

GERMAN CULTURE THROUGH FILM

An Introduction to German Cinema

Second Edition

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Robert Reimer
Reinhard Zachau
with contributions by Margit Sinka

focus an imprint of
Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.
Indianapolis/Cambridge

A Focus book

Focus an imprint of
Hackett Publishing Company

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20 19 18 17 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

For further information, please address
Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.
P.O. Box 44937
Indianapolis, Indiana 46244-0937

www.hackettpublishing.com

Cover design by INSERT
Composition by Integrated Composition Services

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Reimer, Robert C. (Robert Charles), 1943– author. | Zachau, Reinhard K. (Reinhard Konrad) co-author. | Sinka, Margit M. author.

Title: German culture through film : an introduction to German cinema / Robert Reimer, Reinhard Zachau with contributions by Margit Sinka.

Description: Second edition. | Indianapolis : Focus, 2017. | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017003853 | ISBN 9781585108565 (pbk.)

Subjects: LCSH: Motion pictures—Germany—History and criticism.

Classification: LCC PN1993.5.G3 R415 2017 | DDC 791.430943—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2017003853>

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48–1984.

CONTENTS

Preface to the Second Edition.....	vii
I. Weimar Film 1919–1933	1
Introduction	1
Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari (Robert Wiene, 1920).....	9
Nosferatu (F. W. Murnau, 1922)	17
Metropolis (Fritz Lang, 1927)	27
Berlin: die Sinfonie der Großstadt (Walter Ruttmann, 1927)	37
II. Weimar Sound Film 1929–1933	45
Introduction	45
Der blaue Engel (Josef von Sternberg, 1930)	51
M (Fritz Lang, 1931).....	61
III. Nazi Film 1933–1945.....	69
Introduction	69
Triumph des Willens (Leni Riefenstahl, 1935).....	79
Olympia (Leni Riefenstahl, 1938).....	89
Münchhausen (Josef von Bány, 1943).....	97
IV. Postwar Film 1945–1949	105
Introduction	105
Die Mörder sind unter uns (Wolfgang Staudte, 1946).....	115
V. East German Film 1949–1989	127
Introduction	127
Berlin: Ecke Schönhauser (Gerhard Klein, 1957)	137
Die Legende von Paul und Paula (Heiner Carow, 1973).....	147

VI. West German Film 1950–1989	155
Introduction	155
Die Brücke (Bernhard Wicki, 1959).....	165
Aguirre: Der Zorn Gottes (Werner Herzog, 1972).....	171
Angst essen Seele auf (Rainer Werner Fassbinder, 1974).....	179
Die Ehe der Maria Braun (Rainer Werner Fassbinder, 1979)	187
Deutschland bleiche Mutter (Helma Sanders-Brahms, 1980).....	197
Die Blechtrommel (Volker Schlöndorff, 1979).....	205
Die bleierne Zeit (Margarethe von Trotta, 1981).....	215
Das Boot (Wolfgang Petersen, 1981).....	225
Der Himmel über Berlin (Wim Wenders, 1987).....	233
VII. German Film after 1989	241
Introduction	241
Stilles Land (Andreas Dresen, 1992).....	249
Lola rennt (Tom Tykwer, 1998).....	259
Nirgendwo in Afrika (Caroline Link, 2001).....	269
Good Bye Lenin! (Wolfgang Becker, 2003).....	279
Der Untergang (Oliver Hirschbiegel, 2004).....	287
Sophie Scholl: Die letzten Tage (Marc Rothemund, 2005).....	297
Das Leben der Anderen (Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, 2006)	305
Auf der anderen Seite (Fatih Akin, 2007).....	315
Die Fälscher (Stefan Ruzowitzky, 2007).....	323
Der Baader Meinhof Komplex (Bernd Eichinger, 2008).....	329
Barbara (Christian Petzold, 2012)	339
Oh Boy (Jan Ole Gerster, 2012).....	349
Photo Credits	359

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

This book, consisting of seven chapters spanning German film history from the silent era to the present, is meant as an introductory text for undergraduate courses on German film. These are frequently taught in English—not only, for example, in history departments or in international film studies curricula but also in interdisciplinary German studies programs and even in German departments seeking to draw students from a variety of disciplines to the study of German.

Since German film courses are offered across such a broad academic spectrum, it seemed judicious to write the text in English. Its chapters were conceived and written by Margit Sinka of Clemson University (MS), Robert Reimer of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte (RCR), and Reinhard Zachau of the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee (RZ).¹ Throughout the writing process, the authors tried their best to avoid the excessively theoretical language often encountered in academic film publications.

To stress the importance of contextualizing films, each of the seven chapters starts with an introduction focused on the history and culture of its particular time period. In most cases, the introductions also include information and observations on other notable German films produced during the same time span. The introductions are followed by the main section of each chapter: analyses of the individual films. These provide a summary of each film (the section labeled “The Story”), the background necessary for understanding it, and an interpretation under the rubric “Evaluation.” Three additional sections round off each chapter: one with questions and activities to encourage further film interpretation, another on “Related Films,” and a third one with the DVD information and pertinent bibliographical references.

Why should American viewers be interested in German movies that seem cumbersome to watch, especially when viewers not accustomed to subtitles find them less informative than distracting? Though there are of course no subtitles in the films of the silent era, at the outset uninitiated students are not particularly eager to watch them either. But the unusual cinematography and the indisputable artistry of movies such as *Nosferatu* (1922), one of the first horror movies, and the science-fiction film *Metropolis* (1927) soon turn skeptics into devotees. No particular powers of persuasion are necessary, however, to draw students to the blockbuster German movies that made it to American screens, such as *Das Boot* (*The Boat*, 1981), *Der Untergang* (*Downfall*, 2004), and *Lore* (2012)—all movies adding German perspectives to the Nazi era. But, films involving East Germany’s Communist

1. In the first edition the chapter on *Der Himmel über Berlin* was written by three students at the University of the South, Amy Hill, Andrew Doak, and Adnan Dzumahur, and edited by Reinhard Zachau. The chapter has been revised for this edition.

history—for instance, *Good Bye Lenin!* (2003) and the foreign film–Oscar winner *Das Leben der Anderen* (*The Lives of Others*, 2006)—have been similarly popular in the United States. As a whole, though, it has been more difficult in the United States to popularize German films that do not deal with German history—only *Lola rennt* (*Run Lola Run*, 1998) is a notable exception. And regardless of topic, the films of Werner Herzog and of Michael Haneke, whose 1997 *Funny Games* was remade by Hollywood in 2007, continue to have a big following in the United States.

Since thirty-three films are analyzed in our introductory film text, it would be tempting to offer a two-semester introductory course on German film—that is, a two-semester sequence to allow viewings and discussions of most of the films highlighted in the book. However, it is more realistic to assume that by and large one semester will be allotted to an introductory course and that only one film will be explored thoroughly in any given week (this would of course not preclude showing at least some excerpts from other films). Though it would seem difficult to show and discuss more than twelve to fourteen films in one semester, our book nonetheless highlights a rather large number of films—mainly to broaden the range of choices for instructors able to offer only one course on German film.

The seven chapters of our book correspond to the traditional period divisions of German film history. By choosing this organization, we clearly endorse structuring an introductory German film course according to the historical periods highlighted in the chapters. In what follows, we suggest various films as signposts of a hypothetical course trajectory.

Beginning with *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (*The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, 1920) and *Nosferatu* (1922), students receive an impression of the spatial and mental confusions so prevalent in the Germany of the early 1920s. Speculations on why and how these movies were so grotesque and gruesome will invariably shift to discussions of the end of World War I and to the early years of the Weimar Republic, characterized by street fighting and political instability prior to the hyperinflation of 1923.

Metropolis (1927) is an excellent example of how filmmakers speculated about Germany's future—a topic certain to engage students. For most of them, films from the subsequent National Socialist era will represent first impressions of the Nazis from the inside, a perspective many find fascinating. Inevitably discussions on propaganda films will ensue, at times with a castigating tone. Yet students will then learn why the style of Leni Riefenstahl's propaganda films is deemed noteworthy by many movie critics, even in the United States.

At this juncture, we could all remind ourselves that movies are usually not mere reproductions of historic events but artistic recreations of them. History often gets changed in movies in order to render it visually attractive and to limit the represented events to a manageable ensemble of characters. Because images, especially moving images, have the tendency to anchor themselves in our minds as reflections of reality, American audiences should be cautious about accepting at face value the depictions of history in German movies—or in any movies, for that matter.

Postwar movies, especially *Die Mörder sind unter uns* (*The Murderers Are Among Us*, 1946), accentuate the outer and inner devastations after World War II.

Other films, such as *Die Brücke* (*The Bridge*, 1959), and more importantly *Die Blechtrommel* (*The Tin Drum*, 1979) or *Das Boot* (*The Boat*, 1981), enable Americans to take a closer look at how Germans attempted to deal with the Nazi past. This is of course a subject that continues to be an important focus of German movies, most recently in Margarethe von Trotta's *Hannah Arendt* (2012), Christian Petzold's *Phoenix* (2014), Giulio Ricciarelli's *Im Labyrinth des Schweigens* (*Labyrinth of Lies*, 2014), and Oliver Hirschbiegel's *Elser* (*13 Minutes*, 2015).

A German film course would not be complete without movies from Germany's experimental New Wave, a period extending from the late 1960s into the 1980s. Our book thus includes films from the following directors associated at one time or another with the New Wave (all of them particularly worthy of inclusion in a German film course): Werner Herzog, Volker Schlöndorff, Helma Sanders-Brahms, Margarethe von Trotta, Wim Wenders, and, perhaps above all, Rainer Werner Fassbinder. In fact, Fassbinder is the only filmmaker represented in our book by two films: *Angst essen Seele auf* (*Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*, 1974) and *Die Ehe der Maria Braun* (*The Marriage of Maria Braun*, 1979). He combines film experimentation with a progressive message that gives insight into the West Germany of the 1970s, its "Aufbruchstimmung" or mood of reinvigoration, and the notion that West Germany was heading the wrong way with its fascist and capitalist baggage from the past. In this regard, it would also be important to delve into at least one of the two films in the book—Margarethe von Trotta's *Die bleierne Zeit* (*Marianne and Juliane*, 1981) and Uli Edel's *Der Baader Meinhof Komplex* (*The Baader Meinhof Complex*, 2008)—that involve explorations of the West German terrorism of the 1970s, in particular because of the vast influence such domestic terrorism has exerted on the development of today's Federal Republic of Germany.

By the same token, a German film course should include at least one of the two films from East Germany analyzed in our text: *Berlin: Ecke Schönhauser* (*Berlin — Schönhauser Corner*, 1957) or *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* (*The Legend of Paul and Paula*, 1973). If time permits, two other Berlin films could be contrasted with each other: Wim Wenders's *Der Himmel über Berlin* (*Wings of Desire*, 1987), an important movie about the status of Berlin preceding the fall of the Berlin Wall, and Tom Tykwer's *Lola rennt* (*Run Lola Run*, 1998), a significant film on the experimental nature of Berlin after the fall of the Wall, as well as on Berlin's post-Wall youth culture. Films from contemporary Germany should of course also be represented in a German film course, but the precise choices are best left to individual instructors, particularly since the social relevance of recent films is still in flux. Nonetheless, our text does offer several possibilities.

There are clearly many ways to teach a film course and many types of assignments and discussions that can be encouraged. At this point, we wish to underline only two tenets that we share. When discussing a film or writing about it, we should advise students that it is far better to focus on one aspect rather than to analyze an entire film in general terms. It is, for example, advisable to choose one film sequence or scene and then to describe it in detail, taking into account factors such as the following: *mise-en-scène* (setting), genre, cinematography, sound, music, camera angles, narrative, characters, dialogue, and music.

As a whole, though, for first steps we urge students to discuss aspects of a film that appeal to them and to relate these aspects to their own experiences. By initially following this route, the exploration of German film will become an exciting enterprise for students and teachers. And this approach may be—and in all likelihood should be—enriched by other, less experiential modes of interpretation.

I. WEIMAR FILM 1919–1933

Weimar cinema, sometimes referred to as German expressionist cinema owing to the style of many of its films, is generally dated from 1919 to 1933. Those years cover the masterpieces of silent German film and also the early films of the sound era. The division is both natural and yet misleading. Natural because the years 1919–33 represent the closed era of the Weimar Republic, the fourteen-year period between the end of the Imperial Second Reich (empire) of Kaiser Wilhelm II and the beginning of the Third Reich (empire) of Adolf Hitler and the National Socialists (Nazis). Yet any closed period of years is misleading, for it tends to obscure the contributions of antecedents to the movement and suggests that it ended abruptly. While the Nazis did effectively end Weimar and expressionist cinema when they came to power in 1933, the diaspora of talent that occurred because of the anti-Semitic and anti-intellectual policies of the Third Reich continued to influence movements for decades afterwards. As for the forerunners of Weimar cinema, we briefly outline below the themes, actors, directors, and styles found in the films and art of the first two decades of the twentieth century.

In 1919 motion pictures were not yet twenty-five years old. Max and Emil Skladanowsky had invented the Bioscop projector in 1895. Their apparatus had improved on other methods of projection at the time and allowed for longer strips of film and larger venues. A few months after first projecting moving images to audiences in a tavern in Pankow, a suburb of Berlin, they had moved to the Wintergarten, a Berlin theater, with a full evening of entertainment. Their show was scheduled for the *Folies Bergère* in Paris; but by the time of the premier their system had become obsolete, replaced by an invention of Auguste and Louis Lumière. Thus, although it is in Germany that one could see the birth of cinema as entertainment, France, the United States, Italy, and Denmark were first to exploit the international, commercial potential of the medium.

Although not as important on an international scale as the national cinemas of other countries, Germany's industry grew nonetheless, thanks to entrepreneurs like Oskar Messter, who produced film shorts, newsreels, and feature films in creating Germany's most successful film studio at the time. (For a detailed account see Horak 1995.) Mirroring the work of the Lumières, his films documented news events and activities of interest such as ice skating (*Schlittschuhläufer auf der West-Eisbahn* [Skaters on the West-Ice Rink], 1896) or the antics of trained monkeys (*Die zahmen Affen mit ihrem Wärter* [Tame Monkeys with their Handler], 1897). His early documentaries also anticipated the propaganda value of film and thus included what today we call photo ops: *Stapellauf vom Kreuzer Wilhelm der Große* (Launching of the Cruiser Wilhelm the Great, 1897), *Seine Majestät Kaiser Wilhelm II. In Stettin* (His Majesty William II in Stettin, 1897), and *Die Deutsche Kaiser-Familie* (The German Emperor's Family, 1897).

