Apparently it was already the next day, I was probably supposed to wait there for Ms. Taal. But on the back of the bench was a sign stating ‘SLEGS BLANKES’, meaning that the bench was only for the ‘Blankes’, and I felt like I was being watched. I didn’t know whether I had
the right to sit on this bench or not. Which people are marked as ‘Blankes’? ‘A blank space’, a gap, still unwritten, free. Is it possible to have a skin colour that resembles an unwritten page?

Just as Afrikaans was present in her unconscious and manifested itself in her dreams, so too does an encounter with South African racial apartheid appear in what we, as readers, must also assume is the narrator’s dream. “SLEGS BLANKES,” written entirely in capital letters in order to connote that it is actually Afrikaans and not the “afrikaanisiertes Deutsch” (Brandt and Schyns 544) that is used almost everywhere else in the text where ‘Afrikaans’ is conveyed,† indicates that the bench is for ‘whites only’. The bench as a racialized public space, like the public toilets investigated earlier, evokes the signage found on beaches and in parks that is so prevalent in images memorializing South Africa’s disturbing recent history. This textual passage is provocative for a number of reasons, as I will show below, not the least of which being the rather bizarre moment of self-reflection the narrator experiences vis-à-vis the sign’s interpellative calling. It is a scene that again brings to mind the representation of public places as theatrical spaces where racial identities are repetitively performed, rather than simply referenced.

The fact that Tawada chooses to include the Afrikaans terminology for white, namely “Blankes,” is especially meaningful though because the word itself is rich in history and connotations that demand further analysis. Michael MacDonald outlines the significance of the Afrikaner’s choice to use “Blankes” with:

Afrikaans refers to whites not by the word wit, which means the color white, but by the word blank, which entered Afrikaans from Dutch. The word blank in Dutch meant something akin to ‘light colored’ or ‘uncolored’, not unlike the

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† With respect to linguistic play in this text, Brandt and Schyns state: “Tawadas Afrikaans ist ein nachgebildetes Afrikaans: eine Sprache, durch die eine unvertraute Syntax schimmert und aus der ein zerstückeltes Afrikaans widerhallt. Dieses geträumte, entstellte Afrikaans, das von der Ich-Figur geprochen wird und in der trotz der Entstellung viele der strukturellen Besonderheiten des Afrikaans erhalten bleiben (besonders auffällig in der doppelten Verneinung, der Reduplikation und der Diminuierung), wirkt korrigierend auf das Afrikaans ein” 544-45.
contemporary meaning of the English word ‘clear’. It was used to mean white in relation to skin color; in other contexts the word *wit* was used to mean white …

Taken etymologically, it was as if whites were saying both that they were lightly colored and that they were without color, that they were differentiated from browns and blacks in part by different color and in the main by the absence of color. It was as if their identity was incomplete until contrast with their opposites completed them. It is not immaterial, therefore, whether colonists understood themselves as *blank* (white) or as European. (*Why Race Matters in South Africa* 41)

This passage, though specific to the South African context, is indicative of the paradoxical construction of whiteness as a racial category, insofar as it is simultaneously both invisible and extremely conspicuous. In *The Book of Skin* Steven Connor supports this notion in his remark that “words like 'blank' and 'bland', which derive from the French 'blanc', evoke a skin which is both present and absent, in the field of vision, yet featureless, visible as invisible” (161). As we can see in the Tawada, MacDonald and Connor quotations above, by making the move towards whiteness as ‘blank’, or unwritten, or *unmarked*, the implication is that whiteness is somehow the normative standard, while all other racial designations are seen as *marked* and aberrant. In the case of the segregated bench in “Bioskoop der Nacht,” we can also recognize the inherent privileges (*unbeschrieben, frei*) guaranteed to those classified as white for no other reason than their perceived possession of this characteristic, whereas for those who are not white and therefore do not have access, whiteness becomes extremely *visible* as the cause of their exclusion.

It is obvious from the Tawada passages provided above that the author is focusing on the specific deployment of whiteness in South Africa as a kind of rallying point for racial
mobilization that sought to justify itself in nature and through naturalization of difference, while superseding the numerous ethno-cultural, linguistic and historical disparities among whites under this single, homogenous, monolithic banner. However, if we read this text, and especially these particular textual passages, in relation to Tawada’s broader theoretical platform, and in connection with her other texts like Das Bad and “Eigentlich darf man es niemandem sagen” that I will address later in this chapter, it becomes possible to position Tawada’s writing in the broader context of Critical Race Theory, especially in its interrogation of whiteness. Part of the motivation, or at least effect, of Tawada’s focus on the Afrikaner’s choice of ‘blank’ to denote white as a racial category is to highlight, or mark, whiteness as ideologically loaded, so to speak - to take it out of its established space as the norm or natural standard and shed light on how its invisibility is partially the source of its power. Marking whiteness, ‘making it strange’ (to again bring in Shklovsky), and highlighting the processes of its construction and its accompanying advantages is a necessary step towards opening up this category to inquiry, subversion and a potentially productive self-reflection. In The Social Construction of Whiteness, a text frequently cited as seminal in the sub-genre of Critical Race Theory known as ‘whiteness studies’, Ruth Frankenberg asserts that whiteness “refers to a set of locations that are historically, socially, politically, and culturally produced and, moreover, are intrinsically linked to unfolding relations of domination” (6). Frankenberg articulates the pressing need to put this colour-coded category unter die Lupe with “[n]aming whiteness displaces it from the unmarked, unnamed status that is itself an effect of its dominance. Among the effects on white people both of race privilege and of the dominance of whiteness are their seeming normativity [and] their structured invisibility” (6).

174 Frankenberg’s book, along with David Roedigger’s Toward the Abolition of Whiteness are considered two of the central texts in the field of ‘Whiteness Studies’. Written in an English context, they both unsurprisingly focus on the construction and deployment of ‘whiteness’ in the U.S. and Britain. Frankenberg’s main argument in this book is that whiteness has a set of linked dimensions. She states: “first, whiteness is a location of structural advantage, of race privilege. Second, it is a ‘standpoint,’ a place from which white people look at ourselves, at others, at society. Third, whiteness refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed” 1.
Steve Garner, in his book *Whiteness: An Introduction*, which is a useful survey of the relevant literature in the field with some case studies from a predominantly U.K. context, details his approach to analyzing whiteness in five points:

1) ‘White’ is a marked racialised identity whose precise meanings derive from national racial regimes; 2) Whiteness as an identity exists only in so far as other racialised identities, such as blackness, Asianness, etc., exist; 3) Whiteness has been conceptualised over the century or so since it was first used, as terror, systemic supremacy, absence/invisibility, norms, cultural capital, and contingent hierarchies; 4) Whiteness is also a problematic, or an analytical perspective: that is, a way of formulating questions about social relations; 5) The invocation of white identities may suspend other social divisions and link people who share whiteness to dominant social locations, even though the actors are themselves in positions of relative powerlessness. (3)

Both the Frankenberg and Garner quotes stress that the power of whiteness resides in its normativity, its invisibility, its cultural capital, and its parasitical relationship to conceptualizations of blackness.

