The frequency of terms like «gaze/Blick,» «view,» «look,» «eyes,» «seeing,» «visions,» «image,» «imagination,» «iconography,» «Spektakel,» «Schau-stellung/Zurschaustellung,» and «voyeur» in titles of postcolonial analyses indicates the great importance postcolonial critics have placed on the visuality of the colonial imagination and discourse. Birgit Tautz’s volume Color 1800/1900/2000: Signs of Ethnic Difference (2004), for example, investigates how visual perception has contributed to the construction of racial difference and how vision and perception have related to representation and textuality over the course of the past two centuries. Thomas Miller’s comparative study of German and American anthropology in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries outlines how «physical-type» anthropology «sought to build a scientific racial typology from observations of individual characteristics» (124): «Differences in skin and eye pigmentation were considered essential markers of differentiation among human groups» (126). Such descriptions in medical and anthropological scholarship influenced the «scientific and popular discourse about race and the historical origins of human populations» (124). Although nineteenth-century anthropometry was gradually abandoned after its failure to provide an objective racial classification, a hierarchicalized, neo-Darwinian anthropology of human variation from lower to higher states and popular discourse about supposedly natural racial differences continued well into the twentieth century (124). In Looking for the Other (1997), Ann Kaplan investigates «modernism’s two powerful objectifying gazes – those of patriarchy, the much-debated <male gaze,› and of colonialism – the <imperial gaze>» (22). She concludes that «looking is power» (4) as it «symbolizes ways of being toward others, ways of expressing domination» (299). In terms of vision, Kaplan differentiates between gaze as «a one-way subjective» activity and look which «connote[s] a process, a relation» (xvi).

Vision, observation, and perception have played a central role in the construction of biological categories, in the visual tropes that pervaded the categorization of human bodies, and in the application of these categories to
social classification in racial and racist terms\(^3\) that resulted in segregation, discrimination, and the construction of imperialist hierarchies. While racial identity has been socially constructed, it has been inscribed in the body through a taxonomy invented and defined by the white observer.

Applying theoretical approaches to the interplay between vision and racism, I revisit here textual and visual images of European-African encounters as they are represented in selected European works of anthropology, literature, and art around 1900.\(^4\) More specifically, I focus on contradictions between colonial and anticolonial elements as well as on the intersection of racism and sexism as they are reflected in representations of the imperial gaze across cultural and racial divides. My investigation includes representations of colonial-era gazes in Dr. C. H. Stratz’s 1904 *Naturgeschichte des Menschen. Grundriss der somatischen Anthropologie. Mit 342 farbigen Abbildungen und 5 farbigen Tafeln*; in literary works such as fin-de-siècle Peter Altenberg’s *Ashantee* (1897) and Rainer Maria Rilke’s 1902/03 poem «Die Aschanti

Figure 1: Cartoon of scientist inspecting Saartje Baartman, marketed as «The Hottentot Venus.» Engraving ca. 1850.
(Jardin d’Acclimatation)”; and in art work such as Wilhelm Gause’s gougaches depicting African Ashanti who were exhibited in Vienna in 1896 and 1897; to expand on European perspectives, I briefly refer to Édouard Manet’s and Pablo Picasso’s paintings both entitled *Olympia* (1863 and 1901), and Picasso’s *Les Desmoiselles d’Avignon* (1907).

In 1904, after Germany had proudly been the third-largest colonial power (after Britain and France) for twenty years, Dr. C. H. Stratz published his compendium. The title page announces the inclusion of 324 color illustrations (photographs of naked human beings from around the globe) and five charts that are intended to serve as «objektives Beweismaterial» so that readers and onlookers may draw their own conclusions (V–VI). As Stratz’s foreword explicitly states, his volume is designed to educate «a wider audience» (V) about scientific scholarship on the history of human development. It furthermore intends «die theoretische Grundlage [zu] schaffen, von der die praktischen Versuche zur Verbesserung und Veredlung des Menschen- geschlechts ausgehen müssen» (V). This allusion to racial hygiene – which precludes interracial sexual relations, as the white European race is envisioned at the top and other races further down on the evolutionary scale – is accompanied by a statement that puts anthropological science proudly at the service of German colonialism: «[V]on ganz besonderer Wichtigkeit ist sie [die Verbesserung und Veredlung des Menschengeschlechts] für einen kolonialen Staat, zu welchem auch Deutschland in den letzten Jahren mehr und mehr geworden ist» (V). The volume promotes the notion of the white race as the most advanced by claiming scientific authority – note the author’s academic title on the cover – underscored by the frequent use of scientific terminology to categorize physical phenomena and «typical» racial attributes and by combining the text with overwhelming visual «proof» to substantiate observations and conclusions regarding racial typology which had already been called into question by another branch of anthropology (e.g., by Franz Boas) years earlier (Miller 130). Normalcy is measured by white European standards as the caption explaining the photograph of a young white woman suggests: «normaler weiblicher Körper (Böhmin)» (173, my emphasis). By contrast, a group of indigenous Herero from Southwest Africa (today’s Namibia) is considered deficient: «ausgesprochen primitiv» (348). The political element in Stratz’s vision-based classification and hierarchicalization of races becomes obvious when we consider how this approach contributed – in the name of science – to justifying the colonial rule of supposedly superior «civilized» German colonizers over supposedly inferior «primitives» African natives in the German colony of Southwest Africa in a political climate that
made possible the genocide of the Herero at the hands of German colonial troops in the very year Stratz’s volume was published (1904).