German film quickly grew beyond documentation of the everyday. In the early 1900s, Messter synchronized his projector with an Edison gramophone and

produced pictures with sound. The short-lived process was awkward, but it allowed for the telling of simple stories through music. Not until the 1920s, though, was sound to be married with visuals for true talking pictures. One of Messter's early sound films was *Meißner Porzellan* (*Meissen Porcelain*, 1906), with Henny Porten, who became the first star of German film. She appeared in a variety of film genres in their infancy, including melodramas of love-sick young women, family tragedies, and comedies of error. Porten helped popularize film in Germany, thereby giving the country an international presence in cinema. On the whole, however, film in Germany remained lower- or working-class entertainment as opposed to the art form it was becoming in other countries. This difference was largely due to the important role theater was maintaining for most Germans.

That film did not capture the attention of intellectuals may be due to the themes of its early efforts. Messter and Porten may have given film a wholesome image, but it was still mainly spectacle, that is, it captured performances or exhibition in front of a camera. Yet German film at the time offered more than performance; it offered entry into a world of sensation. Murder, emotional violence, and tragedy were available for a few pennies. Film historian Curt Riess describes 250 films in Berlin in 1910 as containing 97 murders, 45 suicides, 51 infidelities, 12 seductions, 22 abductions, 25 drunks, and 45 prostitutes. Eventually German authorities intervened in the projection of so much mayhem and vice and created censorship review boards. Such boards, however, were local, and thus what was objectionable in one city could be projected in another, with Berlin being the most liberal of venues. The dissolution of censorship in the early years of the Weimar Republic led to a resurgence of violence and other themes that had been deemed immoral. If one looks at the themes of classical cinema from Weimar, crime, murder, seduction, and drinking seem to dominate.

The antecedents of Weimar cinema begin to emerge around 1913. Two films in particular introduced a theme of horror and a tone of dread and pessimism that would become associated, wrongly or not, with Weimar cinema—*Der Andere* (*The Other*, Max Mack), an adaptation of Robert Louis Stevenson's novel of horror *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886); and *Der Student von Prag* (*The Student of Prague*, Stellan Rye and Paul Wegener), a gothic thriller which combines the Faustian theme of selling one's soul to the devil with the theme of the doppelgänger. The complex stories of these and other films—such as *Der Golem* (*The Golem*, Henrik Galeen and Paul Wegener, 1915), its sequels, and the six-part series *Homunculus* (Otto Rippert, 1916)—created an awareness for film's potential as a serious dramatic medium. The dark, pessimistic, and tragic tone in these films found echoes in the horror films of the 1920s. The monstrous "other" that was at the center of the films reflected a fascination with the occult and also with the abuse of power that reflects the 1910s and its rush into war, the search for a leader or new man, and the disillusionment that set in when the promise of salvation turned into the certainty of death.

War, disillusionment, and the search for a "new man" or savior were elements of expressionism, an artistic art movement that dominated the arts in Germany during the 1910s and found an echo in the cinema of Weimar. Lyric poetry and drama in particular seemed to long for an escape from a malaise that was prevalent in Germany at the time. Initial enthusiasm for war, which seemed to

promise rebirth, quickly turned to pessimism, which found itself reflected in the plays of Georg Kaiser and Ernst Toller, the lyric poetry of Gottfried Benn and Georg Trakl, and the paintings of Otto Dix. The death and destruction caused by World War I had to wait to become a major theme in film until 1931, when a Hollywood studio made the film *All Quiet on the Western Front* (Lewis Milestone, 1931), based on the best-selling German novel *Im Westen Nichts Neues* (Erich Maria Remarque). Georg Kaiser's 1912 drama *Von morgens bis mitternachts* (*From Morn until Midnight*) and Ernst Toller's 1922 drama *Die Maschinenstürmer* (*The Stormers of the Machines*) find references in Weimar films: Karl Heinz Martin's *Von morgens bis mitternachts* (1920) and Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1926/7). Reaction to the war had also led to an anti-establishment mood. Unlike in France, however, where the anti-establishment tone was more playful along the lines of Dada, the German mood was decidedly pessimistic.

At the same time that German film was discovering its darker side with films of gothic horror, it was also developing its commercial potential, producing comedies, mysteries, and melodramas, with this trend continuing into the Weimar era. Porten continued the success of her earlier films with works about young women in distress, seduced by callous men and their own naiveté. In addition to melodrama, comedy was important to the beginning of German film. Similar to other national cinemas, German film included scantily clad women, cross-dressing, bad jokes, and pratfalls, a staple of burlesque theater carried over into film. Ernst Lubitsch, one of Weimar Germany's more successful directors, whose early films follow the burlesque tradition, eventually found his strength in sophisticated comedies and historical epics. His Weimar works include *Carmen* (*Gypsy Blood*, 1918), which portrays the passionate Gypsy of Prosper Mérimée's mid-nineteenth-century novel, and *Madame DuBarry* (*Passion*, 1919), the story of Louis XV's mistress. Anticipating New German Cinema's penchant for adapting literary masterpieces, Lubitsch and his contemporaries created a unique German genre by blending history and passion, literary classics and film art, thereby enhancing Germany's international reputation. The directions seen in the 1910s continued into the Weimar era, when German film became one of the leaders in film, along with France and America (Hollywood). German film thrived after World War I. Producers continued to make comedies, mysteries, and melodramas to satisfy the public's demand for these films. At the same time, they produced the films that give Weimar cinema its reputation today for being the golden age of German film.

Whether the political and economic situation in Germany after the war contributed to the increased interest in, and quality of, German film is difficult to say. But it can help our understanding of the films to reflect on conditions in Germany in the 1920s. Without argument the harsh conditions that the Allies placed on Germany after World War I reverberated through the decade, initially causing extreme hardship and later providing a ready-made cause for the National Socialists to rally a discontented public facing rising unemployment. The suffering and the political-economic turmoil both made their way into films of the time either directly or indirectly. The war's victors—Great Britain, France, and America—demanded very high reparations from a country that was bankrupt from the war. Spanish Influenza, which had also devastated the allied populations, hit Germany hard because of

conditions there. Returning soldiers, many seriously injured in the war, were met by high unemployment. To help pay the costs of the war and meet its obligations to the winning nations as well as to its citizens, the Weimar Republic printed money, causing hyperinflation so severe that it stands today as a cautionary tale of the dangers of undisciplined spending. Film historian Siegfried Kracauer has noted a number of genres that predominated during the Weimar years, notably horror films, historical films, mountain films, and street films or working-class melodramas. Kracauer's intent was to draw a psychoanalytic portrait of the Germans during the 20s to explain the rise of Adolf Hitler and the Nazis. While his conclusions have been questioned by many historians today, his categorizing of the film genres is still apt for understanding German silent cinema.

Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari (*The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, Robert Wiene, 1920), a horror film discussed elsewhere in the book, gave the genre renewed significance. Continuing the gothic film tradition begun in the 1910s by Galeen, Wegener, and others, Wiene's film became an indictment of the authorities that had led the country into war and that had caused the suffering and malaise that viewers saw daily in the outside world. The film is a cinematic collection of the tenets of expressionism: distorted visuals, exaggerated acting, and drawn-in shadows that reflect the angst or terror that Norwegian artist Edvard Munch had captured in his painting *The Scream* (1893). Other films also capture the state of dysfunction in the face of war's aftermath. Fritz Lang adapted the myth of *Orpheus and Eurydice* in *Der müde Tod* (*Destiny*, 1921) to comment on the misery of loss that the war had created. The film's story transfers the quest to contemporary times, depicting a woman negotiating with death to bring her deceased husband back from the underworld. Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau's adaptation of Bram Stoker's Victorian novel *Count Dracula* as *Nosferatu, eine Symphonie des Grauens* (*Nosferatu, a Symphony of Horror*, 1922) mirrored the death and destruction of postwar Germany. Scenes of crosses on a shore and coffins being carried through the streets remind viewers of the countless dead from the fighting. In turn, rats and plague reflect the deaths occurring from Spanish Influenza.

Other film genres likewise referenced the difficulties and hardships in the world outside the cinema house. Lang focused on German society's corruption in two crime films. *Dr. Mabuse, der Spieler: Ein Bild der Zeit* (*Dr. Mabuse: The Gambler*, 1922) exposes crime and corruption in Berlin. Its German subtitle, which translates as "a picture of the time," reveals Lang's intention for the film to be a document of postwar Germany. The next installment, *Das Testament des Dr. Mabuse* (*The Last Testament of Dr. Mabuse*, 1933), was a sound movie shot in both German- and French-language versions. The film was banned from release in Germany by Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels, as its story of corruption and crime could easily be understood as a reference to Nazi Germany. Other directors chose to reflect harsh economic conditions. In *Die freudlose Gasse* (*Joyless Street*, 1925), Austrian G. W. Pabst, for example, focused on difficulties that the middle class encountered in 1921 during the period of hyperinflation. Joe May in *Asphalt* (1929) sets his film about redemption and true love in the economically harsh milieu of Berlin. Films in the 1920s also helped viewers escape the outside world. Between 1922 and 1932 there were a number of films about Frederick the Great, helping viewers escape into the

nostalgia of supposedly better times. Otto Gebühr starred in the films and revised his role several times during the Third Reich, when Frederick the Great became a symbol of Germany's past glory that was being recreated by Adolf Hitler. Finally, a genre of escape movies known as mountain films, many starring Leni Riefenstahl, focused the camera on fantastic landscapes, attractive, athletic bodies, and sacrifice, just as Riefenstahl was to do in the films she directed in the Third Reich.

Ufa and Decla-Bioscop (after 1921 part of Ufa) made many of the films created during the Weimar Republic. The companies' success in the first years of the decade persuaded Erich Pommer to approve expensive films of directors that had had previous successes. Lang, who had made the two-part series *Die Spinnen* (*The Spiders*, 1919/20) and the two-part cycle *Die Nibelungen* (1922/24) was assigned the big-budget science-fiction film, *Metropolis*. Lang's vision in *Die Nibelungen* of the Germanic legend of Siegfried and Kriemhild had not recouped the costs of its elaborate sets, huge cast, motorized dragon, and symphonic score. But the film's critical and popular success allowed him to go over an already large budget for his next film, *Metropolis*, which by some accounts almost bankrupted the studio (see Riess, *Das gab's nur einmal*, Vol. I, 262–75). Murnau's success with *Nosferatu* and *Phantom*, both 1922, allowed him to make the prestige film *Der letzte Mann* (*The Last Laugh*, 1924). This film and Lang's *Metropolis* showed that Germany was on par with Hollywood in terms of quality and critical acclaim. Murnau's next films, *Tartüff* and *Faust*, both 1926, were art films, excellent adaptations of classics of French and German literature. But the public wanted action films then, as much as today. As a result the films failed to appeal to a wide audience. Moreover, they failed to attract a literary audience in Germany, whose members saw film as something unsuited to portray the classics.

Ufa's financial difficulties forced the studio to seek financial help from Hollywood. Together with Paramount and MGM studios it created the joint company Parufamet. The deal with Hollywood did not turn out well. While the studio got money to produce forty films, it also had to accept forty films from America and open up 75 percent of its screens to Hollywood products. American studios did not want to exhibit the German films, and in Germany, American films dominated the screens, leaving little room for German films. Ufa thus required another bailout and received funds from Germany's largest media magnate, the conservative Alfred Hugenberg. Ufa was not able to return to profitability, however, until Ludwig Klitsch, a member of the Ufa board, negotiated new terms with the parties concerned (see Riess, *Das gab's nur einmal*, Vol. II, 14, 37).

A new technology, sound motion pictures, introduced to Germans by Tobis-Film helped Ufa regain market shares. At first, however, Ufa leaders treated sound as a fad. Of course, sound had always been a part of film. As mentioned earlier, Messter had early on offered movies with sound by synchronizing the playing of disc recordings with the projection of images. The cumbersome nature of the system led to its disappearance, but unsynchronized music almost always accompanied films. Early in the 1920s Germany was again first in cinematic, technological innovation. Joseph Engl, Joseph Massolle, and Hans Vogt and their company Tri-Ergon invented a method in which a sound strip was placed on the film. But their system often broke down, and Ufa, which was the first studio to produce a sound film in

1925, abandoned the technology, allowing Hollywood's *Jazz Singer* (1927) to be credited with being the first commercially successful sound film. Eventually, Tri-Ergon became Ton-Bild-Syndikat (Tobis), which entered into a cartel arrangement with Klangfilm AG. The two companies together controlled movie sound reproduction. Klangfilm entered into an agreement with Ufa, which in turn entered into one with Hollywood studios, dividing up potential markets between them. In this way, Ufa became the producer of some of the most successful sound films in the early 1930s. Ufa created two, sometimes three language versions of its sound films, recognizing that unlike silent films in which inter-titles could be changed out easily in order to meet linguistic requirements, sound film required films to be recorded in the separate languages. This problem was later solved through subtitles and dubbing. Early in the introduction of sound, however, for major films, after a scene in one language was done filming, the same set was used to film in another language, often using the same actors. This was the case, for example, with *Der blaue Engel* (*The Blue Angel*, Joseph von Sternberg, 1930) whose film credits reveal that the same actors are playing in the different language versions. In contrast, credits indicate that while Brigitte Helm played the female lead in G. W. Pabst's *L'Atlantide* (*The Lost Atlantis*, 1932), three different actors played the role of the captain in the French, German, and English language versions. This was also the case for Erik Charell's three versions of *The Congress Dances* (1931).

When the Weimar Republic ended in 1933 with the coming to power of the National Socialists, many of its actors, directors, and other film personnel left the country, mainly for America but also France and England. This diaspora of film-industry talent had actually already begun before Hitler and the Nazis had come to power and restricted and then eliminated Jewish participation in Germany's cinema. Ernst Lubitsch had left in the early 1920s, and Karl Freund left in 1929. Marlene Dietrich left after her success in *The Blue Angel* (1930). Still others left when the Nazis became a threat. Among these were Fritz Lang, brothers Curt and Robert Siodmak, Billy Wilder, and Joe May. The émigrés gave Hollywood films a decided Weimar expressionist tone. Writer Curt Siodmak, for example, wrote the screenplays for films in the expressionist vein about the Invisible Man, Frankenstein's monster, and the Wolfman, among other films of horror and murder. Robert Siodmak directed more than twenty films noirs and together with Lang aided in creating the genre's expressionist style of pessimism and shadows. In their turn, Lubitsch and Wilder contributed to Hollywood's strength of producing sophisticated comedies. Both had excelled in the genre before coming to Hollywood. In America they collaborated on *Ninotchka*, arguably the best-known of the sophisticated comedies and starring Greta Garbo, another early émigré. Weimar's influence continued within Germany as well. Some of Weimar's top actors stayed and had stellar careers in the country. Hans Albers, Heinrich George, and Emil Jannings had particularly successful careers during the Third Reich. George and Jannings appeared in some of the more overtly propagandistic of the Nazi films. Director Arnold Fanck continued his interest in the exotic locales that had been seen in the Weimar mountain films, but in the Nazi era he focused on the South Sea Islands. His main star, Leni Riefenstahl, directed films for the Nazis, continuing the cult of the beautiful body found in her Weimar period. Thea von Harbou, who worked

with her husband Fritz Lang on *Nibelungen*, *Metropolis*, and *M*, had a successful career as a screenwriter during the Third Reich after her husband, refusing to work for Goebbels, had left for Hollywood. These represent but a few of the personages of the Weimar period who, whether they emigrated or remained, continued Weimar's legacy beyond the end of the Republic. (RCR)

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Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari

(The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari, Robert Wiene, 1920)



Dr. Caligari displays Cesare at the fair.