The suggestion that white, or ‘blank’ as it designated in Afrikaans, is also symbolic of its status as “a Blank space, noch unbeschrieben, frei,” is a crucial element to understanding its power structure. It is this very power of remaining *unseen* that Tawada’s text brings under the spotlight. Richard Dyer sketches the implications of what it means to be unwritten, unmarked, virginal, and free to represent and *be* represented as an individual that is ‘just human’ in his appropriately titled book *White*:

There is no more powerful position than that of being ‘just’ human. The claim to power is the claim to speak for the commonality of humanity. Raced people can’t
do that – they can only speak for their race. But non-raced people can, for they do not represent the interests of a race. The point of seeing the racing of whites is to dislodge them/us from the position of power, with all the inequities, oppression, privileges and sufferings in its train, dislodging them/us by undercutting the authority with which they/we speak and act in and on the world. (2)

In the textual passages provided from “Bioskoop der Nacht” I recognize a comparable attempt to reveal, dislodge and undercut the authority of whiteness by exposing it as a race that, though it is definitely not like any other race in terms of historical development, it is an ideologically powerful construct that operates on the illusion of transparency and normativity. Furthermore, as Dyer illustrates, it is crucial to bear in mind the authorial position from which cultural representations are written, in the sense of who is speaking for whom, and to what end. Neutrality and normativity are powerful representational positions, and must be recognized in any critical reception.

Claudia Benthien likewise underscores the power of whiteness to remain unseen as a racial construct when she equates the cultural understanding of skin with an as yet unwritten page. She notes, “as in printing technology or in painting, the 'white' skin is understood as a kind of color-neutral canvas or blank sheet, a tabula rasa, and the dark skin as its colored or written-on counterpart. 'Colored' as opposed to light skin is thus interpreted as a marked epidermis; it becomes a skin that departs from the neutral norm” (148). She later expands upon this thought when she states “just as the European gaze was long regarded as neutral in cultural history, 'white' skin is still seen as nonsignificant and is therefore not considered to be a construct” (153). Catherine Rottenberg laconically sums up this hidden power with “the invisibility of the mark of whiteness is exactly the mark of its privilege” (36), while Uli Linke stresses the invisible power of whiteness in her assessment that:
A key strategy of whiteness is to avoid definition and explicit presence. Deeply embedded in the logic of commonsense thought, whiteness obscures its location in the discourse of domination. By remaining undefined and amorphous, whiteness keeps itself out of the field of interrogation and allows whites to ignore the history of power that has constructed racial difference to their advantage.

(“Shame on the Skin” 208)

And even though in the Tawada excerpt above the advantages wrought from being perceived as belonging to the white label are relatively insignificant (sitting on a bench is a small luxury, and likely a bench for non-whites would not be far away), the implication is that in the South African, but also in numerous other Western, contexts, much deeper, institutional and structural advantages are attached to the white category. Belonging to this category delivers both material and psychical benefits that are conversely denied to the excluded. Moreover, the very practice of classifying is an active form of constructing one’s own sense of racialized identity, and through the act of including whites, there is a concurrent act of inferiorization of those deemed other.

Peggy McIntosh, in her paper “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack” that is so often cited in whiteness studies, but also has created a virulent backlash among those who see the field as ‘hating Whitey’, ¹⁷⁵ outlines the everyday advantages of white invisibility. She characterizes it as “an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was ‘meant’ to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible

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¹⁷⁵ One only needs to execute an online search of “Whiteness Studies” or “white privilege” to gain a sense of the reactionary vitriol directed against this academic field and the scholars who support it. The quote “hating Whitey,” though hardly original, is attributed here to Chris Weinkopf’s article in FrontPageMagazine.com’s “Whiteness Studies.” That is not to suggest that there are no rational, thoughtful criticisms of the field, rare as they may be. Sara Ahmed’s “Declarations of Whiteness: The Non-Performativity of Anti-Racism” reasonably questions the political effectiveness of so-called whites self-reflecting on the construction and conditions of their racial category. Ahmed is skeptical that focusing on whiteness runs the risk of essentializing it, thereby promoting the category as a point of pride. She goes on to critique “how whiteness gets reproduced through being declared, within academic texts, as well as public culture.” The overall tenor of the argument is one-dimensionally cynical, however, and ultimately fails to recognize the necessary first steps which ‘Whiteness Studies’ is promoting, and that need to be made in order for whiteness to be exposed as the guarantor of unearned privileges.
weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks” (120). Clearly the context of a ‘whites only’ bench, and by extension the innumerable advantages bestowed on whites through apartheid laws, provides a very explicit example of colour-coded privilege. But whereas in the South African case the benefits are guaranteed through hyper-visibility, paradoxically in non-explicitly white-supremacist contexts the privileges are linked with the invisibility of whiteness, in the sense that it remains persistently and necessarily invisible to those who reap the rewards.

In “Bioskoop der Nacht,” once the narrator has observed the public bench as a racialized space, she goes on to further ruminate on the use of ‘blank’ to represent white. Shortly thereafter, and unsure of her own racial status, she decides to ask a nearby police officer what is meant by the term ‘Blanke’, and as a Japanese female, where she fits into this system of racial classification:

Das Wort hörte sich außerdem ähnlich an wie ‘black’. Vielleicht bedeutete das Wort ‘schwarz’, das würde heißen, dass nur Schwarze sich auf die Bank setzen dürfen.

... “Was heißt ‘Blanke’? ...”

Der Polizist betrachtete meine Schuhe und fragte:

“Sind Sie eine von den Kap-Malaien?”

“Nein, ich bin keine Malaiin.”

“Die meisten Kap-Malaien sind auch keine Malaien.”

“Sondern?”

While the observation that ‘blank’ sounds like ‘black’ serves to ironically connect these binaries of established polarity, the inclusion of the word ‘black’ could also bring into the conversation the term ‘buraku’, which in Japanese pronunciation would sound very similar to the Japanese pronunciation of ‘black’ (bu-ra-kku). As noted above, the Buraku people, as the lowest ‘caste’ in Japanese society, are very much a taboo topic still today in Japan, and are a telling example of how discrimination continues to operate at the most basic structural levels of society.
“Das sind moslemische Asiaten, die die Holländer mitgebracht haben. Die meisten kamen aus Indien. Haben Sie einen Pass?”

“Ich habe einen japanischen Pass.”

“Ach so, dann sind sie (sic) eine von den Blanken.” (74-75)

The word, moreover, sounded similar to ‘black’. Perhaps the word denotes ‘black’, which would mean that only the blacks are permitted to sit on the bench … “What does ‘Blanke’ mean?” … The policeman observed my shoes and asked:

“Are you one of the Cape-Malays?” “No, I’m not Malaysian.” “Most of the Cape-Malays are also not Malaysian.” “What are they then?” “They are Muslim Asians that the Dutch brought over. Most of them are from India. Do you have a passport?” “I have a Japanese passport.” “Oh, then you are one of the Blanken.”

This dialogue between the protagonist and a police officer has a mildly comedic effect because it showcases both the real, material consequences produced by the discriminatory and de-humanizing policies of apartheid, but also the contingency and malleability of this system, accentuated here by Cape-Malays who are from India, and a Japanese woman who is labeled white. Like I indicated earlier with respect to the possibilities of racial re-classification provided in the apartheid system, despite the profound consequences attached to one’s legally sanctioned racial identity that was seemingly bureaucratically frozen, threatening and destabilizing racial fixity is an ever-present prospect and danger to such systems of designation. The protagonist’s ambivalent position, again here presented as ambiguously white because of her citizenship as Japanese and therefore as part of the economically and legally dominant minority, casts a rather dubious light on the legitimacy of these ordering principles.