The racist implications of Stratz’s visual categorization of humankind are accompanied by sexist imagery: the photo of a young, naked white woman shows her abashedly hiding her face (173); by contrast, naked black women and men are presented in full view emphasizing their supposedly primitive nature, e.g., by depicting men with bow and arrow and wild, «unkempt» hair (373) or by photographing young women in suggestive poses such as with arms folded behind their head and exposing their bare breasts (344). In the guise of a scientific quest and accompanied by scholarly semantics, Stratz’s compilation of photographs of naked people, most of them women, resembles a pornographic publication that eroticizes the exotic. The volume thus helps construct and consolidate the stereotypical image of black women’s supposedly highly developed, untamed and innate sensuality, lack of a «civilized» sense of decency and morality, and sexual availability – in this case, to the camera and thus to the presumably white European male onlooker and reader.

As early as «in the eighteenth century, anatomy and public exhibitions in anatomical theaters were used to present theories of racial difference […] and to forge, through the community of spectators, the awareness of racial, ethnic and […] fictionalized national communities» (Tautz 28). By 1900, photography allowed for mass production of visual images that promoted notions of ethnic alterity and pseudoscientific concepts of racial and national communities. While Stratz’s intention may have been honorable in the sense of spreading knowledge about other cultures, his presentation of them demonstrates that the author could not shed the a priori patterns of perception regarding race, gender/sex, and nation that shaped his gaze through what Mary Louise Pratt calls «imperial eyes.»

The tight link between gaze, visuality, and racial differentiation had intensified in European discourse since the early 1800s when competition for and exploitation of colonies increased, particularly in Africa, and national pride was on the rise in European countries. In his 1811 Lehrbuch der Naturphilosophie, Lorenz Oken, along with numerous European scientists of his day, categorizes black Africans as ape-men and differentiates between the black skin-man and the white eye-man; he thereby determines and justifies the «superior» position of the reflective, systematic white observer vis-à-vis the «inferior» black object of observation reduced to his or her exterior appearance (Benthien 180). At almost the same time South African Saartje Baartman, who was marketed as the «Hottentot Venus,» was exhibited in England and France for her protrusive buttocks. The rumor of her peculiar
genitalia drew crowds. Her racial/sexual «anomaly» was associated with «animality» (Shohat 69), and she was treated by medical and social scientists throughout the nineteenth century as an icon of sexual and racial differences (see fig. 1; Gilman, «Black Bodies» 232–39). Her image literally «gave body to racist theory» (Lindfors 62) and was exploited to justify the concept of the white and black races’ «natural» differences in intellect, civilization and human rights, or the lack thereof.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, exhibiting one «exotic» individual for public observation gave way to a stream of ethnographic exhibits which presented images of entire foreign – including African – landscapes, animals, and groups of people to white audiences in European cities. Völkerschauen, such as those organized by Carl Hagenbeck as early as the 1870s, gained enormous mass popularity and became a financially lucrative enterprise. «In a culture of colonial consumption, Blackness [was] made to serve the desire for exoticism and exhibitionism» (Badenberg, «Mohrenwäsche» 163). Frequently, the «ethnic villages» were set up in zoological gardens which enhanced the impression of the projected natural, animal-like primitivism of the human exhibits. While staged as quite inauthentic spectacles, the shows suggested to the white European onlookers authentic encounters with indigenous «savages.» Visually demonstrating an ostensibly natural polarity between European civilization, technological advancement, modernity and presumed superiority on the one hand and primitivism and presumed inferiority on the other, between Us and Them, Self and Other in general and White and Black in particular, ethnographic exhibits contributed to presenting the white man’s domination over other races as the result of a supposedly natural inequality and thus justifying colonialism as a supposedly natural political system.