CREDITS

DirectorRobert Wiene
ScreenplayHans Janowitz, Carl Mayer
Director of PhotographyWilly Hameister
MusicGiuseppe Becce
ProducerRudolf Meinert, Erich Pommer
CinematographyWilly Hameister
Set DecorationHermann Warm
Costume DesignWalter Reimann
LengthU.S. releases generally 67 minutes; B/W

Principal Cast

Werner Krauss (Dr. Caligari), Conrad Veidt (Cesare), Friedrich Feher (Francis), Lil Dagover (Jane), Hans Heinrich von Twardowski (Alan), Rudolf Lettinger (Dr. Olsen), Rudolf Klein-Rogge (A Criminal).

THE STORY

The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari is set in the small, northern German town of Holstenwall, where Dr. Caligari is one of the exhibitors at a small fair or carnival. Francis (Friedrich Feher), the narrator, attends the carnival with his friend Alan (Hans Heinrich von Twardowski). When they visit the stand of Dr. Caligari (Werner Krauss) where the somnambulist or sleepwalker Cesare (Conrad Veidt) is on display, all dressed in black, Cesare predicts that Alan will die tomorrow. Alan is indeed murdered that night.

Coincidentally, Francis and Alan are both in love with Jane (Lil Dagover), who decided to visit Caligari's stand but flees in horror after catching sight of Cesare in his coffin-like box. Later that night, Cesare rises from his coffin and starts stalking Jane with a knife. Upon seeing her asleep, Cesare falls in love with Jane and does not kill her, as Caligari had demanded. Cesare dies after dragging Jane off, first over rooftops in what is perhaps the most recognized shot from the movie, and finally through fields. Jane's abduction by the monster, itself reminiscent of the "damsel in distress" motif from melodrama, influenced abduction scenes in monster films that came later, including *Metropolis*, *Dracula*, and *King Kong*.

Francis breaks through all the confusion in the end and finds out the background to Caligari's story. The director of an insane asylum, he became interested in historical research and uncovered information about a mountebank in 1612 named Caligari who ran around with a somnambulist whom he trained to commit murder. Dr. Caligari, wanting to imitate those actions, begins his own strange sequence of murders. The film captions—"Du musst Caligari werden!" ("You must become Caligari!")—clearly suggest Caligari's madness.

This story makes up the body of the film as written by Hans Janowitz and Carl Mayer before a framing device was added in which Francis tells Caligari's story to an old man. Francis returns to the asylum where Cesare and Jane are now inmates. When Dr. Caligari appears, the attendants grab Francis and throw him into one of the cells. Dr. Caligari looks at him and mumbles, "Now I know what his problem is. He will be cured."

BACKGROUND

The film opened in 1920 in a time of political turmoil in Germany, twenty-five years after the first movies were shown in Paris in 1895. By early November 1918, many cities had been taken over by workers' and soldiers' councils, as had happened in Russia during the Communist revolution of 1917. Politicians were thus fearful of a similar Communist takeover in Germany where an armistice on November 11, 1918, had been agreed to, after which the German emperor, Kaiser Wilhelm, abdicated. Crippling peace terms were then imposed on the Germans in 1919 in the Versailles Treaty. In the midst of the chaos surrounding the end of the war, a new government, the Weimar Republic, was created to deal with the worsening political situation.

The Weimar Republic had major problems gaining acceptance in Germany. Many Germans did not believe that they had really been defeated, the Versailles

Treaty plunged the country in a constant state of economic chaos, and food was in short supply. The harsh conditions of Versailles infuriated most Germans and they directed their resentment at the government that had signed the Treaty without consulting with the parliament. From 1919 to 1923, there was a series of attempted revolutions in Germany, some by Communists who hoped to take advantage of the situation and create a Communist state as in Russia, others by nationalists (among them Hitler with his fledgling Nazis) who branded the government as traitors that needed to be eliminated.

In spite of the economic and political turmoil, the arts started to flourish in Weimar Germany's impoverished capital city Berlin, with the expressionists dominating the scene. They developed a style notable for its harshness, boldness, and visual intensity. They used jagged, distorted lines; crude, rapid brushwork; and jarring colors to depict urban street scenes and other contemporary subjects in crowded, agitated compositions notable for their instability and their emotionally charged atmosphere. Many of their works expressed frustration, anxiety, disgust, discontent, violence, and generally a sort of frenetic intensity of feeling in response to the ugliness, the crude banality, and the possibilities and contradictions that they discerned in modern life. Woodcuts, with their thick jagged lines and harsh tonal contrasts, were one of the favorite media of the German expressionists.

Strongly influenced by expressionist stagecraft, the earliest expressionist films set out to convey through decor the subjective mental state of the protagonist. The most famous of these films is *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920), in which a madman relates to a madwoman his understanding of how he came to be in the asylum. The misshapen streets and buildings of the set are projections of Caligari's own crazy universe; the other characters have been abstracted through makeup and dress into visual symbols. The film's morbid evocation of horror, menace, and anxiety and the dramatic, shadowy lighting and bizarre sets became a stylistic model for expressionist films by several major German directors. Paul Wegener's second version of *The Golem* (1920), F. W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922), and Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927), among other films, present pessimistic visions of social collapse or explore the ominous duality of human nature and its capacity for monstrous personal evil. Expressionist elements also influenced later films such as *The Blue Angel* and *M*, as well as the noir films made in Hollywood in the 1940s.

At the film's opening on February 26, 1920, in the Marmorhaus in Berlin, a blend of classical music—Beethoven, Schubert, Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, and Paul Lincke—was played. Soon after, the composer Giuseppe Becce wrote his own score of modernist music for the movie, which has been lost. Obviously modernist music works better with Caligari's expressionist style than the original classical score. The film composer Lothar Prox and Emil Gerhardt, who had seen a small piece of Becce's original score, recreated it for a 1984 recreation of the movie. Subsequently, composers have created many different scores of the movie, which always attracted large numbers of composers, thus making it one of the most popular silent movies for re-scoring.

EVALUATION

The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari is one of the strangest German movies ever created. Consequently it is open to multiple and equally extreme interpretations, such as that of Siegfried Kracauer, who saw Dr. Caligari as an early embodiment of Adolf Hitler. Although it was one of the earliest successful German movies to date (filmed in December 1919 and January 1920), it still holds our attention and fills us with suspense. The film is an artistic tour de force that makes every viewer experience the power of expressionist filmmaking.

While the storyline is somewhat incoherent and bizarre, the film is nevertheless worth watching for its artistic quality, its sets, its costumes, the performance of its actors, the coloring of its scenes, and certainly for its music. These collective elements present an excellent example of “expressionism in action.” The film is an almost complete expressionist work of art, a “Gesamtkunstwerk” or “total work of art,” as Richard Wagner might have called it. The only art form missing is dialogue, but captions have been entered into the images in a variety of ways.

The costumes and makeup are skillfully combined with the exaggerated body movements of the actors. Some of these exaggerations originate in the fact that dialogue and adequate lighting, both of which are extensively used today, are absent. Consequently, body movements had to be exaggerated to compensate for the low light and missing dialogue.

Conrad Veidt as Cesare is excellent in his mysterious animal-like acting, repulsive and attractive at the same time, a personification of sexual and subliminal desire, the ultimate alter-ego figure so popular with expressionist drama and movies. One of the precursors to *The Cabinet of Caligari* is the first version of *The Student of Prague* (1913), with its shadowy figures popping up everywhere as bearers of the protagonist’s conscience.

The sets, with their irregular angles, zigzag shapes, and uneven surfaces, are pure expressionism, dominating the actors’ movements. The actors act in similar angular movements, with Conrad Veidt and Werner Krauss as leaders representing an eerie underworld when Caligari presents Cesare for the first time, or when Cesare, shadowy and sinister, slinks by the wall toward Jane’s house.

The other actors follow with equally unsettling movements. The town clerk in his oversized chair and his standoffish attitude suggests Kafka, who wrote his texts about the same time as this movie was produced. We still marvel at these creations in texts and movies as anticipations of the political horrors to come—Stalin’s purges and mass killings and Hitler’s holocaust and the atrocities of World War II.

In his summary of the film, Mike Budd suggests that the more one tries to make all the movie’s details fit, the more difficult and problematic the film becomes, which prompts a critical rereading of the film. The scriptwriter Hans Janowitz had argued that these problems stemmed from Robert Wiene’s rewriting of the original script, which he regarded as a story with a too-conventional frame. According to the original script, Francis and Jane were supposed to have told Caligari’s story at a dinner party, along with how they met him and how the strange Caligari changed their lives.

This opening frame was supposed to be closed again with mad Caligari's death and Francis and Jane's commemoration of it. As Janowitz argued, by changing the frame and turning Francis into the madman rather than Caligari, the entire message became twisted. A film critical of authority was altered into a more conformist one—the edge was removed and what was left was utter confusion that a benevolent viewer might interpret as modern art.

As Siegfried Kracauer argued in his book *From Caligari to Hitler*, "A revolutionary film was thus turned into a conformist one . . . [and] by putting the original into a box, this version faithfully mirrored the general retreat into a shell" (66–67). Kracauer further writes that since both scriptwriters were pacifists, the original script with Francis and Jane's story contained an anti-authoritarian message, with Caligari representing deranged and dangerous authority. For Kracauer, who was attempting to use films to psychoanalyze the German people in an attempt to understand how a man like Hitler could have risen to power, the story becomes prescient, telling the story of a man leading a double life, first as the respected head psychiatrist of a mental institution and then as the insane sideshow keeper who uses his exhibit, a somnambulist, to commit ghastly murders. In Kracauer's psychoanalysis, Caligari becomes a Hitler figure who uses the innocent Cesare, the somnambulist representing the German people, to commit horrible atrocities to satisfy a lust for power. Thus Kracauer, looking back on history, contends the movie was able to foreshadow the German political direction that led to the rise of totalitarianism.

The character of Caligari . . . stands for an unlimited authority that idolizes power as such, and, to satisfy its lust for domination, ruthlessly violates human rights and values. Functioning as a mere instrument, Cesare is not so much a guilty murderer as Caligari's innocent victim. . . . Whether intentional or not Caligari exposes the soul wavering between tyranny and chaos and facing the desperate situation: any escape from tyranny seems to throw it into a state of utter confusion. Quite logically, the film spreads an all-pervading atmosphere of horror. Like the Nazi world, Caligari's world overflows with sinister portents, acts of terror and outbursts of panic. (Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, 109)

Thus Kracauer's entire thesis of equating film with society originates in his reading of Caligari as a mirror of Hitler and of this movie's power to anticipate the horrors of the Third Reich. Kracauer's book was written after the Nazi empire had ended and at a time when everybody was hungry for an explanation of the horrors. In addition, Kracauer, a German Jewish émigré, was a knowledgeable interpreter to the world of what had happened to Germany.

His thesis is also a clever way of tying art and society together and of using film as perhaps the most thorough investigation and explanation of the unthinkable horrors to come. However, while Kracauer wants to work in an enlightened, rational framework, this method may also suggest the opposite by trying to interpret the movie's obscure and contradictory elements with a rational, political interpretation. As expressionism is usually seen as a continuation of irrational romanticism, so can

Kracauer's method be regarded as irrational since he promises an explanation of the mysterious and obscure elements in the movie.

Later interpretations, such as Mike Budd's, center more on textual differences in the movie, such as the contradiction between the surreal settings and the real characters, but Budd does not provide a more convincing interpretation either.

Who then is the real madman in the movie, Francis or Caligari? As we have seen, Janowitz and Mayer intended Caligari to be the evil madman, whereas Wiene's altered frame had turned Francis into the lunatic. A clue for deciphering the movie may be found in the latest restoration of the colors for the DVD version. Here the color brown is used for all daylight scenes (inside or out), blue for all scenes at night and for all titles, pink for three scenes in Jane's bedroom, and two-tone colors with blue on brown for two scenes where Francis narrates his story—the opening scene and the scene where he tells of Alan's murder. These two scenes at last may add meaning to the puzzle of what really happened since they add another layer of interpretation. The two-tone colors separate Francis's story from the rest of the story and point to the fact that the events are indeed told from his perspective. With this information, the possibility is introduced that Francis's rivalry with Alan could have caused harm to his friend—whether he murdered his friend or not remains open.

But a political interpretation along Kracauer's lines cannot be excluded either. Thus, although it will probably never be deciphered completely, the movie serves as a catalyst for discussing political events in Germany during the Weimar Republic. It serves as a testament to one of the most turbulent times in German history and shows how art is able to capture the reality of political confusion in one of its most profound expressions. To this day *The Cabinet of Caligari* stands as an outstanding example not only of expressionist filmmaking but of expressionist art of any kind. (RZ)

QUESTIONS

1. List some elements of expressionism in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*.
2. Describe the expressionist characteristics in the actors of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*.
3. How does the musical score contribute to the atmosphere of the movie?
4. Make a list of important scenes and the colors used.
5. Describe the political situation in Germany immediately after World War I.
6. Why would Siegfried Kracauer describe the film's Dr. Caligari as a precursor to Hitler?
7. What is your own interpretation of the movie and its inconsistencies?

8. Describe the expressionist features in this still image below.



Cesare with Jane in her bedroom.

RELATED FILMS

Nosferatu, eine Symphonie des Grauens (*Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror*, F. W. Murnau, 1922) is an expressionist horror film that introduced the vampire genre.

Der Student von Prag (*The Student of Prague*, Henrik Galeen, 1926) is an expressionist remake of the 1913 *The Student of Prague*.

Dr. Mabuse, der Spieler (*Dr. Mabuse the Gambler*, Fritz Lang, 1922) is the first film in the Dr. Mabuse series.

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Nosferatu

(F. W. Murnau, 1922)



Nosferatu behind a closed window looking at and longing for the woman in the window of the house opposite his.