Towards the end of the text, in a passage that is meant to express the protagonist’s real visit to South Africa rather than one of her dreams, the consequences of the racial order are again
depicted, but this time in a post-apartheid context. In this instance, however, the discrimination portrayed is no longer tied to the fact that the individual’s skin is too black to gain equitable access, but rather that his skin is not black enough. The protagonist, as part of a class trip, visits a friend of her language teacher in a Cape Town slum (a remnant of an apartheid-era township) where the residents are speaking Xhosa, in order to witness first-hand the living conditions and legacy of ‘separate development’. It is at this time she meets Herr Tolk, who explains his situation as a kind of paradox in the racial order. The text reads:

Als wir wieder ins Wohnzimmer zurückgingen, erzählte Herr Tolk von seiner Kindheit während der Apartheid. Er wurde damals als ‘coloured’ klassifiziert, er war nicht hell genug, um zu der herrschenden Klasse zu gehören. Heute sei er nicht dunkel genug, um zu der regierenden Klasse zu gehören, ergänzte er ironisch, viele sagen, die ‘coloured’ seien nicht wirklich schwarz, sondern eben nur gefärbt. (80)

When we returned to the living room, Mr. Tolk spoke of his childhood during apartheid. At that time he was classified as ‘coloured’, since he wasn’t light enough to belong to the ruling class. He then explained ironically that these days he isn’t dark to belong to the governing class. According to Mr. Tolk, many people say the ‘coloureds’ aren’t really black, but rather only marked.

Herr Tolk articulates here a kind of racial limbo that prevented him from belonging to the ruling order during apartheid, but again in the new system of optics his skin colour fails to meet the required standard in these racial metrics. In other words, his ‘badge of authenticity’ is not quite the right complexion. This double-bind position experienced by Herr Tolk is by no means uncommon to large numbers of subjects in post-apartheid South Africa, but the situation is certainly also applicable to individuals in other Western contexts who constantly face
discrimination because they are neither one nor the other (much like the position of the Japanese
in the public toilet signage). Again, the limitations of this colour-coded binary are ultimately
exposed as simplistically ‘black and white’.

Taking a look at this issue from a different perspective, if we shift our gaze away from
the historical situation in South Africa and onto a contemporary Japanese context, an analogous
relationship between the concept of ‘Blank’ and invisibility, unseen and unmarked can also be
detected. Mark Levin, in his article “The Wajin’s Whiteness: Law and Race Privilege in Japan”
makes a provocative comparison between the way that whiteness functions through the power of
transparency in the West to the at least symbolically relatable situation in Japan, where the
ethno-racial majority has developed its own structural privileges linked to their normative and
naturalized transparency.177 Utilizing the Ainu term ‘Wajin’ to describe the ethno-racial majority
rather than the anachronistically loaded racial term Yamato, Levin describes how:

Japan’s Wajin-dominant racial discourse represents the epitome of majority race
transparency. Modern Japan’s mainstream racial discourse famously presents a
false myth of homogeneity based upon a carefully constructed and maintained
conception of a single Japanese race. This social system involves the denial … of
the presence of ethnic and racial minorities in Japanese society. Thus denial,
enabled by long-standing assimilation and exclusion policies, has been an
essential means to subordinate minorities in Japan. (“The Wajin’s Whiteness” 86)

Race may eventually, and ideally, cease to be a defining characteristic that determines an
individual’s belonging or alienation in society, or equal access to education, employment,

177 In a very different sense, the idea of ‘white skin’ as a measure of beauty has a long history in Japan, and can be
connected to early twentieth century Japanese Occidentalism, and associations of white skin with characteristics like
urbanism and cleanliness. In more recent times and practical terms, the cosmetic process known as bihaku has
emerged that attempts to curb the production of melanin in order to achieve a much whiter complexion, although
this technique is generally more popular among older women. Atsuko Onuki’s article “Multiple Refractions: The
Metamorphosis of the Notions of Beauty in Japan” investigates the development of white skin as the mark of beauty
in Japan in literary works by Jun’ichiro Tanizaki, among others, and how this Occidentalism in Japanese cultural
discourse was emblematic of an inferiority complex vis-à-vis ideas of Western beauty.
government benefits and legal protection, or the more quotidian manifestations of racial
discrimination that the unmarked will never experience. Yet today, in Japan, race, but also
ethnicity and even caste, does matter. Because of this myth of homogeneity and harmony,
however, it is often dismissed as a problem only in so-called multicultural societies. In light of
the narrator’s reflections in “Bioskoop der Nacht” on the position of the Japanese within the
racial order in South Africa though, it should not be overlooked that racial ‘invisibility’ serves an
analogously powerful function in contemporary Japan.

Turning our attention back to role of ‘whiteness’ as power in a Japanese context, Mark
Levin later notes in his article, with comprehensive citations of legal decisions, how race (but
also, to a lesser extent, ethnicity and caste) “has been the undercurrent of aspects of
constitutional law, civil law, nationality laws, employment law, public accommodations law,
family registry law, the burakumin and judicial legitimization of instrumental violence” (85). All
of these laws have served to legally discriminate against the non-Wajin minorities, while
subsequently defining the borders of what it means to be an unmarked Japanese, with all the
requisite privileges that accompany it. And even though the legal system has done so much to
diminish the rights of very real minority groups with long histories and legitimate claims to
recognition, it is the prevailing social attitudes so convinced of the myth of Japanese
racial/cultural/ethnic/linguistic homogeneity and the unwillingness, or obliviousness, to see the
racial and ethnic ‘Other’ in Japan that continues to infuse racial transparency with its power. In
“Bioskoop der Nacht,” Tawada is juxtaposing the very explicit and widely known case of South
African apartheid that used white and non-white as symbols of immutable difference, with the
more subtle, though equally effective, conceptualization of whiteness as transparent, ‘blank’ or
invisible as the root of its power structure and source of its privilege. Tawada’s inclusion of the
Japanese as ‘honorary whites’, though specific to the South African context, also serves to
underscore that whiteness, not as colour but as *normativity*, transparency and power, also operates on a comparable level in contemporary Japan. Thus, the invitation is extended for readers to reflect on these hidden, structural inequities in diverse cultural contexts.

4.6 RECONCEPTUALIZING RACE IN “EIGENTLICH DARF MAN ES NIEMANDEM SAGEN, ABER EUROPA GIBT ES NICHT”

“Bioskoop der Nacht” is by no means the only text by Tawada that takes skin colour and race as its focal point, although this is the only text that uses South Africa and the apartheid system as a historical background for theorizing skin colour, racial formation and differentiation. As the previous chapter highlights, skin serves very diverse purposes in Tawada’s texts: from material to metaphor, from physical and perceptual boundary to permeable membrane, as the place where otherness is inscribed, and also as the guarantor of inclusion and exclusion. Skin is connected to a vast array of meanings, and it is crucial in how subjects see themselves and how they are seen by others. Skin colour is not only race, and race is not just skin colour, yet they are often problematically seen as one and the same, and can lead to subjects being perceived as nothing but their skin colour, thus making them ‘types’ that are already known. One of the most compelling examples of the portrayal of skin colour as the already-known marker of identity can be found in a text I have considered at length in the previous chapters. Therefore, to conclude this chapter, I will re-introduce a dialogue from *Das Bad*, together with the author’s additions to this dialogue from “Eigentlich darf man es niemandem sagen” that I omitted from chapter two because this section is more productively analyzed from the perspective of racial discourse, representation and power. The dialogue involves the female, Japanese protagonist-narrator and her German boyfriend/photographer Xander that readers will remember from the earlier chapter on photography. It takes place immediately after they have discovered that she is absent from all of the photographs he took of her during a previous photo shoot. Xander believes that the
protagonist’s absence from these photos is due to the fact that she lacks a sense of herself as Japanese (“Das kommt sicher daher, dass Sie nicht japanisch genug empfinden” [Das Bad 31]), an assertion which serves as the catalyst for a rather spirited, and highly illuminating, debate between the two characters on contrasting approaches to the meaning of skin colour, race and identity.