At the same time, a new wave of romanticization of «natural (wo)man» cast her/him as counterposed to the assumed physical degradation and moral decadence of industrialized populations (Miller 124). «Having defined the dark race in opposition to civilization with industrial culture, the native was therefore perceived as being «purer,» nearer to the origin of man» (Vera 117).

In the realm of turn-of-the-century literature, we find in Peter Altenberg’s Ashantee (1897) an example of romanticizing Africans as «purer,» more genuine, and less affected than Europeans – more specifically Austrians. The work displays an ambivalence between admiration, even idealization, of the Ashanti as «paradise people» (1897 dedication; 2007, 27) in the eyes of a well-meaning Austrian on the one hand and Eurocentrism, racial essentialism, and sexist perspectives on the other. In his collection of Impressionistic sketches, Altenberg describes the encounters of the work’s autobiographical protago-
nist called Sir Peter and Peter A. with a group of Ashanti tribespeople from the Gold Coast of Africa, the former British colony known today as Ghana. Members of the real-life Ashanti had indeed been installed as living objects in a popular ethnographic exhibit from July through October 1896 in the Vienna Tiergarten am Schüttel, then still located in the Prater. While Altenberg’s depiction of them shows genuine curiosity about cultural differences, scholars’ interpretations of the images he constructs vary. Like Stratz, Altenberg employs exoticism in his portrayal of the exhibited Ashanti; however, he does so not to promulgate Western hegemony, but rather to criticize the dehumanizing prejudices common in turn-of-the-century Vienna where the ethnic and national tensions of the multinational Habsburg Empire created a political and social climate of racism and stark differentiation between Self and Other.

While most of the thirty-eight episodes of Ashantee present images of daily life in the Vienna Ashanti exhibit and the protagonist’s friendly relations with and admiration of a group of adolescent Ashanti girls, several episodes explicitly target Altenberg’s fellow Viennese who are depicted staring insensitively at the African Other and as lacking cross-cultural empathy. Early in the text, the autobiographical character – here in his role as tutor of two white Viennese children – is shown to explicitly reject the notion of polarizing Europeans and Africans on the grounds of light or “dunkle Pigment-Zellen” (Altenberg 1987, 234; 2007, 32). He declares the supposed “Abgründe zwischen uns und ihnen” to be constructed by the “dumme Volk, [das] sich über sie stellt, sie behandelt wie exotische Tiere” (ibid). In clear opposition to the popular vision-based concepts of racial classification and hierarchicalization as promoted, for example, by Stratz, the text openly criticizes European arrogance, the exoticizing of Africans, the linking of them to animals, and then placing them on a lower rung of universal human development than northern Europeans.

In almost satirical fashion, one episode in Ashantee describes a rich Viennese lady visually inspecting Akolé, a young Ashanti woman, whom she considers purchasing for her decadent son as “ein ideales Moment […], eine Medizin der schlaffen erschöpften Seele, ein Tonikum” (1987, 251; 2007, 62). The African girl’s natural skin color figures, in the Viennese lady’s imagination, as an exotic asset adding to the anticipated healing effect on the Austrian victim of civilization. The text calls attention to the self-serving, parasitical elements inherent in the binary opposition of nature vs. culture in general and of classifying African primitivism as a refreshing remedy for a decadent European civilization in particular. Another episode entitled «L’homme médiocre» (1987, 257–59; 2007, 75–76) introduces a mediocre
man who wishes to buy the services of a black woman as would a john in a brothel. The reader is made to think of him as an insensitive lowlife who, unlike Peter A., does not appreciate the Ashanti «paradise» women’s true visual and spiritual beauty of body and soul, but views them as exotic lovers.

Figure 2: Original book cover of Peter Altenberg’s Ashantee. Berlin: S. Fischer, 1897. (Dokumentationsstelle, Literaturhaus, Vienna; reprinted in Altenberg 2007, 3)
for hire. The Viennese onlookers at the Ashanti exhibit are thus cast as ignorant, prejudiced and lust-filled observers who are fascinated by the Ashanti, yet cross the cultural and racial divide merely by gazing at them and occasionally by touching them, but not by reaching out with their hearts. By highlighting their haughty, insensitive, and selfish attitudes which manifest themselves in their inspecting and calculating gazes and consolidate «the abyss [...] between us and them» rather than bridge it, the text exposes the polarizing, hierarchicalizing, and exploitive nature of European racism, exoticism, and primitivism—in the sense of defining the Other as exotic or primitive—and the fact that white Europeans looked at black Africans as possessions to be purchased, consumed, and disposed of. Altenberg’s criticism furthermore demonstrates that Eurocentric and colonialist gazes and attitudes were alive and well in turn-of-the-century Austria despite the fact that the Habsburg Empire had no overseas colonies.