CREDITS

DirectorF. W. Murnau
ScreenplayHenrik Galeen
Director of Photography Günther Krampf and Fritz Arno Wagner
Music.....Hans Erdmann
Producers..... Enrico Dieckmann, Albin Grau, Wayne Keeley
Production Companies..... Jofa-Atelier Berlin-Johannisthal, Prana-Film GmbH
Length..... varies depending on version, average is ca. 80 minutes;
Silent, B/W and tinted

Principal Cast

Max Schreck (Graf Orlok), Alexander Granach (Knock), Gustav von Wangenheim (Thomas Hutter), Greta Schröder (Ellen), Georg H. Schnell (Harding), Ruth Landshoff (Harding's sister), John Gottowt (Professor Bulwer), Gustav Botz (Dr. Sievers), Max Nemetz (Captain of the Demeter), Wolfgang Heinz (First Mate).

THE STORY

Thomas Hutter¹ travels to Transylvania at the request of his boss to interest Count Orlok (also spelled Orlock) in an old house in Wisborg.² Although the trip will be long and dangerous, Hutter undertakes the commission for the financial gain and adventure that the trip promises. Once in Transylvania, and in spite of warnings from the local populace, Hutter visits the count, who agrees to purchase the house but attacks the agent during the night. Hutter escapes the vampire's attack only because Ellen, his wife, who is hundreds of miles away, calls out his name in her sleep just as the count is ready to bite him. The count later travels to Wisborg by sea, killing all the crew on the ship that transports him. Hutter returns home via land after a bout with fever. An outbreak of plague in Wisborg coincides with Count Orlok's arrival, but the town is saved from further suffering when Ellen, having read that a woman pure of heart could kill the vampire, sacrifices herself by keeping him at her bedside until the break of dawn.

BACKGROUND

F. W. Murnau's vampire film, *Nosferatu*, was inspired by Bram Stoker's popular 1897 novel *Dracula*. The legend of Count Dracula,³ an immortal who drank the blood of his victims, had been a part of popular culture since medieval times. Capitalizing on the legend's darker side and also on the Victorian era's repressed nature in matters of sexuality, Stoker created a novel of a monster who was at once a threat to women wanting sexual adventure and men who were insecure about their own sexuality. *Dracula* has remained a bestselling book since its publication and influenced dozens of novels and films up to the present day. Murnau adapted this theme to capture the temper of German expressionism, the aesthetic movement that dominated all of the arts in Germany through the 1910s and 1920s. As a consequence, his film reflects the frightening tone of German expressionist lyric and painting and mirrors the horror stories being told by other German directors, leaving little of the original novel in place.

Even though the film little resembles Bram Stoker's Victorian novel, the author's widow, Florence Stoker, filed and eventually won a lawsuit for copyright infringement of *Dracula* (Saviour 2004). Murnau changed the names of his characters and location of the action, but Mrs. Stoker pursued her case, and in 1925 a

1. In some video releases, intertitles refer to Thomas and Ellen as Jonathan and Mina, their names in the original Bram Stoker novel on which the film is loosely based.

2. The fictional town of Wisborg is sometimes referred to in some releases and in some reviews as Bremen, a city in northern Germany.

3. The figure may or may not be based on Vlad III, a fifteenth-century monarch around whom a series of legends developed. For a thorough study of Vlad III's history, the legends, and the possible connection to Bram Stoker's novel, see Grigore Nandris, "The Historical Dracula: The Theme of His Legend in the Western and in the Eastern Literatures of Europe," *Comparative Literature Studies* 3, no. 4 (1966): 367–96.

German court ordered all copies destroyed. Some prints did survive, however, and thus in spite of the interdiction, the film had a New York premier in 1929. By 1943, it was recognized as one of Murnau's masterpieces (Ford 2000). Yet, as mentioned, in spite of Mrs. Stoker's suit and the court's ruling, Murnau's film resembles Stoker's novel very little. Even had he not changed the names and location, the movie's story departs sufficiently from Stoker's novel as to suggest a radically different reworking of the Dracula legend.

Nosferatu is a silent film, but the term is somewhat of a misnomer since films were never silent, or at least they were seldom experienced in a silent mode. Even if the visual track could run without sound of any sort, it was general practice in the early days of cinema to have music in the background. Major films often had a score composed especially for them and played by a full orchestra at the premier and in first run metropolitan film houses. In less affluent settings, organ or piano music replaced the orchestra. Often the organists or pianists chose their own music to accompany the visuals, choosing from source books that made suggestions as to what kind of music was appropriate for what kind of scenes. Silent movies often had a narrator as well.

The situation today—with the music on various DVD releases, as well as on the now obsolete VHS recordings—often follows the haphazard choice of scores from the early years. For works in the public domain, distributors may choose their own music, adding tracks that are more or less suitable or unsuitable to the visual text. The Kino Classics release of the film contains the original music by composer Hans Erdmann, but other versions underscore the visual text with compositions that range from jazz to electronic music to nineteenth-century classical. Perhaps the strangest accompaniment is by Type O-Negative, an alternative rock band.

Just as films from the silent era were not silent, they were also generally not in black and white, as one often assumes. Instead, directors used tinted filters to indicate mood, location, and time of day. Blue generally meant nighttime, for example. Owing to most of the tinted prints having been confiscated after Murnau lost the copyright infringement lawsuit, until recently *Nosferatu* has been known only in a black-and-white format. Indeed, even though restored in 1995, some DVD versions still have only the black-and-white print, which visually implies that all scenes take place in the daytime, a problem for a movie about a vampire who is injured by daylight.

EVALUATION

Murnau's film tells a story quite different from that traditionally associated with vampire movies. Perhaps as the first of the vampire films it had less to be influenced by, although as mentioned, Bram Stoker's novel served as a model, even if extensively altered. Stoker's novel and the vampire films that followed equate vampirism with unrestrained sexuality. Their imagery suggests seduction as well as violation, excitement as well as fear. And even the first Hollywood version with Bela Lugosi suggests irony in the paradox of the count's immortality. To understand how important sexuality is to the Dracula legend, one need only consider the film *Interview*

with a *Vampire*, whose overt texts of homosexuality and promiscuous sex create a subtext of AIDS that bubbles beneath the surface of this vampire tale.

In contrast to most other vampire films, Murnau's *Nosferatu* minimizes the subtext of sexuality, although some readings of the film point to an obvious subtext of homosexuality (Koller 2000; Dyer 1990). In place of overt sexuality Murnau focuses on themes of interest to German Expressionism in general and horror films of the time in particular: good vs. evil, sacrifice, and death. *Nosferatu* is a film infused by its time, reflecting the pessimism of postwar Germany, echoing themes of horror found in other films of Weimar cinema, and committed to the idea of movies as art (Eisner 2008; Kracauer 1947). Yet the film also reaches beyond its era, exploring the issues of identity and alterity or otherness, themes of universal interest, which explains the film's reputation as a classic and its position on critics' lists of "top films."

Nosferatu equates evil with rats, disease, and wild animals. Count Orlok embodies what man fears most, a premature death. Evil, as embodied by the vampire, is unrelenting and indiscriminating, infecting all who cross his path, young and old, shipmates and ship captain, women and men, and poor and rich. Indeed not even the virtuous Ellen can escape *Nosferatu*'s power over life, even if she can end that power. For it is only through her death that the vampire's scourge of killing can be stopped. Unlike his model/counterpart in Bram Stoker's novel, *Nosferatu* possesses no social graces, no handsome physiognomy, and no seductive allure. He is a total and complete outsider, both because of his physical appearance and of course because of his unnatural being. Yet, in spite of his representation of evil, we develop sympathy for him, if only briefly, as he stands behind a closed window looking at and longing for the woman in the window of the house opposite his. Indeed the film gains its power in the polarity that is evident in scenes such as this, revealing Count Orlok's loneliness even as it captures the hideousness that produces his evil. The same effect occurs early in the film when the count reaches out for human contact after first seeing Ellen's portrait in a locket. The contrast of ugliness and beauty transmutes in the next scenes to a contrast of evil and goodness.

Nosferatu explores other themes in addition to good and evil. Among them are the power of love, the exclusion of those who are different, and the loneliness of the outsider. Love, exclusion, and loneliness all come together in the denouement of the film: Ellen's willingness to seduce the vampire to end his evil reign. Ellen Hutter is sensitive, good, and totally in love with her husband. We recognize the essential decency of her character in her expression of sadness that the flowers she has just received from her husband will now wilt and die. Furthermore, in her husband's absence she develops difficulty sleeping, wandering in her sleep and walking morosely when awake along a coastline strewn with crosses that memorialize men who have died at sea. Finally, we see goodness in Ellen's reaction as she reads a page from a book on vampires that advises that only a woman of pure virtue can save mankind from the threat of the monster. In reading this page, she shows a defiant nature, as her husband has forbidden her to read the book, but she also reveals her readiness to sacrifice herself to save her husband and the town.

When contrasted with Ellen's beauty and goodness, it is of course not difficult to see why the vampire would be excluded from human company and

discourse. Nor is it difficult to recognize that this very exclusion, even if he himself seems to choose this path, is a motivating factor in his killing of the townspeople. Moreover, he possesses a cursed form of immortality that sets him apart from humanity. His very nature condemns him to a fate of eternal aloneness. His victims die. Unlike Dracula's victims who become his consorts and share his vampire existence, Nosferatu is and always will be alone.

Nosferatu is one of the first films not merely to make extensive use of location shooting but to allow location shooting to reflect the themes of the film. The exterior scenes of the town and harbor of Wisborg were shot in Germany's northern seaports of Rostock and Wismar. Count Orlok's Wisborg dwelling was an old warehouse in Lübeck, and it still stands as a department store. The High Tatras and Orasky Castle of Slovakia substituted for the Carpathian Mountains and the count's home in Transylvania.

Murnau's decision to shoot on location lends an atmosphere of mystery and decay to *Nosferatu*. At the same time, location shots add a sense of realism to this otherwise expressionist and formalist film. In the Transylvania scenes especially, the film builds tension by counterbalancing expressionist form with realistic content. Murnau uses shadows, deliberate pacing, oblique angles, exaggerated speed, and scenes reproduced in negative on the screen to capture the natural settings of a village inn, horses running in a meadow, a coach racing through the heath, a ruined castle on a mountain top, and local villagers. The director thus reverses the convention of early horror films such as *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* or *The Student of Prague*, which used the artificiality of studio sets to enhance horrific effects. Murnau instead sets his tale of fantasy and horror in the natural world, adding realism to an artificial tale, creating an uneasy feeling of dread in viewers.

The film itself, however, is not scary in the conventional sense. There are no monsters that jump out at the characters and startle viewers, nor bats that fly in through windows foreshadowing danger, as occur in conventional vampire movies. Instead, there are arches that lead from an actual courtyard into the void of total darkness; tower rooms whose windows look out and onto a real but unreachable landscape; and furnishings that transmute into objects of danger. In one of the more effective scenes of the film, Hutter lies in bed as his door slowly opens and the vampire appears in the distance down the corridor. As he slowly advances and reaches the room, he goes up a step or two until his body is framed by the doorway, which is shaped like a gothic arch, the monster's head almost reaching the peak of the arch. The doorway emphasizes and even extends the monster's size, generating in Hutter and the viewer a deeper fear than would have been achieved had Nosferatu appeared suddenly out of nowhere.

Murnau created a likewise ominous atmosphere for the scenes in Wisborg by shooting in patrician houses that had once been fine but had become rather dilapidated. Here also he creates fear and dread through a blending of natural settings, expressionist techniques, and horrific content. Ellen, for example, stands at her window looking down onto the street watching as a town crier's proclamation signals the spread of the plague. The next time we see Ellen at the window, she is watching Nosferatu looking out the window opposite hers from the rundown building he has leased. Later in a stairwell, we see not Nosferatu but his shadow

as it slinks along the walls of the hallway before the monster appears in Ellen's room. Again there are no surprises, no sudden appearance of objects of danger. Rather, there is a deliberate sequence of movement that builds suspense and leads to Ellen's sacrifice, submitting to the desires of the vampire, which in turn leads to the monster's death.

Reflecting the themes and the tone prevalent in the expressionist plays and films of the era, the movie creates a mood of mystery surrounding themes of sacrifice, love, and death. As the film opens, for example, Knock, a gnomish-sized broker, pores over real estate documents whose strange cabalistic-like symbols suggest hidden meaning. His subsequent commission to Hutter, one of his agents, is likewise suggestively ambiguous, mixing promises of rewards with warnings of danger. Finally, this sequence comes to a close as Hutter offers his wife a bouquet of flowers as a way of breaking the news to her about his trip, which she accepts, at the same time mournfully expressing her sorrow that the flowers are now going to die.

Thomas Hutter, in his own way, also contrasts to the vampire. He is a naïve fellow, totally in love with his wife and full of ambition. With few intertitles to guide us, we sense his pleasure in his wife through his smiles, his gift of flowers, and his willingness to undertake the arduous trip to Transylvania. Once in Transylvania, his love letter home and his reckless attempts to get back to Wisborg to warn Ellen further characterize his noble nature. We can also see in him the beginning of a filmic cliché, the husband or fiancé who temporarily leaves his partner, thus endangering her life.

Throughout the movie, Murnau's visual text continues to juxtapose the irrational and the rational, the themes of adventure or sacrifice and danger, and elements of love and death found in the opening sequence. Murnau makes ample allusion throughout the film to polarities such as good and evil, beauty and ugliness, and life and death, themes that in general are especially strong during war years and immediately thereafter and that in particular reflect the condition found in Weimar Germany. Ellen's perfect features are thus contrasted with Nosferatu's distorted body, even when she is absent. At a table in Transylvania, Nosferatu remarks about Ellen's beauty (specifically her beautiful neck) as he holds her photo in his exaggeratedly elongated hands. Later in the night, scenes of the vampire beginning to attack Hutter are intercut with scenes of Ellen calling out his name. Finally, in Wisborg, as the monster stares out a window opposite Ellen's bedroom, she stares out her window at him. Evil, ugliness, and death are present in all these scenes. Yet they seem ably dispelled by goodness, beauty, and love.

Yet much of the film stresses death and illness, as was prevalent in Germany and much of Europe immediately after the war. Nosferatu, for example, brings plague with him as he arrives in Wisborg. At a time not long after the Spanish Influenza had killed millions worldwide, Murnau associates his vampire with disease-carrying rats. Three scenes develop his motif of death. The first occurs on the boat that brought Nosferatu to Wisborg. Subsequent to showing how the sailors break open Nosferatu's earth-filled coffins and thereby release scores of rats, the crew buries the first to die in a shipboard ceremony. In the second, Ellen walks along a deserted coastal shore dotted with dozens of crosses, looks out to



Nosferatu stands on the deck of the ship terrorizing the crew.

sea, and awaits Hutter's return; but the scene also strengthens her tie to the vampire, who is also at sea at this time. Finally, in the third scene, shot from a bird's eye view as Ellen looks out her window, coffin after coffin is carried down an otherwise deserted street.