The complete discussion is provided below, and the italicized print represents the author’s additions to the discussion in the essay “Eigentlich darf man es niemandem sagen.” Tawada’s later additions to the dialogue between the couple actually serve to emphasize Xander’s racialized thinking that considers difference in skin colour as symbolic of incommensurability between subjects. Beginning with direct speech from the protagonist, the passage reads:

“Glauben Sie wirklich, daß die Haut eine Farbe hat?” fragte ich ihn zögernd, damit ich nicht in den Tonfall einer Aufklärerin verfiel.

Xander lachte. „Was für eine Frage. Oder glauben Sie vielleicht, daß die Farbe von Ihrem Fleisch kommt?”


Xander wurde unruhig und sagte: „Aber das Licht spielt auf eurer Haut anders als auf unserer.”

Daß er die zwei Wörter ‘eurer’ und ‘unserer’ so sehr betonte, überraschte mich. Ich konnte seine Absicht nicht verstehen: Falls für ihn die Identität als ‘Weiβer’ wichtig sein sollte, müßte er eher behaupten, daß keiner von den ‘Weiβen’ eine
papierfarbene Haut besitze und daß die Gemeinsamkeit der sogenannten Weißen auf einer ganz anderen Ebene zu finden sei.

Er streichelte den rechten Arm mit der linken Hand, als wollte er sich vergewissern, daß er eine weiße Hautfarbe besaß.

Ich erwiderte: “Das Licht spielt auf jeder Haut anders bei jedem Menschen, in jedem Monat und bei jedem Tag.” (“Eigentlich darf man es niemandem sagen” 45-46)

“Aber dafür hat jeder eine eigene Stimme in sich. In uns ...”

“In uns gibt es keine Stimme. Nur die Luft ausserhalb unseres Körpers vibriert.”

(These last two lines are only in Das Bad [33]).

“Do you really think skin has a color?” I asked him hesitatingly, so that I didn’t assume a pedantic tone. Xander laughed. “Of course. Or do you think it’s the flesh that’s colored?” Like a physics teacher I explained to him the following:

“How could flesh possibly have color? There’s color in the play of light on the surface of the skin. We don’t have colors inside.” Xander became unsettled and said: “Yes, but the light plays on your skin differently than on ours.” The fact that he so emphatically emphasized the two words ‘your’ and ‘ours’ surprised me. If his identity as ‘white’ is really so important to him, he would at least have to admit no ‘white’ person actually possesses paper-white skin, and that the commonality among whites must be located elsewhere. He stroked his right arm

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178 Ivanovic and Matsunaga outline how the author’s additional commentary to this dialogue in “Eigentlich darf man es niemandem sagen” represents a more detailed and nuanced position by the author that was absent in Das Bad. They remark “der strikt individualistische und damit relativistische Standpunkt, den ihre Protagonistin in Das Bad vertritt, wird im späteren Text umgebrochen in die Eröffnung der Möglichkeit eines anderen Denkens, das für beide Sprecher, und damit für alle Menschen Gültigkeit haben soll. Die Nervosität und gleichzeitig Selbstgewissheit Xanders, der sich über die weiße Hautfarbe seines Körpers seiner kulturellen Identität zu vergewissern sucht, wird über das von diesem Weißen aus konstruierte Negativimage dekonstriuiert. Tawada bemüht in der zweiten Textfassung demnach weniger ein physikalisch begründetes Gegenargument als ein kulturwissenschaftliches: Nur im zweiten Text erscheint jetzt der Begriff der Finsternis, dem sie – entgegen dem auf Antike und Christentum basierenden Lichtglauben der Aufklärung – ein eigenes Erkenntnispotenzial zuschreibt” 128.
with his left hand, as though he wanted to assure himself that he possessed a white skin colour. I responded: “Light is different on every skin, every person, every month, every day.” “Each one of us, on the other hand, has a special voice inside. There is …” “There aren’t any voices inside us. What you hear is air vibrating outside our bodies.” (“The Bath” 11; italicized quotations from “Eigentlich darf man es niemandem sagen” are mine)

While at a superficial first glance this dialogue might appear somewhat simplistic and anachronistic, in fact it is representative of a very consequential theoretical tension between prevailing conceptualizations of racial formation and meaning. Although race is not explicitly mentioned by either of the characters, the connections they are making between skin colour, identity, classification and belonging are all exemplary of how race operates as a system of categorization of human bodies based on phenotypical characteristics. The passage above points to how colour has become synonymous with race, and how one character represents a discourse that naturalizes race and fixes difference by assuming skin colour to be representative of an unchanging essence at the center of subjectivity. The protagonist, on the other hand, represents a much more fluid, contingent and discursive position. It may seem self-evident, but this excerpt is expressing the very essence of racialization, which as Robert Miles describes it, is “a dialectical process by which meaning is attributed to particular biological features of human beings as a result of which individuals may be assigned to a general category of persons which reproduces itself biologically” (Racism 76).

The female protagonist is forwarding a very constructionist and mutable understanding of race here, as for her the concept of race as skin colour can only be conceptualized as an external projection of raced ideologies onto the surface of the body, and which are contextually and temporally contingent and forever open to re-articulation. Xander’s position, on the other hand,
seems to be much more essentialist, naturalist, visually-based and common-sense. This is evidenced by his derisive laughter at the protagonist’s question as to whether or not he actually believes that skin has a colour, and then his rather patronizing response “was für eine Frage.” Following Gramsci, Stuart Hall notes how this ‘common-sense’ or ‘taken-for-granted’ understanding can serve a very ideological function in the maintenance of hegemony in his statement: “it is precisely its spontaneous quality, its transparency, its ‘naturalness’, its refusal to be made to examine the premises on which it is founded, its resistance to change or correction, its effect of instant recognition … [that] … makes common-sense, at one and the same time, ‘spontaneous’, ideological and unconscious” (“Culture, the Media, and the ‘Ideological Effect’” 325). The common-sense concept of race depicted in Tawada’s text is directly tied to the seemingly incontrovertible truth of visible difference represented by the protagonist and Xander’s skin colours, for seeing-is-believing, as the saying goes, and for Xander difference is reflected on the material body.

In “Eigentlich darf man es niemandem sagen,” Tawada even prefaces this dialogue on skin colour with the comment “[d]amals betrachtete Xander die ‘weiße’ Hautfarbe als einen Bestandteil seines Körpers und nicht als Metapher” (“at that time Xander considered ‘white’ skin colour as a component of his body and not as a metaphor”; 45). This statement indicates that Xander’s understanding of skin colour is based on an apparent biological or natural difference, as something that has meaning because it is seen as part of his body, rather than on a discursive, cultural or reified conceptualization. Xander’s approach that race, but more importantly racial differentiation, is premised on self-evidently biological or natural facts is key to the logic that believes race is fixed, static and the external manifestation of an inner essence. Xander’s insistence that skin colour represents an insuperable divide between ‘us’ and ‘them’, which Tawada underscores in her addition to “Eigentlich darf man es niemandem sagen” by again
ironically comparing skin colour to a white piece of paper, implies that the world is separated into two incommensurable racial polarities: white and non-white.