Altenberg’s critical depiction of the racist distance, divisive gaze, and emphasis on difference, control, and ownership exhibited by the fictional Viennese, is contrasted with positive descriptions of Sir Peter’s unprejudiced, integrative, interracial interaction and seemingly disinterested look of admiration, if we employ Kaplan’s above-mentioned differentiation between gaze as being one-directional and signaling power and look as a dialogical process building a two-way relationship (Looking for the Other xvi). Unlike the other Viennese, Altenberg’s fictional doppelgänger is characterized as an emotionally involved and sympathetic crosser of cultural and racial boundaries who derives his «anthropological» knowledge about Ashanti customs and their mentality from sincere interest in and observation of them, and even learning their language. In turn, his fictional Ashanti are constructed to view him as a friend whom they welcome into their most intimate space. The way the text renders the Ashanti’s responses mirrors the evaluative contrast between most Austrians’ exploitive gaze at the Ashanti Other and Peter A.’s empathetic look at them. While Altenberg’s female African characters are shown despising ordinary Viennese, they figuratively and literally embrace Sir Peter irrespective of his sexually charged gaze at their «tadellose[n] Körperbau [und] Haut wie Seide» (1987, 242; 2007, 45) and his frequent erotic touching which is at no point in the text equated with the encroachments of the «mediocre man.» This self-aggrandizing take on the author’s fictional representative in the eyes of the text’s Ashanti strangely matches the colonial legend of the benevolent German(-speaking) colonizer who, unlike his British or French counterparts, was supposedly loved by his devoted native subjects (Friedrichsmeyer et al. 21).
Altenberg’s observation and literary representation of interracial gazes and looks thus extend to the reverse look of the Ashanti at the Austrians, or shall we say, to his perception and interpretation of it. If we take, with Miller, reciprocity as the essence of the look, then, «looking at the world, what I see is a picture of the world looking back» (124). Altenberg constructs a picture of the world – including the Ashanti Other – that matches his desired image of the Self. According to his letters, his real-life Ashanti friends gave «black» looks – in the sense of both contemptuous and African – to the Viennese (to Annie Holitscher, August 11, 1896, cit. Kosler 165) while they met him with the «mildesten Blicke»: «Wenn ich komme, strahlt ihr Auge in Freundschaft» (to Gretl Engländer, August 5, 1896, cit. Lunzer and Lunzer-Talos 87). However, while the fictionalized accounts of his encounters in Ashantee praise the African children’s eyes as «sanfteste Augen der Welt. Paradieses-Augen» (Altenberg 1987, 238; 2007, 38), the text at no point portrays the Ashanti as either looking or gazing. This seems appropriate, considering Kaplan’s thesis that being at liberty to look involves an element of «power» in the sense of independence and that the one-directional gaze even symbolizes «ways of expressing domination» (Looking for the Other 4, 299). Altenberg’s fictionalized Ashanti, just as the ones in real life, are not endowed with the power to gaze at their Viennese environment in the sense of controlling it. By interpreting the look in their eyes and quoting Ashanti reactions in Altenberg’s translations of their native tongue, the text creates the illusion of providing access to unmediated, authentic Ashanti sentiments and invites the reader to take an ostensibly unbiased look behind the Ashanti scenes. Altenberg’s appropriation of their voices and ways of looking to support his own cause is, in fact, «dispossessing the subaltern of authority over […] identity,» as Ella Shohat would call it (41).

Altenberg seems to be aware and critical of what Kaplan identifies one hundred years later as «the oppressive structure of the objectifying gaze and the reliance on (superficial) exterior bodily signs (like skin color) that feed prejudice and hate» (Looking for the Other 299). Yet, he excludes his own, or his autobiographical character’s, objectifying gaze from his critical analysis13 and seems oblivious to the fact that he, too, is a Viennese and therefore a privileged white European gazing at black African performers hired to satisfy the whites’ sense of superior Self and voyeuristic desire for the exotic and erotic. In the triangle of gazes and looks represented in Ashantee – those of the Viennese, Sir Peter, and the Ashanti – he positions his character Sir Peter and thus himself, the author, on the Ashanti’s side of the fence. Not only does this interpretation represent a delusion, but it is also self-serving, as Altenberg establishes his moral high ground vis-à-vis his fellow Viennese by appro-
priating the Ashanti’s supposedly more human – and humane – perspectives and attitudes to merge with his own and support his critical views on European civilization, specifically the racism of fin-de-siècle Vienna. Despite good intentions and sympathy for the colonial underdog, Altenberg’s romanticization of the Ashanti as children of nature and peaceful, sensuous, free «paradise people» implies an essentialization which follows patterns of gazing at and categorizing Africans that come close to applying the very imperial lens typical of the racist nineteenth-century anthropology the text explicitly rejects. His idealization of the Ashanti serves his agenda – of criticizing his contemporaries – more than it represents actual Ashanti perspectives or needs.