The vampire's association with disease and death does more than reflect conditions in postwar Germany. By making Nosferatu a hideous, diseased pariah, the film also positions him as a perfect example of the other, the misfit who stands outside society, never able to join in. Whereas Count Dracula as conceived by Bram Stoker is clearly a monster, his guise of sophisticated Eastern European charm gains him entry into society's theater boxes and parlors. Even as he remains an outsider he enters easily into social discourse and is seemingly welcomed into parlors and even bedrooms through doors and windows conveniently left opened. Murnau's monster, in contrast, is shut out of social interaction with the other characters both because of his physical appearance but also as mentioned above by his own choosing. Murnau never shows him even attempting to socialize; rather, he shows him sneaking through the town at night, preferring to enter his new home through an outside wall rather than a door. Murnau also positions the monster both within his own world, looking out of his window, and shut out from society, looking over and into Ellen's window. Indeed this shot, as pointed out earlier, at least to modern sensibilities, elicits a degree of sympathy for the monster, totally alone because of his physical hideousness as well as his metaphysical condition of being unable to die. (RCR)

QUESTIONS

1. Describe the way Murnau uses the following elements of cinema to enhance the evil power of the vampire: (1) camera (movement and placement, looking especially at distance from camera); (2) lighting, including shadows; (3) mise-en-scène (the way people and objects are positioned within the frame); and (4) editing (the way scenes are put together or ordered).
2. *Nosferatu* was released in 1922, less than four years after the end of World War I. At the time, Germans were still suffering from the effects the war had had on their physical and emotional wellbeing. Identify individual scenes that would remind contemporary viewers (those seeing the film in 1922) of the war that had just ended and the misery in which they now found themselves.
3. Some critics have noted an anti-Semitic subtext (secondary meaning buried within an artwork's story and structure) in the film. What evidence is there to support their argument? Others have suggested a homosexual subtext. Can you find evidence to support this claim?
4. How does Murnau use the visual text to prepare us for Ellen's sacrifice?
5. How does the film differ from other film versions of the vampire legend with which you may be familiar? Some other famous versions are *Dracula* (Todd Browning, 1931), starring Bela Lugosi; *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1992), starring Gary Oldman; *Interview with a Vampire* (Neil Jordan, 1994), starring Tom Cruise and Brad Pitt; *Blade* (Stephen Norrington, 1998), starring Wesley Snipes; *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Fran Rubel Kuzui, 1992); *Nosferatu* (Werner Herzog, 1979), starring Klaus Kinski; *Shadow of the Vampire* (E. Elias Merhige, 2000), starring John Malkovich and Willem Dafoe, and the films based on Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight Saga* novels. There have also been several popular television series of vampires, the most recent being *True Blood* (2008–14).

RELATED FILMS

Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari (*The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, Robert Wiene, 1920). This excellent example of expressionist film relates the tale of an inmate of a mental institution and his confrontation with the head psychiatrist, Dr. Caligari, a man he accuses of murder. One of Germany's earliest horror films. See discussion elsewhere in this book.

Der Golem (*The Golem*, Henrik Galeen and Paul Wegener, 1915) and *Der Golem, wie er in die Welt kam* (*The Golem: How He Came into the World*, Carl Boese and Paul Wegener,

1920). These two films, based on a Jewish legend of a clay statue that was brought to life, tell the tale of horror from a different perspective. The 1915 film locates the legend to the twentieth century. The later film leaves the story in the sixteenth century.

Der Student von Prag (*The Student of Prague*, Hanns Heinz Ewers and Stellan Rye, 1913) and *Der Student von Prag* (*The Student of Prague*, Henrik Galeen, 1926). The original and its remake, based on a story by the German Romanticist E. T. A. Hoffmann, tell of a student who sells his mirror image to the devil in return for fame and fortune. The films offer an excellent example of the advances in production values made between 1913, when narrative film was still in its infancy, and 1926, the heyday of German silent cinema.

Der müde Tod (*Destiny*, Fritz Lang, 1921). The film reframes the Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, a tale of going to the underworld to bring a deceased lover back from the dead. Set in contemporary Germany, the story tells of a woman who goes to the realm of death to bring back her dead husband.

Nosferatu: Phantom der Nacht (*Nosferatu the Vampyre*, Werner Herzog, 1979). Herzog remade Murnau's film as a loving homage to the original movie. Klaus Kinski, who worked with Herzog in a number of his movies, creates a monster at once frightening and pitiful, as a man condemned to live forever.

Other Murnau films of note

Der letzte Mann (*The Last Laugh*, 1924). Embarrassed when he is demoted to lavatory attendant because of his age, a doorman at a prestigious hotel continues to don his fancy uniform, changing into his attendant's clothes only when at work. A happy end was added at the request of the Hollywood distributors.

Faust (1926). Emil Jannings, who was the first actor to win an Academy Award in 1928, starred as Mephisto in this silent film adaptation of the classic drama by Wolfgang Goethe about a man who sells his soul to the devil.

Sunrise (1927). This was the first of four films that Murnau made after moving to Hollywood. It tells a melodramatic love story about a man tempted by a lover to kill his wife.

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Metropolis

(Fritz Lang, 1927)



Skyscrapers and smokestacks tower above the city.

CREDITS

Director Fritz Lang
ScreenplayThea von Harbou and Fritz Lang
Director of Photography Karl Freund, Günther Rittau, Walter Ruttmann
Music..... Gottfried Huppertz
Producer Erich Pommer
Production Companies.....Universum Film (Ufa)
Length..... Originally ca. 150 minutes; other copies vary from
70 minutes to 149 (remastered film); IMDB.com reports
a premiere cut of 210 minutes; Silent, B/W and tinted.

Principal Cast

Brigitte Helm (Maria / Robot), Gustav Fröhlich (Freder), Alfred Abel (Joh Fredersen),
Rudolf Klein-Rogge (Rotwang), Theodor Loos (Josaphat), Heinrich George (Guardian
of the Heart Machine).

THE STORY

In a large city of the future that closely resembled the city of New York at the time, a small elite class of businessmen own the means of production. It is unclear, however, just what is being produced. They live on the surface of their world, party in nightclubs, and worry about the stock exchange. Their children, of whom we see mainly young men in their twenties, engage in sports and chase young women in a paradisiacal garden. Meanwhile, a much larger group of men serve as the workforce. They tend the machinery that runs the city and creates wealth for the upper class. They live in the depths of the city. Their children wear raggedy clothes and appear somewhat undernourished. They mostly seem to be under ten, suggesting that those older have joined the workforce, having no time to engage in sports or chase around in a garden. Machines that keep everyone alive are found between these two worlds of high finance and backbreaking labor. The head of the wealthy industrialists believes he will get more productivity from the workers, who are threatening to strike, if he can goad them into rebelling. The voice leading them to strike belongs to Maria, an evangelist who preaches in the workers' underground caverns. The leading industrialist asks a mad scientist to construct a robot in the image of the evangelist, and he hopes to use the robot to foment a revolution that is doomed to fail. Two factors thwart his plan. First, Freder, the wealthy leader's son, falls in love with the evangelist Maria and lends his support to the workers. Second, similarly to the prince in *Swan Lake* and other myths, Freder cannot tell the difference between the woman he loves and her evil double. Even though they look the same, they act very differently from each other, a clue that he overlooks. Freder's confusion leads to the false Maria taking the place of the evangelist Maria. The false Maria induces the workers to wreck the machines that prevent the underground city from flooding, which in turn endangers the workers' children as well as the wealthy scion, who is in the city. Eventually, the workers recognize the false Maria's evil intent and burn her at the stake. As she melts back to her robot state, Freder sees his error in judgment and rescues the good Maria from the mad scientist who had imprisoned her, mistakenly taking her for his dead wife. Order is restored after the scientist falls to his death from a church tower and Freder acts as an intermediary between his father and the lead worker.

BACKGROUND

Fritz Lang's career spanned four decades (1919–60), two countries (Germany and the United States), and three distinct eras of cinema (silent, early sound, and film noir). His fame rests primarily on the films he directed early in his career in Germany, particularly the two-part cycle *Die Nibelungen* (*The Nibelungen*, 1922/24), *Metropolis* (1927) and *M* (1931). Nonetheless, his work in Hollywood also brought him recognition, especially from French critics writing for the influential periodical, *Cahiers du cinéma*, who believed that his work in Hollywood revealed his personal vision even as he was forced to work within the studio system. That vision was characterized

by themes of corruption, murder, betrayal, and vengeance, as well as camera work that enhanced a feeling of entrapment. Among his best-known Hollywood films are *Hangmen Also Die* (1943) and *Ministry of Fear* (1944), both thrillers set in the years of World War II. The films noirs *Fury* (1936), *The Big Heat* (1953), and *While the City Sleeps* (1956) reprise Lang's interest in police corruption, serial murder, and organized crime as found in his Weimar-era films (1919–33) *Dr. Mabuse: The Gambler* (1922) and *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse* (1933), and again in the early sound film *M*. Toward the end of his career, Lang returned to Germany, directing a third *Dr. Mabuse* movie, *The Thousand Eyes of Dr. Mabuse*. His films during this time never reached the level of success or recognition of those films of his Weimar or Hollywood days.

Lang's film *Die Nibelungen* consists of two separate films, *Siegfrieds Tod* (*Death of Siegfried*) and *Kriemhilds Rache* (*Kriemhild's Revenge*). Its story follows the original medieval epic rather than that of Richard Wagner's opera. Movie legend claims *Die Nibelungen* as a film admired by Adolf Hitler (Bratton 2000, 195). Lang's camera movement created elaborate action scenes that create martial-like film rhythms that could easily have appealed to the Nazis' love of pageantry. Certainly the heroic nature of the original tale and the grand monumental sets would have satisfied their desire to see themselves as the successors to Germanic knights. Moreover, the second part of the film, which features the Huns as disfigured sub-humans, seems to presage Nazi theories of racial superiority (Eisner 1973, 326, 335–36; Kracauer 1947). Lang's use of monumental architecture, both of structures and crowds, finds echoes in the films of Leni Riefenstahl in which she manipulates human form, such as in *Triumph des Willens* (*Triumph of the Will*, 1935), her documentation of the Nazi Party rally held in Nuremberg in 1934. Lang's greatest film legacy, however, is arguably *M*, a film based on the Düsseldorf child murderer Peter Kürten and discussed in a later chapter in this book. It was his first sound picture in which he continued to explore the themes of good and evil, fate, and revenge found in his silent films and which he would reprise in the films made in Hollywood. The film stars Peter Lorre, who got his start on stage in Bertolt Brecht's *Mann ist Mann*. Lorre's portrayal of the schizophrenic murderer made him an international star. He reprised his role as sinister villain throughout a long career in Hollywood, which followed his flight from Nazi Germany.

The history of the reception of *Metropolis*, as with that of other cult films from the silent era (*Nosferatu* and *The Cabinet of Caligari*, discussed elsewhere in the book), is complicated by the number of print versions of the film. Until the most recent remastering of the movie, it is probable that few viewers have ever seen it as Lang intended. The original ca. 150-minute film was the most expensive of its day. The movie's producer, Universum Film AG (Ufa), pulled the film shortly after its premier in Berlin in order to shorten it for international release. Three master negatives were made available, one each for America, Germany, and Europe outside Germany. Distributors further cut these to correspond to their assumption of viewer expectations. The version originally released in America, for example, ran 75 minutes.¹

1. It is interesting to note that ninety years later, *Snow Piercer*, a South Korean film produced in 2013, whose story and structure pay homage to *Metropolis*, was also shortened considerably for American audiences by its U.S. distributors.

Scenes were also cut in differing sequences and had varying title cards, thus creating different versions of the film. *Metropolis* went over budget and lost money for Ufa (Riess 1985, 11–14). Furthermore, it received mixed reviews, particularly in America, perhaps because the shortened print made the movie difficult to follow. Today it is considered a major classic. Roger Ebert calls it the first true science-fiction film (Ebert 1998), and David Bordwell writes that “*Metropolis* (1927) is one of the great sacred monsters of the cinema” (Bordwell 2010).

After World War II, *Metropolis* gained in popularity, entering into film history courses that were beginning to grow on university campuses. Eventually, the film became a cult favorite of cinema clubs, among architecture and physics students, and also classic movie fans. Several different 16mm versions of the film circulated before VHS tapes became popular in the 1970s. Since the film was in the public domain and thus no longer protected by copyright, the 16mm prints became a source for multiple versions, first on VHS tape and finally on DVD. By 1990 there were at least five different versions available. They differed slightly in the order of scenes, the inclusion or exclusion of sometimes important narrative material, and most of all in the accompanying soundtrack. As the original score had been lost, the 16mm prints added their own music. VHS and DVD copies added still more optional tracks. The movie has had electronic music, waltz-like tunes, jazz, industrial sounds, and 1980s rock. Ultimately, in 2002, the original score by Gottfried Huppertz was rediscovered and added to the film’s soundtrack in an arrangement by Berndt Heller. In 1984, music impresario Giorgio Moroder added a rock/disco track, colorized scenes, added additional footage and stills, which had been found, rearranged the sequence of some scenes, and added notes to explain the narrative. The publicity for the film proclaimed that a classic again conquers the world. The 1980s rock version and the version with original music were released theatrically in 35mm. In 2002, The Murnau Stiftung, together with the British Film Institute, released through Kino International the remastered version and in 2010 released the latest restored copy. This 2010 version contains additional footage found in Argentina and is augmented by footage located in Australia and New Zealand. The film is estimated to be 95 percent of the original, thus allowing viewers to see what had excited audiences at the Berlin premier.

EVALUATION

Spanish film director Luis Buñuel described *Metropolis* as “two films joined by the belly, but with divergent, indeed extremely antagonistic, spiritual needs” (Buñuel 1927). Noted film critic and historian Lotte Eisner pronounced it “divested of all reality” (Eisner 1976, 86). Both comments are apt. Although the images and special effects that cameraman Eugen Schüfftan created for the film are indeed dazzling, the story as described in the first section of this chapter is not merely muddled but a bit silly. The film’s acting and the movement of the actors is exaggerated, even when projected at correct speeds. Story strands gain prominence only to disappear. Finally, themes and ideas seem to cancel each other out. Yet as Roger Ebert wrote, “The movie has a plot that defies common sense, but its very discontinuity is a



The real or good Maria preaching in front of the workers.

strength" (Ebert 1998). That is to say, the greatness of the film lies precisely in the multifaceted and multivalenced vastness of its images and filmic style.