This differentiation has come into effect because of dominant discourses that have served to naturalize difference. As Mirón and Inda indicate in their provocative “Race as a Kind of Speech Act,” this means “differentiating human subjects into a number of natural and distinct races based on their typical phenomenal characteristics, and the consignment of some groups as inferior, … amounts to the familiar practice of locating difference in the presocial realm, as part of nature, hence rendering it immutable” (86). Following the line of the Critical Race Theory of Omi and Winant’s “Racial Formation” and David Theo Goldberg’s “The Semantics of Race,” which they then intersect with the discourse and performativity theory of Derrida, Foucault and Butler, Mirón and Inda take an approach which supports the assertion that “race is not the effect of biological truths, but a historically contingent, socially constructed category of knowledge” (86). That does not mean, however, that these claims about race as an effect of discourse, or that skin colour should be understood as a metaphor, are implying that race is merely a meaningless and empty category that any discerning and self-aware person would recognize as an ideological myth. Mirón and Inda accept that even though race is a discursive effect, it

179 Goldberg’s illuminating article concisely outlines the power of race as a concept. He argues that “[i]ts power has consisted in its adaptive capacity to define population groups, and by extension social agents, as self and other at various historical moments. It has thus facilitated the fixing of characterizations of inclusion and exclusion, giving an apparent specificity other wise lacking to social relations. To be capable of this, race itself must be almost but not quite empty in its own connotative capacity, able to signify not so much in itself as by adopting and giving naturalized form to prevailing conceptions of social group formation at different times” 558.

180 Though their approach sounds problematically anti-materialist, the authors insist that this is not the case. They note “if race is anything, it is material. That is to say, racial difference is an issue of material differences to the extent that race is a difference inscribed on the body. However, racial difference is never simply a function of material differences that are not in some way both marked and formed by discursive practices … [T]he argument here is that there can be no access to a pure materiality of the body outside or before signification and, by extension, no access to a pure materiality of bodily life that is separate from discourse. The signifying act could thus be said to be performative to the extent that it delimits and contours the racial body” 105 n.10.

181 As the title “Race as a Kind of Speech Act” implies, Mirón and Inda’s thesis is heavily based on Butler’s theory of gender performativity. According to the authors, “race, rather than being a biological truth, is a kind of speech act, a performative that in the act of uttering brings into being that which it names … Race works performatively to constitute the racial subject itself, a subject that only procures a naturalized effect through repeated reference to that subject.” This means that “racial performativity is not a singular act of racial subject constitution, but a reiterative...
nevertheless has very real, material implications. The authors claim that “while ‘race’ may not be a natural category, it nevertheless plays a central role in the construction and rationalization of orders of difference, making group relations appear as if they were natural and unchangeable … [I]t gives social relations the façade of long duration, hence reducing, essentializing, and fixing difference” (99). It is crucial to mediate between the two extremes represented in the Tawada dialogue above in order to avoid, as Omi and Winant express, “both the utopian framework which sees race as an illusion we can somehow ‘get beyond’, and also the essentialist formulation which sees race as something objective and fixed, a biological datum. Thus we should think of race as an element of social structure rather than as an irregularity within it, … as a dimension of human representation rather than an illusion” (124).

Diana Fuss advocates for a similar type of intervention into the constructionist/essentialist polemic in *Essentially Speaking* when she states:

On the one hand, to maintain a strict constructionist view which holds that there is no such thing [as essence] in racial identity can block our understanding of the social production of ‘race’. On the other hand, to advocate an even more rigid essentialist view which holds that ‘race’ is self-evidently hereditary or biologistic can also interfere with an analysis of the ideological and political formation of racial subjects. (92)

The ‘self-evidently hereditary or biologistic’ view represented by Xander’s position is undoubtedly undermined in this dialogue, especially if we consider the narrator’s interjection that “[e]r streichelte den rechten Arm mit der linken Hand, als wollte er sich vergewissern, daß er eine weiße Hautfarbe besaß.” This observation suggests an uncertainty and destabilization is creeping in to his racial identity. Xander’s self-assured arrogance has transformed into a
suspicion that even the most secure of his identity markers, that being his race, is not nearly as common-sense nor concrete as he was led to believe.

While there is relatively little attention paid to this dialogue in secondary research, despite the fact that Das Bad and “Eigentlich darf man es niemandem sagen” are two well researched pieces in Tawada scholarship, Ruth Kersting does summarize Xander’s position as follows:


For him it was an established fact that every person has only one body, that the flesh has a set colour, and that everyone has an individual, inner voice at his or her disposal that is a fixed expression of the self and the soul. Conversely the first person narrator refuses to categorically ascribe people according to a constant, stereotyped skin colour into a black-white, hierarchically differentiating binary rubric – a rubric that ignores nuances and change. Xander has normative ideas, such as the idea that the face is an expression of what he sees as typical ‘Japanese feelings’, and he attempts to transpose his ideas onto this modular woman.
Kersting’s comment points to the contrast between the two characters’ positions in their dialogue, as one side subscribes to the idea that skin colour and race are tied to, and reflective of, an ‘inner voice’ or essential core, while the other sees skin colour as a concept that is historically, culturally and spatially contingent, and thus it is susceptible to re-interpretation and re-articulation. Miho Matsunaga also considers the central focus of this dialogue with:

Das Gesprächsthema ist die Hautfarbe. Xander will nicht einsehen, dass die Farbe der Haut je nach dem Menschen anders ist und dass es keine eindeutig “weiße” oder “schwarze” Haut gibt. Für Tawada ist die Hautfarbe etwas, das ständig wechselt, und sie warnt davor, dass man die Farbe der Haut nicht mehr wirklich sieht, wenn einem Bezeichnungen wie “weiße Haut” oder “schwarze Haut” automatisch durch den Kopf gehen. (“Ausländerin, einheimischer Mann, Confidante” 257)

The theme of the conversation is skin colour. Xander doesn’t want to accept that the colour of the skin differs from one person to the next, and that there is no unambiguous ‘white’ or ‘black’ skin. For Tawada skin colour is something in continuous transformation, and she warns that we don’t really see the colour of skin any more when labels like ‘white skin’ or ‘black skin’ automatically run through our heads.

The ‘automatisch’ perception of skin colour to which Matsunaga is referring is identical to the common-sense or taken-for-granted understanding of race that I spoke of earlier, and is directly connected to how skin colour and race naturalize as givens, as fixed, and as beyond contention.

Later in “Eigentlich darf man es niemandem sagen” Tawada explicitly addresses how the power of race as a category of visually-verifiable difference lies in its development as a common-sense and unquestionable truism. The text reads:
Ohne Licht gibt es keine Farbe, und wenn man sich in einer Finsternis befindet, ohne ihr etwas Negatives zu unterstellen, so bietet sie uns die Chance, unsere Augen von den täglichen Bildern zu befreien.

Weil uns die optische Wahrnehmung zu leicht fällt, bleiben wir dabei meistens zu passiv. Aus Faulheit übertragen wir Sprachbilder ins Optische, anstatt das Spiel des Lichtes in Sprache zu übersetzen. Er ist ein Schwarzer, sagt das Gehirn, und die Augen sind dann nicht mehr fähig, seine Haut wirklich wahrzunehmen. (46) Without light there is no colour. When we find ourselves in darkness and don’t assume it means something negative, we are given the chance to free our eyes from everyday images. Because optical perception comes to us so easily, we often remain too passive. Out of laziness we transfer linguistic images into the optical realm, instead of translating the play of light into language. He is black, says the brain, and the eyes are no longer capable of actually perceiving his skin.