This self-serving view corresponds with Kaplan’s thesis that «the subject bearing the gaze is not interested in the object per se, but is consumed by his own anxieties, which are inevitably intermixed with desire» (Looking for the Other xviii). In Ashantee, men’s erotically charged gazes run like a leitmotif through the episodes which repeatedly rave about the Ashanti women’s «wunderbaren hellbraunen Brüste» (1987, 236; 2007, 34), their naked «ideale Oberkörper» (1987, 248; 2007, 56), and «wunderbare glatte, kühle Haut» (1987, 235; 2007, 32). As I have outlined elsewhere in more detail, the autobiographical character’s desire for the Ashanti girls puts him on a par with the sexist fellow Viennese the author seeks to expose. For the book cover (fig. 2) Altenberg selected the photograph of two bare-breasted Ashanti women which visibly attests to the voyeuristic pleasure of both author and expected readership. Thus, the proximity Andrew Barker observes between German ethnological research of the time and soft pornography («Unforgettable» 57) holds true for Ashantee, too. The work’s highly visual descriptions show elements of the same colonial narrative of sexualization and visual ownership of the female body that I have demonstrated for Stratz’s History of Man. We find here merged both the male and imperial gazes. Altenberg and his autobiographical character Sir Peter fall into the category of what Pratt terms the «seeing man,» an admittedly unfriendly label for the European male subject [...] whose imperial eyes passively look out and possess» while he at the same time «seeks to secure [his] innocence» by assuming an «anti-conquest» position (7).

Altenberg’s liberal, «anti-conquest» critique of racism in public and scientific discourse, well-meaning advocacy of Ashanti concerns, and support for them distinguishes him from representatives of hardcore racist anthropology like Stratz – with whom he shares, however, the good intention of spreading insights about another culture among a German-speaking audience. The pervasive essentialization and eroticization of the Ashanti in
Ashantee nevertheless reflect a white European male’s pattern of perception and objectifying gaze and demonstrate that Altenberg, like Stratz, cannot escape the limitations of his «imperial eyes.» Consequently, in contradiction to the author’s explicitly stated antiracist intent, his literary representation of the Vienna ethnographic Ashanti exhibit in Ashantee perpetuates some of the racist and sexist gazing patterns typical of nineteenth-century European discourses in science and art.

Compared to Altenberg’s Ashantee, Rainer Maria Rilke’s 1902/03 poem «Die Aschanti. (Jardin d’Acclimation)» (150–51) denies any sense of a sexual attraction to the scantily dressed «braune[,] Mädchen» the author had seen at the Paris Ashanti exhibit. At the center of this poem is the first-person narrator’s twofold disappointment with the Africans’ inauthentic performance catering to the European onlookers’ expectations and, as a result, with the performers’ failure to confirm his own preconceived «Vision von fremden Ländern.» The narrator’s unfulfilled expectations of Africans are, however, not unlike those of historical audiences of such events around 1900. The «vision» is listed in the first three stanzas: «Gefühl von braunen Frauen, die/ tanzen» and drop their «Gewänder[,]» «wilde, fremde Melodie[n]» presumably of drums, «samten» skin, and «Augen, die […] flammten.» The images remind us of Altenberg’s sensuous descriptions of the Ashanti exhibited in Vienna and correspond with widespread contemporary, predominantly physical and thus visual stereotypes. The threefold mention of the Africans’ «Blut» as the origin of their songs (cultural production) and core of their being (mentality) underscores the idea of their proximity to nature, alludes to the binary opposition constructed between Africans’ supposed naturalness vs. Europeans’ supposed civilization, and thus corresponds with the biologistic
Figure 4: Ashanti village school in Vienna Zoological Garden. Gouache by Wilhelm Gause, 1897. (Wien Museum, Vienna; reprinted in Altenberg 2007, 37).

Figure 5: Ashanti village dance performance in Vienna Zoological Garden. Gouache by Wilhelm Gause, 1897. (Wien Museum, Vienna; reprinted in Altenberg 2007, 44).
approach to «racial» differences. The poem, in fact, is somewhat ambivalent as to whether the expectations outlined in its first half reflect those of the narrator or those of the voyeuristic masses he may want to criticize. Anne Dreesbach concludes that the only difference between the poetic narrator and audiences of contemporary ethnographic shows is his «Enttäuschung darüber, dass die Realität der Ausstellung seinem Bild nicht entspricht» (205).