Metropolis truly defies interpretation. Outwardly, the film is science fiction, reflecting the marvelous inventions and atmosphere found in the novels of Hans Dominik, a German science-fiction writer popular at the time. Joh Fredersen, the father and mastermind of the business life of the city, communicates by two-way video. The workers control the life support of the city through an elaborate system of machinery. The film's futuristic world even anticipates robots and cyborgs. Lang depicts the futuristic, deceptively utopian aspect of the city through the distantly viewed cityscape of the Metropolis created for the film. Yet science is a malevolent force in *Metropolis*, suggesting a dystopic rather than utopic future. For science is used against the bulk of the people, eventually threatening to destroy the city. Wealth is available only to the privileged. Technology condemns the others to poverty. The scientific mind is represented by Rotwang, a mad scientist whose obsession is to destroy Fredersen, his former rival in love, and to this end he uses his cybernetic creation. Science, and by extension modernity, is thus not panacea but curse.

Metropolis reflects the popular culture of the 1920s and its interest in social, political, and religious themes. Social disparity is introduced early. In an early scene, Maria brings the children of the workers up to the Garden of Paradise in order to introduce them to their "brothers and sisters," the rich and spoiled progeny of the city's rulers. Another early scene shows workers in lock step trudging to industrial elevators to be lowered to their homes deep underground. This sequence is

juxtaposed with one showing the “club of the sons” high above the world engaging in sports and romping in a pleasure garden. The images showing the disparity of rich and poor and the exploitation of the latter for the benefit of the former reflect the social issues with which modernity was struggling. Technology, mass labor, and disregard for workers had already been exposed in plays such as Gerhart Hauptmann’s *The Weavers*, Georg Kaiser’s *Gas Trilogy*, and Ernst Toller’s *The Machine Wreckers* (1922). In these plays, workers who have been exploited by the ruling class rise up against the master class and destroy the means of production. In *Metropolis*, the elites, as embodied in Joh Fredersen, recall America’s industrial tycoon John D. Rockefeller, Jr., who had authorities crush a strike at one of his mines in Ludlow, Colorado, killing dozens of people. Joh Fredersen is willing just as ruthlessly to crush the workers in his factory.

Religious imagery and a love story overlay the film’s dystopic world of social rebellion. Fredersen’s son, Freder, first meets Maria when she brings the children to the Garden of Paradise. Their next meeting takes place in front of an altar, where Maria has been preaching to the workers about the Tower of Babel and brotherly love. Her passionate sermon is reminiscent of American evangelists Aimee Semple McPherson, Mary Baker Eddy, or the women crusaders of the Salvation Army.¹ Maria’s double, the robot Maria, is a seductress in the vein of a 1920s vamp. Her death through burning at the stake continues the religious imagery, as does the happy end of the film in front of a church.

The two Marias introduce a sexist subtext, characterizing women as either virgin or prostitute (Jenkins 1981, 82–87). The stereotype of women in terms of good or bad is reflected in the minor portrayals in the film as well. Mirroring the personalities of the two Marias, other women are party-loving flappers (the Brahmin class) or conscientious mothers (the working class), albeit concern for their children comes only after a catastrophe. Social conscience is reduced to its origins in religious zealotry (Maria) or sexual desire (Freder). Indeed, the son’s conversion to activist, coming as it does after his secret rendezvous with Maria in the chapel, anticipates a literary and filmic cliché of the latter half of the twentieth century, namely, that men join causes to sleep with the women behind the cause. The film’s end is particularly troubling. As generally interpreted, the father (referred to as “head” in the ending inter-titles), the worker (referred to as “hand”), and the son (referred to as “heart”), are premonitions of Hitler, the heart uniting industry and labor. Indeed, if one looks at the imagery of the final moments, the workers are again marching in unison, and the father is back in power. The compromise that the son achieves is essentially a compromise of the status quo. This is ironic since Freder’s role is that of savior and embodies the characteristics of the “new man,” a trope from expressionist plays of the 1910s. In these plays characters are waiting for a “new man” who will transform social and economic structures. Freder, the “new man,” changes nothing.

Metropolis is recognized as a pioneering science-fiction film. Its structure, themes, and images can be found repeatedly in films that followed. Two recent

1. Bertolt Brecht was to use the trope of female crusader a few years later in his play *St Joan of the Stockyards* (1929), set in Chicago.

films, *Elysium* (2013) and *Snow Piercer* (2013), pay direct homage to its vision of a stratified world of haves and have-nots. In the former, the wealthy live literally above the clouds in an artificial satellite city. The poor live in a polluted world, toiling to keep the cloud city running. In the latter, the poor occupy the end cars in a perpetually moving train, providing hard work and sacrificing their lives for the ruling class at the front of the train. An episode of the television series *Star Trek*, “The Cloud Minders” (1969), likewise borrowed the idea of a planet of workers toiling for masters who lived in a city above the world. *Dark City* (1998) pays homage primarily to the architectural structure of Lang’s film. Finally, *Metropolis* (2001), a Japanese animé based on a 1949 manga (comic book) by the late Osamu Tezuka, incorporates Lang’s imagery and his theme of robotic people. (RCR)

QUESTIONS

1. Identify as many examples as possible of the contrast between the wealthy and the workers.
2. How does the movie characterize the working class? Give examples.
3. How does the actress playing Maria and the robot portray the differences in the two women?
4. Identify the religious references in the film. How are they filmed? What purpose do they serve?
5. Why do you think *Metropolis* has captured filmgoers’ imaginations for ninety years?
6. Compare the scene of the shift change from the remastered version of *Metropolis* with that from Moroder’s film (found on Youtube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S7CLLBZpT_Q).
7. How does Lang create tension and suspense in the following sequences?
 - a. Maria’s attempted escape from Rotwang
 - b. The exotic dance in the nightclub
 - c. The flooding of the underground city
 - d. The burning of the robot
8. Watch the trailers for *Elysium*, *Snow Piercer*, the Japanese animé *Metropolis*, and *Dark City* and discuss any elements that allude to the original.

RELATED FILMS

Silent films of Fritz Lang

Der müde Tod (*Destiny*, 1921). The film reframes the Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, a tale of going to the underworld to bring a deceased lover back from the dead. Set in contemporary Germany, the story tells of a woman who goes to the realm of death to bring back her dead husband.

Dr. Mabuse, der Spieler – Ein Bild der Zeit (*Dr. Mabuse: The Gambler*, 1922). Power and greed as motivating forces of evil have been a favorite subject of filmmakers up to the present. Here Lang tells of an arch criminal who sets out to rule Berlin.

Die Nibelungen (*The Nibelungen*, 1922/24). In this two-part cycle, Lang uses monumental sets and masses of extras to tell this Germanic legend of love and betrayal. The second part has been criticized for its negative and racially stereotyped portrayal of the Huns.

Other silent films

Von morgens bis mitternachts (*From Morn to Midnight*, Karl Heinz Martin 1920). The film is an adaptation of Georg Kaiser's drama of the same name, which tells of a man, bored with his humdrum life, who abandons his family for a fling with a prostitute.

Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Grosstadt (*Berlin: Symphony of a Great City*, Walther Ruttmann, 1927). The film is a documentary of Berlin from sunrise to sunset.

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Berlin: die Sinfonie der Großstadt

(Berlin: Symphony of a Great City, Walter Ruttmann, 1927)



Workers during Berlin's morning rush hour.

CREDITS

Director Walter Ruttmann
Screenplay Walter Ruttmann (based on an idea of Karl Mayer)
Cinematography Robert Baberske, Karl Freund, Raimar
Kuntze, and László Schäffer
Music Edmund Meisel (the original compositions are lost);
Timothy Brock (1993 score)
Production Deutsche Vereins-Film AG, Berlin; Fox Europa
Length 62 minutes, B/W

THE STORY

The film is a visual symphony that Ruttmann divides into five parts, labeling each part an "Act." A prelude contrapuntally focusing on unblemished nature and on

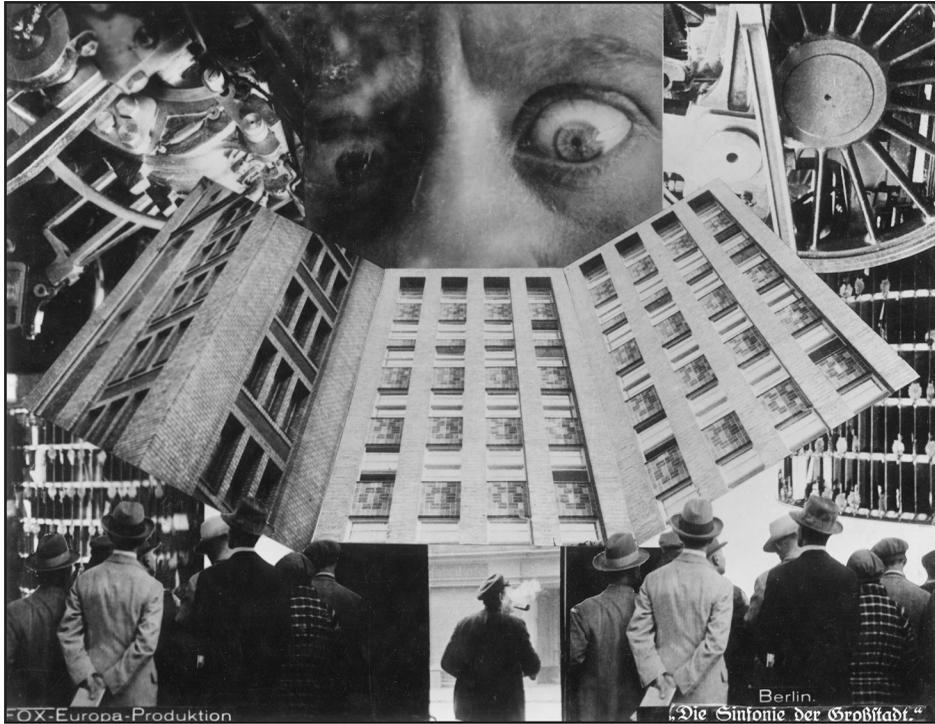
technology precedes the five-part drama, which consists of twenty-four hours in the life of Berlin. Ruttmann segments the day as follows:

Act I (5:00 a.m. to shortly before 8:00 a.m.). At the beginning of Act I, most of Berlin is still dormant—its inhabitants, its animals, its vehicles, its traffic, its stores, its factory machinery. No signs of life stir from the buildings. The streets, in spite of occasional late-night revelers or early-bird risers, are largely empty. Soon, however, the city starts to awaken. More and more blue-collar workers slowly populate its streets. Coming from all imaginable directions after using different modes of transportation—from trains to the simple use of their feet—many head toward work in factories. There they put machines into motion, ensuring that the machines produce mass quantities of milk, bread, or steel—the old staples manufactured differently coexisting with the new.

Act II (Immediately before 8:00 a.m. through mid-morning). The beginning of this act continues to focus on workers' tasks, but now mainly on those of various servants, cleaning women, housewives, garbage collectors, mailmen, sales personnel in small stores, and car washers. By this time, children have also awakened and are shown en route to schools and as they arrive in them around 8:00 a.m. After the film highlights the 8:00 a.m. time, it concentrates on white-collar workers on their way to large office buildings that they disappear into. Abundant amounts of activity occur in the offices too as drawers and notebooks open, papers are sorted, and typing, printing, and telephoning starts and accelerates.

Act III (From mid-morning until noon). Work continues as construction workers repair streetcar rails, people sell clothes, policemen help children cross the streets, and railroad and hotel personnel help new arrivals in Berlin load and unload suitcases. But this act mainly centers on the increasing activity in the streets: the many means of transportation (busses, streetcars, taxis, and trains with signs connecting Berlin to other European cities) and the hectically circulating traffic. The advertising world is conspicuously present in a multitude of signs and display windows, the latter filled with nodding or rotating mechanical dolls energetically emulating the accelerated movement on the city streets. In the midst of the considerable chaos, there is room not only for the purposeful workers of society but for a varied assortment of other Berliners. There is, for instance, a woman who goes into a church, a flirting couple and one that gets married, a woman who searches for something in forlorn fashion, and a prostitute who entices a man as they look at each other through the display windows of a store situated at the right angle of two streets. There are quarreling men flanked by onlookers, beggars, political demonstrators along with a political rabble-rouser, newspaper vendors, and marchers in a military parade (this scene leads to a quick glimpse of Paul von Hindenburg). All are representative of the traffic collages incessantly recreated in the film.

Act IV (Noon to dusk/early evening). This act includes perhaps the largest variation of activities and moods. At its outset, a welcome calm prevails as workers put down their tools and the wheels of factory machines come to a halt. A large cross section of Berliners—both humans and animals—eat, drink, and rest contentedly. Children play in the parks and on the streets, musicians practice in Berlin courtyards, people take leisurely walks or conduct leisurely conversations in garden cafes. After the noon rest period—idyllic except for the inexplicable torturing to which some



Collage of images from *Berlin: die Sinfonie der Großstadt*.

children suddenly subject animals and a poverty-stricken mother's surprisingly harsh rejection of the children approaching her with warmth—Berliners resume activities in the world of work.

But the irrational harshness introduced at noontime increases in the course of the act: the newspapers seem to highlight crises with words such as "murder" accentuated to the accompaniment of ominous rhythms; stormy showers catch Berliners unprepared and cause them to panic; a roller coaster plasters rigid fear on the faces of its riders; suddenly a woman commits suicide by jumping from a bridge; the animals in the zoo become menacingly restless; and two dogs ferociously attack each other. Toward the end of the act, however, the weather no longer poses any danger, and the working day comes to a halt in the offices and factories, allowing Berliners to engage in their various favorite daytime leisure activities. These range from pursuing all sorts of sports to attending a fashion show or simply sitting in the park.

Act V (From dusk to the early morning hours). As night falls, lights appear in residential buildings, advertisements light up the streets, and—much as a light bulb draws moths to it—lit-up display windows lure Berliners from the dark. Movie theaters, concerts, theater productions, variety shows, ice hockey and boxing events, jazz evenings, dancing establishments, bicycle races—all imaginable forms of spectacle and entertainment attract large crowds. In a word, the people drink, dance, and are merry. The ceaselessly circulating traffic of vehicles and pedestrians, the

dancing city lights, and the gleaming advertisements seem to merge into a chaotic whole with indistinguishable parts. This entity bursts into a firework display spreading all over the sky but ultimately giving way to the light circling from the solitary radio tower of Berlin—the only immediately recognizable Berlin landmark the film features.

BACKGROUND

Berlin: die Sinfonie der Großstadt (*Berlin: Symphony of a Great City*, 1927) is unquestionably a landmark film in the history of German cinema. For the first time, none of the filming occurred in an artificial studio, and barely any props were produced for the film (one of the few exceptions is an advertising column set up so that a cameraman could hide in its interior and film street scenes through a slit in the column).

For several tracking shots, a canvas with a slit for the camera was spread over the back of a truck. During approximately one year, Walter Ruttmann (the “h” was dropped from the first name in 1929) and his camera crew immersed themselves with hidden cameras in the life of Berlin, largely unnoticed by the people they were filming. Of the many thousand segments filmed on the life of Berlin, Ruttmann’s film includes only two with professional actors: an actor initiated the aggressive street argument between two men that was terminated by a policeman, and clearly the suicide episode was also a staged event.