The key concepts in this passage are also central to the politics and poetics of Tawada’s writings on a broader scale. Tawada frequently employs literary strategies and tropes that are meant to bring into focus seemingly obvious facets of identity linked to language, race and gender, but which force readers to rethink and reassess the processes involved in their construction, and perhaps question the stability of these concepts and categories. In the above quotation, it is the ease and laziness with which one visually perceives the racial other that lends skin colour its naturalized effect. As a result of this absence of self-reflection, and of this certainty in visual verification, the racial stereotype is born. Critical perception is inhibited by the lure of the visual, and by discourses and representations that congeal over time into fixed, pre-determined types. Stuart Hall outlines the general process of how such stereotypes operate with “stereotypes get hold of the few, simple, vivid, memorable, easily grasped and widely recognized characteristics
about a person, reduce everything about the person to those traits, exaggerate and simplify them, and fix them without change or development to eternity. Stereotyping reduces, essentializes, naturalizes and fixes difference” (Representation 258). Simplicity, habit, fixity and laziness are all core elements to both the Tawada and Hall quotes above, and like so many other examples in Tawada’s writing, this passage advocates for a re-valuation of habitual practices of perception that rely on the immediacy of visual input without the possibility for a more thoughtful self-reflection.

As was the case with the photograph, Tawada’s critique of the laziness of optical perception is again a disavowal of visual realism. This is again emblematic of the critical politics behind the fictive ethnological counter-ethnographic poetics stressed throughout this dissertation. Contrast this critique of the visually observable with Tawada’s emphasis on ‘darkness’ in the above quotation; darkness is being re-conceptualized as ‘enlightenment’ in this case, insofar as closing our eyes to visual reality will ‘free us from the daily images’ that preclude more nuanced understanding and knowledge production. The brain already knows that “er ist ein Schwarzer,” thus making the visual object already known as skin colour. As chapter two of this project emphasized, pleas for less automated and more nuanced engagement with images and between subjects is a common element in Tawada’s writing. Ivanovic describes in “Vernetzt oder verletzt?” how, in Ein Gast, Das Bad and “Ohrenzeugin,” Tawada introduces alternative symbols for perception (in the form of an ear and a tongue) as a means questioning the reliability of visual images, representations and perception. Even towards the end of “Eigentlich darf man es niemandem sagen,” the narrator states “[i]ch möchte aber Europa nicht mehr optisch, sondern mit meiner Zunge wahrnehmen” (50), indicating the need to get away from the easy and habitualized lines of comprehension, sensibility and logic that constrict rather than deepen knowledge of ‘otherness’ or difference.
It is not sight itself as a modality of perception that is being undercut in the above passages, but rather the privileged position sight occupies in the long history of western metaphysics, and the fact that layers of previous images already determine what can be seen. This sentiment of conceptual and perceptual liberation is echoed throughout nearly all of the texts that I have discussed in this project: from the call for a fresh, more thoughtful and less habitual cultural literacy in “Das Fremde aus der Dose,” to the re-valuation of photographs as direct reflections of reality and photographic practice as complicit in subjectivity construction and subordination in Das Bad, to the spotlight on whiteness as an ideologically transparent racial category that operates through the pretence of normativity in “Bioskoop der Nacht” and “Eigentlich darf man es niemandem sagen.” Each of these critical interrogations of knowledge production, representation and intercultural engagement is articulated through the lens of Tawada’s highly self-reflective and subversive, fictionally ethnographic narrator who travels and lives in foreign countries. In combination with each other, photography, skin and race interlink and formulate an overarching ‘fictive ethnology’ that lies at the heart of Tawada’s writing, and which ultimately comprises the essence of her political and poetical approach.

4.7 CONCLUSION

The primary impulse for this cultural studies analysis that focused exclusively on “Bioskoop der Nacht,” Das Bad and “Eigentlich darf man es niemandem sagen” and their representations and interrogations of skin colour, race, racial performativity and the ideological power of whiteness, was a direct result of the scarcity of research into either Tawada’s South African story or the representation of skin colour, race and processes of racial construction in her works. Because, to date, there is but one article that has taken “Bioskoop der Nacht” as its singular focus of inquiry was part of my motivation for analyzing “Bioskoop der Nacht” at such
length. However, the fact that it is Tawada’s most extensive reflection on skin, skin colour and racial categories was the main reason for its centrality. As the only piece included under the sub-heading “Südafrikanische Zungen” in Überseezungen, “Bioskoop der Nacht” is a fictional narrative that again features a travelling narrator, who this time voyages to South Africa in order to engage with, and interrogate, intercultural and multilingual identity constructions. This text is a rich source of analysis because of the historical and theoretical context against which it is written, and with which it is clearly in dialogue. The initial introduction of Afrikaans as a kind of conceptual paradox that summons associations of its part in the articulation of apartheid racial segregation, but also the fact that it is a multi-accentual pastiche of various and incongruent voices, sets the stage for a destabilization of notions of racial and cultural homogeneity that the text later articulates. Severing links between identity and essence, in all its manifestations, is a key component to the texts addressed in this and the other chapters. By focusing on representations of the tension between constructing racial unity and the ever present threat of fracturing that unity, and also exposing racial borders as malleable, contingent and open to re-articulation, I have demonstrated how “Bioskoop der Nacht” ultimately serves to undercut not only the fixity of racial difference in a white-supremacist regime, but also how it invites readers to reflect on more subtle, more contemporary, and more immediate contexts like Japan, Europe and North America.

The representation of whiteness and its theoretical interconnectivity with transparency and unmarked skin certainly extends the power of colour-coded skin outside of the South African context and into a western one. With the support of whiteness studies scholars like Ruth Frankenberg, Steve Garner, Richard Dyer and Peggy McIntosh, I have detailed how the reified construct of whiteness exemplifies the normalizing work of power, which in this instance operates ideologically by remaining unseen as a racial category, or as the standard against which
all other marked skins are related. Far from establishing whiteness as an essentialized category that needs to be celebrated as a binding marker of identity, Tawada’s texts, and the theory just mentioned, attempt to make whiteness, as a mechanism of power, visible to those who benefit from it without recognizing it. Richard Dyer articulates this well with “power in contemporary society habitually passes itself off as embodied in the normal as opposed to the superior. This is common to all forms of power, but it works in a peculiarly seductive way with whiteness, because of the way it seems rooted in common-sense thought, in things other than ethnic difference” (“White” 45). The power of being unmarked or ‘just human’ infuses subjects with material and psychical privileges that only become apparent once one is ‘marked’. It is, however, much less common to attempt to pass as marked than it is to pass as unmarked, and the former would be considered performance, while the latter would be survival. Although Tawada’s text utilizes the explicit and extreme example of South Africa for its production of race as hyper-visible, this context should compel readers to focus on the much more subtle, albeit equally consequential and hierarchical, construction and maintenance of differentiation based on skin-colour that still persists in western contexts. The paradox of white privilege is that, while on the one hand it is unambiguously visually perceived, on the other hand it is guaranteed by the power of invisibility and normativity instead of conspicuousness. Tawada again, in the texts examined in this chapter, brings the unseen and common-place structures and processes underpinning social relations and differentiation into focus, and forces readers to reflect on what seems so self-evidently natural and beyond question.