Indeed, Rilke’s narrator expresses unease at the Africans’ «wunderliches Sich-Verstehen/mit der hellen Menschen Eitelkeit» which he interprets as their corruption by «neue[fremde] Dinge, die sie nicht verstehen.» Following his emotionally charged observations the immediacy of which is enhanced by the poem’s trochees, he voices in a single, stand-alone and thus highly expressive verse a sense of disquietude at the adjustment of the exhibited black people to white society’s self-serving and vain expectations of them: «Und mir war so bange hinzusehen.» This verse is the only one explicitly highlighting the narrator’s personal stance. It refers to both his gazing and his emotion doing so. Surprisingly, his implicit criticism of the Ashanti’s behavioral adjustment to their assigned roles is directed not at the white initiators or audience of the pseudo-ethnographic spectacle but rather at the black performers themselves for displaying an attitude of willing conformity. Noticing merely their «Gelächter,» the narrator does not acknowledge the forced character of actual Africans’ performances at ethnographic exhibits.

Rilke, like Altenberg, explicitly refers to the strong visual impact of the encounter with the Ashanti exhibited at the Paris Jardin d’Acclimatation. Unlike Altenberg’s Sir Peter in Vienna, Rilke’s narrator perceives the Africans’ eyes as burning neither with the fire of eroticism nor with that of resistance: «keine Augen, die wie Waffen flammten.» It is his perception of the show as performative and inauthentic that causes his disappointment and consequently eliminates any compassion, not even to speak of desire, for the observed Ashanti.

As in Rilke’s famous poem «Der Panther,» written in September 1902, the narrator of «Die Aschanti» expresses his preference for images of animals which, although caged and exhibited away from their natural habitat, supposedly remain detached from and uncorrupted by their voyeuristic, «civilized» environment.16 According to his perception, they do not seek «Eintracht mit dem Treiben neuer/fremder Dinge» but withdraw «still,» «leise,» «teilnahmslos,» fade away passively and «allein,» yet remain «treuer» to themselves than the Ashanti he observes. Comparing exhibited human beings from Africa with exhibited animals, even if by contrast, alludes to and possibly enhances the contemporary colonialist discourse that constructs
black Africans as animal-like and seeks to confirm this concept through spectacles that display them at zoological gardens.

Looking relations as portrayed in Rilke’s «Die Aschanti» are clearly one-sided, even if the poem calls attention to the observer’s uneasiness with both his objects of inspection and his own emotional reaction while observing. Yet, his gaze and the Africans’ visual impression on him rather than his actual communication with them is taken as a reliable base for his sense of understanding and, in fact, of entitlement to judge the black Other. If this poem was intended to criticize the violations of human dignity at ethnographic shows as some scholars suggest, it does so in a most covert manner. Barker, for example, concludes, «Whereas Altenberg uses the exploitation of the Ashanti as the basis for a critique of late nineteenth-century mores, Rilke, typically, shies away from the socially critical implications of his material, although they are certainly there implicitly» («Unforgettable» 66).17

In the realm of graphic art, Wilhelm Gause’s gouaches from 1897, reprinted here as figures 3, 4, and 5, were probably painted during the second Ashanti exhibit in Vienna in the same year. While an acquaintance between Altenberg and Gause cannot be established, the gouaches complement Altenberg’s Ashantee and reflect the same discourse. They, too, portray Viennese-Ashanti interracial interactions;18 they, too, represent a white artist’s and, presumably, a white viewer’s gaze at scantily dressed African males and females; and they, too, display Viennese gazes at the Ashanti, while the Ashanti do not look back. Figure 3 presents to the viewer the «Ashanti village» in the Vienna Zoological Garden: well dressed, presumably middle-class, white visitors stroll around primitive huts and inspect the native goods for sale on display tables; African men, women, and children dressed in African print fabric sell wares, wander about, and, by contrast, seem to be looking aimlessly. Figure 4 depicts fourteen black children tightly and orderly seated in two rows of an open-air, but fenced in «school room»; the class is headed by a male African teacher whose authority is underscored by colonial symbols like holding a switch and wearing a white European-style shirt. The children are shown to be well behaved, diligently reading or writing, and not raising their eyes, while they are – like animals in a zoo – observed with great curiosity by white onlookers of varying ages and both sexes standing outside the fence. The image captures the phenomenon of one-directional white gazing, but does not critically expose it. The uneven power relation between white gazes and the black subaltern not looking back is complicated by the portrayal of the teacher, whose attire, switch, and standing position align him with the white onlookers and identifies him as an African supervisor at the service of white interests, as
he assists in satisfying the «Schaulust» (voyeurism) of the Viennese by ensuring a smooth performance. His role as disciplinarian resembles that of contemporary African administrators in Africa who control their fellow country(wo)men at the service of white colonial powers. Despite painting him practically facing the viewer, Gause chose not to endow him – the overseer of the powerless nonlookers for the benefit of the powerful onlookers – with the power of gazing straight at the viewer.