On the whole, though, Ruttmann was right to pride himself on having produced the first German film departing from Germany’s theater tradition. His was also the first German film to feature a city as the main character and the first to dispense with inter-titles (there was no need for them, since spectators easily recognized the actual Berlin locations appearing in the film and were not called on to understand a traditional plot). Diverging from prevalent subjective, expressionistic filmic modes, Ruttmann initiated the realist tradition in German cinema. Thus his film is generally classified as an example of the New Objectivity (*Neue Sachlichkeit*), the artistic movement of the middle and later 1920s that followed expressionism.

Perhaps one of the most important innovations connected with *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* is the highly sensitive film stock that its producer Karl Freund, a photography expert, developed. It is this new film stock that enabled filming at night and filming inside any city building. Before Ruttmann’s groundbreaking movie, filming had been done almost exclusively in studios, since the expensive, special studio lighting was needed for simulating not only scenes taking place in the dark, whether inside or outside, but also for inside environments in general. Freund’s sensitive film stock was thus nothing short of revolutionary. It vastly expanded the areas where filming could occur and immensely increased the potential of cinema to shape perception—the act of viewing as much as the act of filming.

Despite its reliance on the real people of Berlin rather than on actors, on the real environment rather than on props, and on actual incidents rather than on simulated ones, Ruttmann’s film cannot be considered a pure documentary. Reflecting Ruttmann’s personal signature, its editing and montage techniques are largely responsible for introducing the concept of urbanism or modernity into German

film. In fact, the film needs to be situated in the context of the many hotly argued aesthetic debates of the Weimar era.

Musically talented, Ruttmann had nonetheless pursued a career as a painter after abandoning his study of architecture. Yet he eventually became dissatisfied with the static nature of paintings and moved more and more to the forefront of the theoretical positioning pertaining to film. Even before the start of the 1920s, he had fervently opposed the use of cinema to film literary works, whether novels or dramas, insisting that film was a new art vastly different from any other. Convinced, moreover, that art needed to capture the quintessential nature of contemporary times—in the case of Berlin's Weimar era the rapidity of change or the intensely accelerated pace of all movement—he no longer felt that his occupation as a painter made any sense. To reflect the times, still life must be put into motion, he decreed. But, he wondered how to turn motion—the essence of film—into art, much as he puzzled over maximizing the visual potential inherent in film. In these ponderings, he was not alone, for others too concerned themselves with the question of how to create what was then envisioned as pure film or “the absolute film.”

Ruttmann's first attempt at addressing his aesthetic concerns was *Opus I* (1921), a short of approximately ten minutes that turned into the first German abstract film shown to a wide public. Believing that color and shapes were the most important features of painting, he focused on these rather than on people or on recognizable, everyday objects. In *Opus I* and later in the three other *Opus*-shorts that followed (1921–25), he therefore set colors and shapes into motion—shapes such as circles, spheres, rectangles, triangles, cones, slices of the moon or of the sun, and straight or wavy lines. In concert with the music composed for each *Opus*-work, he put the hundreds of variously colored shapes, each painted by hand, into motion in countless ways (e.g., they jumped, fell, soared, melted, merged, separated, burned, rested, expanded, contracted, and danced). Mostly enthused (except for those who complained about the absence of human beings), critics heralded the advent of “the new art,” calling it “painting in motion,” “audible light,” or “visible music.”

When his filmic experimentations with abstract shapes, color, and music seemed to reach a dead end, Ruttmann turned to the concrete objects of the everyday world after all, but without abandoning the aesthetic tenets dearest to him: form and content must be fused, the one signifying the other; cinema alone represents “painting with time”—that is, the visual in motion. In the film he planned on Weimar Berlin, images of the real, unmodified Berlin were to represent the “painting” element; the “motion” to express Berlin's tempo would, in turn, result not merely from the music but also from montage techniques lending rhythm to the Berlin shots. While the optical and the auditory elements were meant to complement each other equally, in reality the music took precedence, necessitating the removal of several Berlin images that were in Ruttmann's view among the best of those filmed.

Since the musical composition created by the composer Edmund Meisel seems to have been irretrievably lost, no contemporary interpretations of the film can purport to do justice to the original film. Still, Ruttmann is on record for having wished another musical score. It is thus at least possible that the current musical

score—the music composed and directed by Timothy Brock in 1993—might have been more to Ruttmann’s liking.

EVALUATION

Declared the capital of the Germany founded in 1871, Berlin at that time had a mere 800,000 inhabitants. By 1910, the number had risen to two million—this figure, in turn, swelled to four million by the middle of the 1920s, partly because Berlin had incorporated eight outlying cities and dozens of rural areas in 1920. This substantially enlarged Berlin became the biggest industrial city on the European continent, annually drawing thousands of people looking for work. Understandably, as the youngest industrialized metropolis in Europe, Berlin represented mobility and unlimited possibilities.

Ruttmann’s film accentuates Berlin’s changes and its dizzying potential by depicting the arrival of more and more people, the abundance of new consumer goods in well-lit display windows, and the flashing electric advertisements on facades of buildings that both fascinate and confuse the senses. Above all, though, the film focuses on the ceaselessly accelerated tempo that had become Weimar Berlin’s most prominent attribute. The establishing shots of the film leap from the primordial nature represented by a placid sea of water to the technology-driven modernity characterized by an imposing passenger train completely oblivious to nature as it relentlessly charges and roars toward urban Berlin.

Though spectators do not encounter this same train again after it arrives in Berlin, more than twenty train episodes in the first four acts of the film do help them to recall it, both in its material reality and in its symbolic functions. Because of the film’s first powerful train, later ones also connote technological change and its forceful imposition on life, as well as the anonymity of city dwellers. Though the many compartment windows of the first train clearly mark it as a passenger train, the high velocity of the train precludes spectators from seeing any of the passengers through its windows (something that does become possible later in the film through the windows of slowly moving streetcars). Only the last act contains no train at all, not even the large quantities of steam that either terminate or suggest the arrival of a train (at one point in Act IV, the steam from a train occupies the entire frame). Entirely dedicated to leisure, the last act has no use for the steam that signifies toil.

The first train acts, moreover, as the harbinger of the increasingly complex city traffic conditioning modernity and thus of changing rhythms and swift tempo of the film as well. The urban traffic depicted in the film consists of all manner of vehicles—from horse and buggy (holdovers from a more bucolic era) to Lufthansa airplanes. Urban circulation is complicated not only by the large number of differing vehicles moving horizontally, vertically, and in circles but also by a vast array of pedestrian legs navigating the cityscapes in myriad ways (up and down, strolling, running, gliding, jumping, dancing). Just how important the legs and feet—like the horse and buggy arguably also holdovers from a more bucolic era—remain in the urban traffic jungle becomes apparent as they infiltrate even leisure moments.

Ruttmann's film, for example, captures a single moment of a Charlie Chaplin movie shown in the fifth act, when we see a large image of Charlie Chaplin's unmistakable feet. In marked contrast to their customary restlessness, spectators seem glued to this image—an image, one might say, that encapsulates the essence of their era, mobility in their lives.

Since aesthetic concerns, including the conviction that cinema needs to express the times in its filmic form as much as in its content, led Ruttmann to the subject of Berlin and thus to his choice of tempo as the main organizing principle of his film, faulting Ruttmann, as several critics have, either for excluding certain factual information on Berlin (e.g., the stock market and the dehumanizing aspects of technology) or not dealing with the inner life of Berliners—with their “soul”—seems somewhat misplaced, at least from today's vantage point. To be sure, the contrasts in the film do occur at too rapid a pace to be interpreted. Viewers see many montages—for example, the feet of cattle being herded to slaughter and then the feet of marching soldiers (perhaps they too on the way to slaughter), or an image of fighting dogs juxtaposed with one of a woman indignantly slamming her office phone down after an angry phone conversation. Or a woman's vertigo as she commits suicide by jumping from a bridge interrupts a vertiginous roller coaster ride. The petrified gazes of the roller coaster riders hardly differ from the paralyzed fear in the gazes of those witnessing the suicide. Yet in none of these instances or in any others do viewers have sufficient time to draw connections or to interpret any of the montages at all. Viewers simply have to accept that moments potentially begging for explications are swiftly followed by unrelated, irrelevant episodes—the suicide scene, for instance, by a fashion show. Clearly viewers are meant to experience the whole rather than its parts. That the film consists of abundant movement but contains no goal seems, however, less important to today's audiences, who continue to be intoxicated by the energy Ruttmann released in his film, just as Ruttmann had hoped his Berliners would be.

For some critics, *Berlin: die Sinfonie der Großstadt* did not seem to portray Berlin specifically but rather any and all urban centers, particularly in its juxtapositions of rich and poor, young and old, work and leisure. For Ruttmann, however, Berlin was not interchangeable with other cities. In his opinion, only Berlin could function as the epitome of modernity—of its restlessness, dislocations, technological rhythms, hectic pace, surface pleasures, easy distractions, chameleonic nature—and thus of the times.

Admired by many in Ruttmann's days too, *Berlin: die Sinfonie der Großstadt* became a widely imitated film, causing the British film critic John Grierson to label it in the 1950s as one of the most influential films of all times. Still, Grierson complains of the proliferation, especially among film students, of “one day in the life of the city” movies, all clad in symphonies, regardless of the city highlighted. And in all of them, Grierson adds, the urban day draws to a close without anything essential having been imparted. (MS)

QUESTIONS

1. Does Ruttmann make viewers want to visit the city or not? Give examples of positive and negative attributes of Berlin.
2. Ruttmann divides the film into specific time segments. Choose five scenes or episodes in the film that could be included in a time segment other than the one in which it occurs. How would these changes alter their respective time segments? How would they alter the nature of the entire film?
3. Why do you think Ruttmann chose to include a suicide in this film? How does he integrate this fictional element into the documentary style?
4. Identify as many scenes as you can that show public transportation and discuss how they are edited. Be sure to include how the editing produces various feelings in viewers.

RELATED FILMS

Berlin Symphony (Berlin – Sinfonie einer Großstadt, Thomas Schadt, 2002). A remake of the 1927 film after German unification. TeamWorx Television and Film and Odyssee-Film.

Kino-Eye (Dziga Vertov, Russian, 1924). Vertov's famous model for Ruttmann's movie.

Metropolis (Fritz Lang, 1927). Another great film about twentieth-century cities that was inspired by Lang's visit to New York City.

INFORMATION

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Berlin: Sinfonie einer Großstadt. Thomas Schadt. Berlin: Nicolai, 2002. The book to accompany the remake of the film.

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II. WEIMAR SOUND FILM 1929–1933

Sound film entered Germany in 1929, the year of the Great Depression that coincided with the beginning of Germany's most tumultuous period in its history. With Black Friday, worldwide economic troubles began, but they hit Germany harder than other countries. Because of the high reparation payments mandated by the Versailles Treaty and its political and economic problems after World War I, Germany fell into a deep recession. But the Great Depression triggered an explosion of artistic and innovative filmmaking in Germany, just as the political turmoil at the beginning of the decade had elevated German filmmaking to an artistic peak.

Despite the achievements of film during that period, a steep decline in movie attendance was the result, which should be expected in a drastic economic crisis. The first official movie attendance statistics are available for 1926, when 330 million viewers watched movies, followed by 352 million in 1928. Movie attendance dropped to 328 million in 1929, and then fell further to 238 million in 1932, which represents a loss of 90 million viewers. This decrease was due mainly to the Depression, as could be expected, but it is also true that part of the decrease is attributable to a reaction to sound film.

After the hugely successful *The Jazz Singer* introduced sound film in the United States in October 1927, topping all previous box office records in the process, German production companies were eager to introduce sound to German movies as well. As a result, distribution of American movies in Germany dropped sharply after 1929. The reason for the loss of viewers was simple: Silent movies could easily be exported worldwide, but sound movies had to be dubbed. And with dubbing, language became the prominent factor for watching movies, and whereas silent movies had given artistic achievement room to dominate, in the world of sound films it was once again cultural differences and attitudes that dominated.

The result was a steep decline of American movies in the period from 1929 to 1933 (Brockmann 2011). The reasons were economic but would eventually deeply affect relationships between countries. With the use of language, film became divisive and nationalistic, as Germany and the world would soon find out. It would be fair to state that the advance of sound film had some impact on German nationalism and the radicalization of the country that led to its eventual downfall. After 1933, movie attendance rose again, although the number of movie theaters remained stable at around five thousand. By the end of World War II, the number of movie theaters in Germany had declined to twenty-five hundred (Prommer).

Like the musical *The Jazz Singer*, German movies would also focus more on music to attract new audiences, starting with the 1929 German production *Ich küsse Ihre Hand, Madame* (*I Kiss Your Hand, Madame*), the first European feature film, a synchronized vocal performance and recorded score. The movie starred Marlene

Dietrich in one of her first screen appearances, but it did not have real dialogue apart from the title-song that had been specially recorded by Richard Tauber to be played during the screening. Tauber himself does not appear in the film.

Another important German sound film, *Melodie des Herzens* (*Melody of the Heart*), with the popular Willy Fritsch, was shot in several language versions and became a success throughout the world. The film was the first real sound film produced by Ufa and was able to copy the success of *The Jazz Singer*. It was released in four different languages—German, English, French, and Hungarian—a practice that was common until dubbing became more widespread. Also in 1929, a first feature-length German documentary had its premiere, *Melodie der Welt* (*Melody of the World*, 1929), directed by Walter Ruttmann, who had introduced innovative documentary filmmaking to Germany with his *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City*. The composer Lou Lichtveld described *Melodie der Welt* as the first important sound documentary in which “musical and unmusical sounds were fused into a single unit and controlled by the same impulse” (Dibbets, 86–86). Also in 1929, the first entirely German-made feature sound film, *Das Land ohne Frauen* (*Land Without Women*), directed by the Italian director Carmine Gallone, premiered.

Aside from the major movements already addressed, sound film brought with it not only new technical and dramatic requirements, but new stars—such as Marlene Dietrich in *Der blaue Engel*—and above all new audiences. For example, Wilhelm Thiele’s musical film *Die Drei von der Tankstelle* (*The Three from the Gas Station*, 1930) was a major success for Ufa. *Die Drei von der Tankstelle* was a hit in Germany upon its initial release as part of the first wave of German musicals in the early sound period. Like Hollywood’s Depression-era film musicals, *Die Drei von der Tankstelle* is based in the economic misery of the time but proposes an escapist solution. As the three men of the title gather what little money they have to open a gas station, each falls in love with the same favorite customer, a beautiful female motorist. The score contains songs that became popular standards, and the cast boasts a number of stars of early sound cinema in Germany, notably Lillian Harvey and Willy Fritsch.

