



The Department of German Studies
is pleased to present

IAN FLEISHMAN

University of Pennsylvania

"Each man kills the thing he loves": Queer Failure in *Querelle*



Wednesday, October 9th 5:30pm

RI Hall 108

60 George Street (Main Green)

Free and open to the public

Rainer Werner Fassbinder's swansong *Querelle*, released in August of 1982, in the wake of the director's death by drug overdose, is marked both thematically and stylistically by a self-destructive narcissism and an embrace of abjection: the depiction of dueling near-identical brothers and sadomasochistic sexual encounters indulges in willful (and willfully awkward) anachronism, alienatingly unconvincing post-dubbing, shoddy sets in garish colors and tacky costuming that *Die Zeit* considered, in its review of the film, befitting the "Fundus eines mondänen Schwulen-Karnevals."

With all of this in mind, the manifesto-like final lines of Jack Halberstam's *Queer Art of Failure* read almost as if they were a film review of *Querelle*: "To live is to fail, to bungle, to disappoint, and ultimately to die; rather than searching for ways around death and disappointment, the queer art of failure involves the acceptance of the finite, the embrace of the absurd, the silly, and the hopelessly goofy. Rather than resisting endings and limits, let us instead revel in and cleave to all of our own inevitable fantastic failures." Yet Halberstam takes care to distance himself from the "narrow range of affective responses" that constitute the "camp archive" to which this film would presumably belong. Reevaluating this disavowal of camp, this paper seeks an updated definition of the camp object in the various versions of *Querelle*, ultimately positing that Fassbinder's Genet adaptation invites us to understand queer as a narrative function of self-erasure: the biographical author's disappearance into the work that bears his name.