Finally, in this chapter I focused on narrative representations of the processes, discourses and physical spaces that are not merely reflective, but also productive, of the racial categories that subjects are forced to repetitively and unconsciously identify with. By centering on the depictions of the segregated public toilets and the whites-only public bench in “Bioskoop der
Nacht,” I not only situated this text within the apartheid policies that built the racial categories South African subjects were legally obliged to internalize, but also show in general how humans are racially interpellated and performatively constituted as racial subjects through the discourses, social practices and institutional and public spaces that hail them everyday and everywhere. Yet the categories themselves, just like the identities they serve to regulate, turn out to be fluid, malleable and vulnerable to reinterpretation and rearticulation, thus remaining consistent with Tawada’s overarching theme of metamorphosis and a resistance to fixity.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION - TAWADA’S TEXTS AS CULTURAL CRITICISM

The innovative impulse of this dissertation lies in its stress on Tawada’s texts, and her entire literary approach, as political and cultural criticisms. My argument focuses on and teases apart the ideological implications and investments of photography as a representational practice, skin as a border and legible surface crucial to a subject’s belonging and exclusion, and race as a performative, rather than natural and self-evident, category used to classify and stratify social groups. The complex and contentious topic of race has been essentially omitted from discussions of Tawada’s texts despite its almost ubiquitous presence, and thus I have made race, and its relation to ethnic, national and linguistic identities, central to my analysis. There is little doubt that Tawada’s texts are highly experimental, often surreal, playful and heavily premised on the interconnectivity between language, culture and identity. Yet what is frequently overlooked is how highly critical, interrogatory and provocative they also are, particularly when they feature characters or groups experiencing marginalization, oppression and exclusion because of their race, gender, ethnicity or nationality. Photography, skin and race in Tawada’s texts are complicit in the construction of frontiers and boundaries, and it is these frontiers and boundaries, as spatial and conceptual divisions generated by ideologies of incompatibility and oppression, that Tawada is representing and interrogating throughout her oeuvre, and thus I have analyzed the politics behind her poetics.

As the project’s title indicates, the purpose of this study on select German language prose, poetry and essays by the contemporary Japanese author Yoko Tawada was to investigate Tawada’s ethno-critical (as a kind of counter-ethnography) literary approach that is premised on a highly unstable and self-reflexive authorial and narratorial perspective. The critically ethnographic position that underpins the author’s literary technique reflects the subversive
politics present in all of Tawada’s representations of ethnically, racially, nationally or linguistically identified and ‘othered’ subjects, and problematizes the very notion of representing a subject’s true, authentic self. By no means then do I contend that this critically ‘ethnographic’, or ‘fictive ethnological’ (as she labels it), approach in Tawada’s texts presents first-hand or objective observations and explanations of foreign cultures and peoples, or that these texts are created with the intention of articulating or revealing the differences which comprise cultural, racial or ethnic essence. While nearly all the Tawada texts I analyzed in this project feature a narrator or protagonist who travels or lives in a foreign country, there is no attempt at representing the unique cultural characteristics of the people and places encountered, nor do these texts reflect on the narrator or protagonist’s own essentialized identity as a Japanese female living in Germany. Tawada’s texts, although primarily concerned with investigating cultural identities, represent and express the contingent, processual and performative nature of gendered, racial, ethnic and national identities, instead of depicting so-called authentic and fixed subjects as they already are.

The fact that Tawada frames her writing as fictively ethnographic means that she is not, as I mentioned, presenting insights into cultural differences or truths from some kind of reliable ‘Japanese’ (or German) viewpoint, but rather is highlighting a destabilization of the authority and coherency of both the represented ‘self’ and the author/ethnographic observer in her texts. In “Eigentlich darf man es niemandem sagen, aber Europa gibt es nicht” the narrator makes it clear that there is no such thing as an authentic Japanese perspective, but rather only a constantly shifting perception that varies with time, space and audience. The passage reads:

Ich muß mir, um Europa sehen zu können, eine japanische Brille aufsetzen. Da es so etwas wie eine ‘japanische Sicht’ nicht gab und gibt – und für mich ist das keine bedauerliche Tatsache -, ist diese Brille zwangsläufig fiktiv und muß
ständig neu hergestellt werden. Meine japanische Sicht ist insofern keinesfalls authentisch, trotz des Faktums, daß ich in Japan geboren und aufgewachsen bin. (50)

In order to be able to see Europe, I have to put on my Japanese glasses. Because there was, and is, no such thing as a ‘Japanese view’ – which for me is not a regrettable fact – these glasses are necessarily fictive and must be constantly reproduced. My Japanese ‘view’ is in no way authentic, in spite of the fact that I was born in Japan and grew up there.

By foreclosing the very possibility of a real, authentic position from which her narrators or protagonists can judge the cultures and people they encounter, Tawada already deflects the critique that her texts are mere reversals of Eurocentric or Orientalist expressions of, or engagements with, otherness, or that she is simply inverting binary models of comprehending the foreign by reflecting the ethnographic gaze that traditionally looks out, rather than within. The explicitly self-reflexive narratorial position is part and parcel of the entire deconstructive, critical politics and poetics connecting the German language Tawada texts investigated, and it is this critical technique that I have explicated from a theoretical grounding in post-structural, media, gender, post-colonial and performativity theories read in a literary and cultural studies context.

Within this fictive ethnological and ethnographic framework, my dissertation focused on three core thematic threads in Tawada’s texts, namely: photography, skin and race, and how these three threads are entangled in Tawada’s critical interrogation of the processes of constructing, writing, reading and classifying bodies and their identities within a highly rigid and regulatory grid of intelligibility. To accomplish this, I first considered Tawada’s Das Bad and its

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182 Tawada also explicitly challenges the potential critique of reverse-Orientalism, stating “[m]an könnte Europa nicht nur als eine Figur, sondern auch als Summe von Bildern verstehen. Ich könnte einige schöne Postkarten aus meiner Sammlung herausnehmen und daraus eine imaginäre Welt bilden. Ich werde das aber hier nicht tun, weil die Gefahr besteht, daß das Ergebnis eine bloße Umkehrung des Orientalismus wäre” (“Eigentlich darf man” 50).
representations of photographs as agents of knowledge and power, and photography as an ideologically invested representational practice, by drawing the numerous implied links between the visual and textual depictions of photography in the text with its capacity to objectify, commodify and fetishize, but also surveil and discipline, the photographed subject. The hierarchical relationship between subject and photographer becomes especially illuminating if we consider that in Das Bad the female, Japanese protagonist is being used as a photo model for a Western, tourist marketing campaign. While ostensibly harmless, this campaign actually attempts to represent the protagonist as a representative of a pre-conceived imaginary, as a stereotyped image of exotic and erotic allure, which thereby highlights the metonymic quality of the photograph. The attempt to fix a racial or ethnic essence by capturing the protagonist’s image through representational closure fails however, although it does suggest that this kind of representation is more a reflection of the one doing the representing rather than of the one being represented. This of course implies that there is power in representation, subsequently eliciting a history of collusion between ethnographic photography and colonialist projects that, through imaging, classification and display, served to construct and categorize a highly mediated and subjective image of non-European racial and ethnic otherness. However, as the end of this analysis outlined, there is also a prevalent instability in the photograph as a testament of reality. Much like the concept of race that it helped constitute through visual imagery, the photograph is revealed to be neither as fixed, eternal nor natural as it is often considered to be.

Tawada’s interrogatory counter-ethnographic position exposes the sedimented layers concealing cultural processes and power relations as though they were natural, self-evident givens. The photograph, often masked by the transparency of ‘naturalness’, as a ‘message without a code’, is exemplary of how cultural and political meaning and influences can be hidden under a visual, common-sense cloaking. So from the seemingly objective and unmediated visual
image of the photograph I then shifted my analysis to another concept frequently mistaken as
singularly biological or naturally occurring, or misunderstood as pure material without symbolic
meaning: human skin. What became immediately clear in my investigation of texts like
Verwandlungen, “Das Fremde aus der Dose,” “Eine Hautnahme,” “Wo Europa anfängt” and Das
Bad is that there is, and can be, no singular, universal and all-encompassing understanding or
definition of skin as a literary metaphor, cultural construction or visually verifiable, biological
fact. Rather, as the texts I considered illuminate, skin is an exhaustingly diverse and
contradictory concept that can serve as the cause of an individual’s marginalization and physical
and psychical suffering, but it can also be re-figured (and re-written) as a potentially liberating
symbol towards inclusion, self-becoming and regeneration. Tawada questions the common-sense
and taken-for-granted acceptance of skin as something that just is by puncturing it, peeling it,
making it leak and re-writing it altogether. Therefore, an extensive, theoretically diverse and
close textual reading was developed in order to expose skin’s intercultural, historically
contingent and ever-changing complexities.