In figure 5, two small African girls and, more highlighted, four adult African women are dancing to the beat of drums while an audience of African men and women looks on. The adult dancers’ dresses are folded down to the waist to expose, as in Stratz’s images and Altenberg’s descriptions, their naked upper bodies. White people are absent in this gouache. Ignoring the performance character of the so-called fetish dance of semi-nude women, which in reality was an integral part and major attraction of the Europe-touring Ashanti exhibit, the dance appears to be performed by Ashanti for Ashanti. Similar to the effect that the direct speech of Altenberg’s Ashantee has on the reader, Gause’s gouache, too, provides the onlooker with a seemingly unmediated glimpse into Ashanti life. The illusion of an exclusively African event removed from the artificiality of a staged spectacle for the white audience is dispelled by the fact that the three women dancing in the foreground do not face the African crowd in the background, but appear to be dancing for and exposing their bare breasts to the white artist and thereby the white viewer of the gouache. None of the Africans are shown to look back at the viewer. In fact, the topless dancers are painted with downcast eyes suggesting a gesture of submissiveness. As in Altenberg’s Ashantee or Stratz’s Naturgeschichte des Menschen, black women appear to be subserviently available to the white «master’s» gaze.

The metaphorization of the narrative of mastery through the denuded black female body and thus sexualization of colonial relations characterizes all three works. We may apply to the representations of gazing as power in Stratz’s anthropological and Altenberg’s literary texts as well as Gause’s gouaches what Kaplan poses for the unequal relations in which blacks serve whites but may not observe them: «Only white people, i. e., those conceived as subjects, can observe and see. Since blacks are not constituted as subjects, they cannot look (i. e., look for whites, satisfy openly their curiosity about whites) let alone gaze (in the sense of dominating, objectifying)» (7).

African women’s visual objectification and sexualization, the notion of their actual sexual availability to the white male onlooker, suitor, or master, and their implicit or explicit approximation to prostitutes in the eyes of white scientists, authors, and artists has a long tradition in nineteenth-century
medical, social, and artistic discourses beyond German-speaking Europe (see Gilman, «Bodies»). In Édouard Manet’s famous and initially scandalous painting *Olympia* of 1863, for example, a black pussycat serves to symbolize white and naked Olympia’s hidden genitals and links them to her black, although clothed maid (Torgovnick 102). While Olympia, stretched out on a bed, confidently gazes straight at the viewer of the painting, the maid’s look is absorbed by her white mistress. Picasso’s 1901 parodistic sketch of Manet’s *Olympia* creates even more forcefully a linkage between black women and sexuality, namely, prostitution. As with Altenberg’s dual male gaze as author and character, here too the voyeuristic male pleasure is doubled since one of the two sexualized observers of the naked black woman is a self-portrait of Picasso (ibid; Gilman, «Bodies» 251).

The image of prostitution and brothel life is at the center of Picasso’s *Les Desmoiselles d’Avignon* (1907) which introduces his *période nègre* and is considered a milestone in modern art. The painting famously connects the motifs of the female body, African art, and debased sexuality, as it depicts five nude women in suggestive poses; they are light-skinned but their stylized features are clearly reminiscent of African masks. The work was inspired by «primitive» masks of what was then called «art nègre» and by Picasso’s visit to the Paris Musée d’Ethnographie du Trocadéro in 1907. Employing «art nègre» had become popular among French artists opposed to colonialism since reports about slavery-like conditions in the French Congo had reached the Paris public in 1905 (Badenberg, «Art nègre» 225). Unlike Rilke, Picasso does detect elements of resistance in African perspectives and incorporates them into his own defiance of traditions in European art and society. *Les Desmoiselles d’Avignon* thus reflects turn-of-the-century European artists’ fascination with African «primitivism» as they searched for alternatives to the alienating impact of European civilization; the painting critically addresses exploitive power relations by stylizing prostitutes as the epitome of society’s victims, as was fashionable also in German Expressionist art and literature. At the same time, the protest and sympathy are – as in Altenberg’s *Ashantee* – accompanied by the essentialization and sexual objectification of the «savage» black woman and the appropriation of African themes to support a white man’s own critique of European traditions. However, unlike the images of African women I have discussed so far, three of Picasso’s five nude women in *Les Desmoiselles d’Avignon* stare straight at the viewer. Yet, they do not actually stand for African women or even African issues, but are stylizations in the service of the white European artist’s agenda. As with Altenberg’s *Ashantee*, one might read Picasso’s *Les
Desmoiselles d’Avignon, too, as «dispossessing the subaltern of authority over [...] identity» (Shohat 41).

As has been demonstrated, turn-of-the-century discourses motivated by anticolonialism produced numerous representations of European gazes at and perspectives on Africans, particularly on African women who were frequently envisioned naked and presented as such to the reader or viewer. Even renderings of Africans’ reverse gazes at German-speaking cultures were most often written by white Austrian or German writers who utilized the African Other’s supposed impressions to either critique their own societies or to reify stereotypical European assumptions about the African way of thinking. By contrast, contemporary documentations of black Africans’ or African-Americans’ experiences in German-speaking countries from authentic African or African-American perspectives are extremely rare.

Having analyzed a selection of turn-of-the-century textual and visual representations of white gazes and the black subaltern mostly not looking back, one might ask what lessons can be learned from the interracial looking relations represented in texts or art work of the colonial past. In which ways might they be enlightening for the interracial, interethnic, and/or intercultural looking relations in the globalizing present – that is within today’s multi- and intercultural German-speaking societies?

In the realm of literature, Paul Michael Lützeler has coined the term «postkolonialer Blick» – translated as «postcolonial view» – capturing the critical approaches taken by some contemporary German-language authors to writing about living conditions in former colonies and their current relations to the West. The postcolonial view, according to Lützeler, tries to find alternatives to the colonial gaze that was, and still is, some might say, characterized by a superior white attitude within colonial (and neocolonial) power relations, a strategy aimed at conquest, and the writer’s assumed omniscient perspective and ability to categorize and evaluate (Pratt 201). By contrast, a number of current German-speaking writers observe life in and from the so-called «Third World» in an effort to «recognize the culturally foreign, not with a superior, know-it-all, exploitive, colonial attitude, but with an open, inquisitive, empathetic, and, at the same time, critically postcolonial view in mind» (Lützeler, «Postcolonial View» 9; see also «Einleitung: Postkolonialer Diskurs» 29) – or at least, that is the intention. Lützeler’s juxtaposition of colonial gaze and postcolonial view highlights, however, an ambivalence that, I argue, links some multi- and intercultural and postcolonial approaches of the late twentieth century to liberal elements in the former colonial discourse: like Altenberg, for example, many late twentieth-century liberal German-language authors strive for intercultural dialog, understan-
ding, and empathy intended to counteract and replace the colonialist obsession with classification, hierarchicalization, and domination; yet, the constellation of a Western subject observing a non-Western object remains in place while questions of Western positionality may or may not be critically reflected upon.27 As a general observation, Lützeler appropriately acknowledges that even recent, open-minded, and interculturally and interracially well-intentioned Western intellectuals – just as some of their liberal predecessors around 1900 – «often cannot make good on their good intentions and have difficulties or don’t manage at all to shed their patterns of perception» («Einleitung: Postkolonialer Diskurs» 29).28

Ann Kaplan promotes as an alternative to the categorizing, hierarchicalizing, appropriating, often sexualizing, and altogether objectifying «imperial gaze» a «different kind of [interracial] looking, not in the service of the self» (Looking for the Other xx). As quoted above, she proposes this looking «as a process, a relation, rather than a gaze» (14). This dialogical, interactive kind of looking between members of different ethnic backgrounds would not be based on essentializing constructs of the Other (neither idealizing nor demonizing ones), as we have found in science (Stratz), literature (Altenberg, Rilke), and art (Gause, Manet, Picasso) around 1900. It would not cast the Other in the position of object, but would instead recognize «the Other as an autonomous subject» and would thus respect both white and «black subjectivity» (299–300). Rather than insisting on self-interested dominance, this kind of interested looking at and for the Other would invite cross-fertilizing exchange and inspire mutual transformation. It would aid in learning to walk the fine line between defining one’s own self-image and respecting the other’s difference without insistence on divisive polarity. This focus on the cultural dimensions of colonial or neocolonial looking relations, however, must be expanded to account for the economic and structural conditions of inequality.

From the onlooking, powerful whites and the assigned nonlooking of powerless blacks in anthropological, literary, and artistic representations of European-African relations around 1900, we have come a long way and still have a long way to go. As Richard Dyer suggests, «whites must be seen to be white, yet whiteness as race resides in invisible properties and whiteness as power is maintained by being unseen» (47, cit. Tautz 23).29

Notes
Works Cited


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