Especially in “Das Fremde aus der Dose,” Tawada represents skin as a surface of
inscription and legibility that can perform as the site and marker of an individual’s otherness
when read through habitual, naturalized and, often pre-conceived and limited, codes of
intelligibility. This text assumes Tawada’s counter-ethnographic perspective by staging the
Japanese female protagonist as the object of observation, who is neither feared nor viewed
suspiciously as an unknown element, but rather is already known as the visible stranger. The
narrator then exposes and critiques how the foreignness inscribed onto the protagonist’s skin is
appropriated as a marketing technique through totalizing and packaging an easily consumable
semantics of otherness into a canned commodity. Yet, as Tawada demonstrates in her subversion
of Lavater’s physiognomic interpretation, the external packaging is no one-to-one representation
of an internal essence; there is no ‘true self’ inside, but rather beneath the layers are only more layers, or more signifiers that are not attached to a stable, core signified.

In a similar vein, I then detailed how Tawada’s depictions of masks that are inscribed onto the faces of foreign subjects by the external expectations of observers also undercuts the notion of an authentic self hiding behind the masks. Analogous to Butler’s concept of gender performativity, Tawada’s texts like Das Bad and Verwandlungen present the seemingly irreconcilable tension between performing identities within the limited and rigid regulatory frame of discourse and normativity, and the possibility of disrupting and undermining this repetitive process by revealing gender, but also racial and sexual identities, to be imitations, groundless performances, and citations or copies of an original that does not exist. Masks, whether real or symbolic, prove to be ever-present in Tawada’s texts, in the sense of cosmetic self-stylizations that seek to meet prescribed gender, racial and ethnic body image ideals, or in terms of externally imposed, culturally specific expectations written into the faces of Tawada’s protagonists, and which falsely give the impression that the authentic self, the true identity, resides within.

Finally, with respect to “Eine Hautnahme,” “Wo Europa anfängt” and Das Bad, I examined how all three texts work in concert to produce a multivalent conceptualization of skin as symbolic of fluidity and change, and as a boundary and landscape metaphor that is historically and culturally contingent. In all of Tawada’s texts, skin proves to be susceptible to discourses of power that work to naturalize it as rooted in nature, and thus outside the realm of discussion. My investigation then transitioned back to Das Bad, as I analyzed skin as a surface vulnerable to psychical influences from beneath, which then manifest as dermal anomalies (scales and blisters) on the bodily exterior. With recourse to Didier Anzieu’s notion of the skin ego, I conversely considered skin as constitutive of the protagonist’s own sense of self, although, as we witness
from the protagonist’s constant bathing, self-excoriation and self-surveillance, skin ultimately becomes the symbolic site of her need to conform to normative ideals of appearance and lifestyle. The skin in Tawada’s texts is discursive and material, it is paradoxically a boundary that can include and exclude, it can be stubbornly fixed or pierced and flayed, it can register psychical disturbances or it can cause them, but, as these texts suggest, it is never distinct from politics, history or conceptualizations of identity.

In the last of the three core chapters, my analysis evolved from skin as a literary trope signifying boundaries and bounded bodies, to how skin and skin colour are made meaningful, and normalized and naturalized under the complex, contingent and contested category of race. Race is subtly present, though never actually named as such, in several of Tawada’s texts as a means by which protagonists’ self-identify. Yet, more consequentially, it also operates as a category through which they are seen, known, and ultimately classified, by others. It is cited as the visually verifiable mark of difference, or as unmarked normativity in Tawada’s texts, and thus I situated my literary studies analysis within a predominantly cultural studies frame utilizing Critical Race theory, theories of racial performativity and theories of whiteness studies. To best illustrate Tawada’s highly critical engagement with, and deconstruction of, racialized identities, my analysis first focused on the short story “Bioskoop der Nacht” from Überseezungen. “Bioskoop der Nacht,” inspired by the French surrealist ethnographer Michel Leiris’s African expedition a half century before, again features a travelling narrator who directs her critical counter-ethnographic gaze towards pre- and post-apartheid South Africa. South Africa, in this text, does not serve as a context for a comparative study between different cultural groups and their defining characteristics presented by an outside, objective observer, but rather as a kind of heavily connoted, historically charged stage for Tawada to interrogate the ideological implications of race as a unifying and exclusionary category. Furthermore, this distinctive
historical and political stage also shows how race needs to be discursively constructed, retroactively applied and then repetitively performed in order that it pass as a natural, pre-discursive and transcendental given (‘passing’ in these texts does not mean passing as another race for survival or personal gain, but passing as though race is a real thing). Discourses do not only exist as language or linguistic phenomena, but also in practice – they are embodied in institutions, everyday rituals, and public spaces. As I have demonstrated with respect to specific textual examples, spaces like a public toilet and a segregated public bench can be consequential in producing a subject’s identification with a racial category, over time sedimenting this identity as a naturalized and normalized fact of nature that seemingly never required constituting in the first place.

With recourse to Critical Race theory and theories of racial performativity, I then detailed how colour communities and colour consciousness are neither ready-made nor self-evident – the reified category whiteness needs to be created. Therefore, I have attempted to not only situate this text within the apartheid policies that built the racial categories South African subjects were legally obliged to identify with, but also show more generally how humans are racially interpellated and performatively constituted as racial subjects through the discourses, social practices and institutional and public spaces that hail them everyday and everywhere. The racial categories themselves, however, just like the identities they serve to regulate, are revealed to be fluid, malleable and vulnerable to reinterpretation and rearticulation, thereby undermining the essentialist logic that race is a naturally unifying category, or that race is something one possesses rather than performs.

I concluded my argument in this dissertation by focusing on the representations of whiteness in “Bioskoop der Nacht” and the essay “Eigentlich darf man es niemandem sagen.” Whiteness in these two texts performs a very different role, though with similar outcomes. In
both texts the reified construct of whiteness exemplifies the normalizing work of power, which in one case operates through its hyper-visibility, whereas in the other it functions ideologically by remaining *unseen* as a racial category, or as the standard against which all other marked skins are related. Far from establishing whiteness as an essentialized category that needs to be celebrated as a binding category, Tawada’s texts, and in relation to the whiteness studies theory of Ruth Frankenberg, Richard Dyer, Claudia Benthien and Peggy McIntosh, attempt to make whiteness, as a mechanism of power, visible to those who benefit from it without recognizing it. The power of being unmarked or ‘just human’ infuses subjects with material and psychical privileges that only become apparent once one is ‘marked’ and thus denied access. A position of neutrality and normativity is a position of power, insofar as the seemingly neutral observer can represent others without prejudice. Yet, as the chapters on photography and race underscore, this neutrality is a fantasy and a fallacy. Tawada texts, as all three chapters attempt to outline, bring the unseen and common-place structures and processes underpinning representational practices, social relations and differentiation into focus, and force readers to reflect on, and ultimately criticize, what seems so self-evidently natural and beyond question.
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