With its lead actress Lillian Harvey, *Die Drei von der Tankstelle* provided a prototype for later popular and exportable sound film comedies, such as Erik Charell’s *Der Kongreß tanzt* (*Congress Dances*, 1931). *Der Kongreß tanzt* centers on the Congress of Vienna, where an Austrian commoner is mistaken for the tsar of Russia. *Der Kongreß tanzt* was released in German, French (*Le congrès s’amuse*), and English (*Congress Dances*). Lillian Harvey played in all three versions, as she spoke all languages with no accent. Germany’s best-known sound film of the early 1930s was *Der blaue Engel* (*The Blue Angel*, 1930) by the Austrian director Josef von Sternberg. It was the first sound feature film to receive near-universal critical approbation. *Der blaue Engel*, with its blend of claustrophobic noir scenes and upbeat cabaret music, became one of the prototypical German sound movies for the Weimar period.

As the Depression continued, music films provided some much-needed distraction from the daily misery of most people. This was as true for the United States as it was for Germany, and thus movies again were readily traded back and forth across the Atlantic. But it changed after the economic misery in Germany surpassed that of the United States when Heinrich Brüning was appointed chancellor. Since

Germany's two radical parties—the Communists and the Nazis—had gained enough votes to eliminate a coalition of moderate parties, Brüning ruled by emergency decrees and cut state expenditures, including unemployment insurance. The results were disastrous, and unemployment skyrocketed.

Political films therefore became popular in Germany, which was not the case in the United States. With its cutting-edge sound abilities, what medium could do a better job of examining a country's political identity than film? But this changed after Heinrich Brüning's appointment to chancellor. Weimar at that time centered on the "stab-in-the-back" myth, namely, that Germany could have won the war had it not been for treasonous Communist mutineers in November 1918. Most late Weimar movies were pacifist, such as the acclaimed 1930 movie *Vier von der Infanterie (Westfront 1918)* by G. W. Pabst, set in the trenches of the Western Front during World War I. It was Pabst's first sound film, with complex tracking shots along the trenches.

Vier von der Infanterie bears resemblance to its close contemporary *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930), an American production based on Erich Maria Remarque's bestselling *Im Westen Nichts Neues*. The American film became a benchmark for World War I movies and is often mistaken for a German movie. During its brief run in German cinemas in the early 1930s, the Nazis, led by Joseph Goebbels, disrupted the viewings by setting off stink bombs and releasing white mice in the theaters. Subsequent to these Nazi riots, according to Harvard scholar Ben Urwand in his study *The Collaboration: Hollywood's Pact with Hitler*, producer Carl Laemmle, Jr., agreed to significant cuts in the movie to make it more palatable for Germany's large film audiences.

Weimar Germany's political issues were also explored in a number of successful novels and plays which would then be adapted to the screen, such as Phil Jutzi's *Berlin Alexanderplatz: Die Geschichte Franz Biberkopfs (Berlin Alexanderplatz: The Story of Franz Biberkopf, 1931)*, which is based on Alfred Döblin's novel. The film stars Heinrich George as a small-time criminal recently released from prison who finds himself being drawn into the Berlin underworld of the 1920s after his prostitute lover is murdered. Another successful adaptation is Pabst's 1931 movie *Die Dreigroschenoper (The Threepenny Opera)*, which is based on Bertolt Brecht's first successful play with the same title. Although set in London's crime district, its similarities to the situation in Berlin are intentional. *Die Dreigroschenoper* is also considered one of the first musicals that successfully combines a political message with a music-based play, albeit in a different form as later Hollywood-type productions. Much of the musical's and movie's success is based on Kurt Weill's catchy tunes, such as "Mack the Knife" ("Oh the shark has pretty teeth dear / And he shows them pearly white / Just a jackknife has Macheath dear / And he keeps it out of sight).

From its obsession with expressionist art, Weimar's sound film further developed one of the great achievements of silent film: film noir. Film noir became one of the staples of American crime movies in the 1930s, emerging in the United States during the Great Depression and whose roots go back to Weimar filmmaking. Roger Ebert calls it the most American film genre "because no society could have created a world so filled with doom, fate, fear and betrayal, unless it were essentially naive and optimistic."

Fritz Lang's thriller *M* (1931) is acknowledged as one of the first important noir films with its innovative use of sound and images. Lang uses silent-film features and combines them with sound, presenting a quick succession of empty scenes, such as a blind beggar recognizing the murderer's whistling, and a chalk symbol—"M" for murderer—that the audience sees before seeing the murderer himself. Roger Ebert understood of Lang's art that "early talkies felt they had to talk all the time, but Lang allows his camera to prowl through the streets and dives, providing a rat's-eye view" (Ebert 2003, 77).

M's eerie style served as a premonition of the changing political landscape. So too would *Razzia in St. Pauli* (*Raid in St. Pauli*, 1932), another gritty social drama film directed by Werner Hochbaum. He explores Hamburg's prostitution scene and the decaying moral fabric during the Great Depression. *Kameradschaft* (*Comradeship*, 1931) is a dramatic film with Socialist overtones, also directed by Pabst. *Kameradschaft* is noted for combining expressionism and realism in a story about a mining disaster where German miners rescue French miners from an underground explosion.

Another movie to show social changes in Germany was *Mädchen in Uniform* (*Girls in Uniform*, 1931), based on a play about a girls' boarding school. The movie was directed by Leontine Sagan and became an international cult classic with its representation of a lesbian relationship between a teacher and a student. As with pacifist movies such as *All Quiet on the Western Front*, for Germany's political right, *Mädchen in Uniform* became yet another example of the deterioration of the social fabric that called for strong political leadership to correct such aberrations.

More provocative than Weimar's sexual dramas, however, were flagrantly leftwing movies, such as those based on Brecht's plays. Brecht was one of the creators of the explicitly Communist film *Kuhle Wampe oder: Wem gehört die Welt?* (*Who Owns the World?* 1932), which was banned soon after its release. This ban is indicative of the changing political climate in Weimar culture, which was veering more to the right. The movie was directed by Slatan Dudow and music was provided by the leading Marxist composer Hanns Eisler. The film's title comes from the name of a tent camp in the Müggelsee region of Berlin where huge illegal camps of the unemployed had sprung up.

It was against this background of economic uncertainty that the Nazis became the largest party. And as we saw earlier, the Weimar Republic was destroyed by the Wall Street crash of October 1929 and the Great Depression. The crash of course had a similar impact on the American economy, and when the United States, which had propped up the Weimar Republic with huge loans (with the 1924 Dawes Plan and the Young Plan in 1929), gave Germany ninety days to repay its money, Weimar Germany was effectively bankrupt by the end of 1929. Many companies throughout Germany, mostly in the industrial zones such as the Ruhr, went bankrupt, and workers were laid off by the millions.

Unemployment affected nearly every German family, coming just six years after the last major economic disaster—hyperinflation—had hit Weimar. What followed was a rapid increase of unemployment figures, from 1,320,000 in 1929 to 6,100,000 in January 1933. Most, though not all, of the unemployed were male. These men were almost certainly family men who could see no way ahead with regards to providing for their families. Money was required for food, heating a

home, clothes, and so on. With no obvious end to their plight under the Weimar regime, it is not surprising that those who saw no end to their troubles turned to the more extreme political parties in Germany—the Nazis and the Communists. In the July 1932 Reichstag election, the Nazis gained 230 seats, making them the largest party in the Reichstag.

As Westerns were becoming America's iconic sound films in the early 1930s, Germany began to develop its own strain of adventurous nature films in its "mountain films" (Bergfilme). One of the first notable mountain films was *Stürme über dem Mont Blanc* (*Storm over Mont Blanc*, 1930), which was directed by Arnold Fanck and introduced Leni Riefenstahl. It is a film about a man who works alone on the alpine Mont Blanc weather station but is later joined by a female friend, who helps him survive a storm. Filmed on location in Switzerland and France, it is notable for its footage of the high mountains. Another mountain film, *Der weisse Rausch* (*The White Ecstasy*, 1931), was also directed by Arnold Fanck and again featured Leni Riefenstahl.

The success of *Der weisse Rausch* became Riefenstahl's entry ticket to her first big success as a director, *Das blaue Licht* (*The Blue Light*, 1932), which she co-directed with Béla Balázs, the film critic who would later become one of the first important German film critics with his concept of an anthropomorphic film analysis. Balázs had been asked to write the script for *Das blaue Licht*, a fairy tale-like story about the conquest of the mountains. Balázs had wanted originally to refuse the job because he was planning to go to Moscow, but he finally agreed to discuss Leni Riefenstahl's plans, which he found intriguing. Balázs was curious why a successful actress would want to direct a film and, after meeting her, was mesmerized by her. Soon Balázs and Riefenstahl became lovers and decided to move to Moscow after the completion of their film. Moscow was at that time a mecca for filmmakers all over the world because of Sergei Eisenstein. Riefenstahl, who was still busy with post-production, promised to follow Balázs after completion of her work, but when the film won the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival, she decided to continue her film career in Germany rather than in Russia. This decision changed Riefenstahl's life, because she went on to become one of the few Weimar filmmakers who continued their career with the Nazis. Riefenstahl became known as "Hitler's director" with her best-known movies, *Triumph des Willens* (*Triumph of the Will*, 1935) and *Olympia* (1938). Both films are still considered outstanding works of art and essential documents for analyzing National-Socialist propaganda.

With the appointment of Hitler as chancellor, the golden age of German cinema ended. On May 30, 1932, Brüning resigned and was succeeded by Franz von Papen. The elections held on July 31, 1932, yielded even greater gains for the Communists and the Nazis, who won over 37 percent of the vote, replacing the Social Democratic Party as the largest party. On December 3, 1932, in a last attempt to prevent Hitler from taking power, General von Schleicher succeeded Franz von Papen as chancellor. However, on the infamous January 30, 1933, the date dubbed *Machtergreifung* ("seizure of power") by the Nazis, Reich President Paul von Hindenburg replaced Schleicher with Hitler, which marks the beginning of Nazi Germany. After seizing power, the Nazis quickly set out to overturn the country's

constitution and, as a result, severely damaged Germany's artistic reputation, a tragedy from which it took the country a long time to recover.

With its silent expressionist movies, Weimar Germany's brief explosion in creative filmmaking had produced outstanding movies. And despite the brevity of Weimar's four years of producing sound film, the iconic movies that came from that brief period, such as *The Blue Angel* and *M*, are considered groundbreaking in the history of film. (RZ)

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Der blaue Engel

(The Blue Angel, Josef von Sternberg, 1930)



Lola Lola (Marlene Dietrich) performing at The Blue Angel nightclub.

CREDITS

Director Josef von Sternberg
Screenplay Heinrich Mann, Carl Zuckmayer
Director of Photography Günther Rittau
Editor Walter Klee, Sam Winston
Music Frederick Holländer
Producer Erich Pommer
Production Company Universum Film AG (Ufa)
Length 99 minutes; B/W

Principal Cast

Emil Jannings (Professor Immanuel Rath), Marlene Dietrich (Lola Lola), Kurt Gerron (Kiepert, the Magician), Rosa Valetti (Guste, Kiepert's wife), Hans Albers (Mazeppe, the Strongman), Reinhold Bernt (the Clown), Rolf Müller (Pupil Angst), Karl Huszar-Puffy (Innkeeper), Wilhelm Diegelmann (Captain).

THE STORY

One day the fastidious and despotic Professor Rath, instructor of English at a German *Gymnasium* (a secondary school) in an unspecified north German port city, discovers that some of his students are spending their evenings at The Blue Angel, a rough beer hall close to the harbor, and that they have a crush on Lola Lola, the singer currently performing there. Professor Rath visits The Blue Angel, determined to command Lola to desist from turning his pupils' heads. But the pompous professor melts in her presence.

The next night the professor is back at The Blue Angel to pick up the hat he had left behind the previous night. To hide from their professor, his students rush to a cellar beneath Lola's dressing room. Watching through its trap door, they gleefully observe him as he fully succumbs to Lola Lola's charms. Then, to escape the police intending to raid the beer hall, it becomes the professor's turn to hide. He ends up in the cellar with his students, who no longer even pretend to respect him. After he chases them away, Lola comforts the exhausted professor. He remembers his professorial duties only the next morning, when the clock of the town hall chimes as he is having a pleasant breakfast with her. Completely distraught at his tardiness for school, Professor Rath (the "Rat"-part of his name translates as "advice") rushes to his class. There, on two blackboards, he confronts caricatures of himself labeled "*Unrat*" ("garbage" or "filth"), as well as an unruly class of students ridiculing him.

Soon thereafter, defending his behavior and Lola Lola's honor, Professor Rath tells the school director, who has entered the classroom to restore order, that he will be marrying Lola. After the director dismisses Rath from his position, the professor visits Lola and proposes marriage, an offer which amuses her but which she accepts. At the wedding, in a state of uninhibited happiness, the professor merrily responds to Lola's antics: she cackles like a hen; he crows like a rooster.

After four years of traveling around with Lola's troupe, living in cheap lodgings, selling postcards of Lola Lola, and later even performing on stage as a clown, the professor is ordered to crow like a rooster during the troupe's scheduled guest appearance in the town where he had taught. Plenty of advertising preceded this commercially promising event. Consequently, all of the townspeople, including the professor's former students, appear for the performance. Despite resisting his impending humiliation to the bitter end, the professor is forced to go on stage. From there he suddenly sees Lola in the arms of Mazeppa, her new lover. Wildly bellowing the rooster's "*Kikeriki*" (the German version of "cock-a-doodle-do"), the professor rushes from the stage and attempts to strangle Lola. He is at first restrained but is freed after he calms down. As if in a trance, he then stumbles through the town until he reaches his old school. In his former classroom, he staggers to his desk. After sitting down, he grips the edge of the desktop so hard that the night porter cannot remove his hand when he finds him dead shortly after the clock chimes strike twelve.

BACKGROUND

Though *The Blue Angel* is firmly anchored in German film history, it also reflects the international nature of the film industry. As Germany's first notable sound film, it achieved both critical and commercial success in Germany and abroad. It also created instant fame for Marlene Dietrich, whose interpretation of Lola Lola, the female protagonist, became the star's signature performance—a position it retained even after Dietrich became Germany's most internationally acclaimed filmic icon.

Even though *The Blue Angel* was a German film, financed by a German studio, and cast with German actors, it has a non-German or only semi-German director: Josef von Sternberg, an Austrian who had emigrated to the United States at the age of seventeen. From 1917 he produced educational films for the Army Signal Corps, which led to his classification as an American. In 1924, he moved from New York to Hollywood. The Hollywood films he directed included the one that had garnered the famous German actor Emil Jannings the first Academy Award granted to an actor (1928). After Jannings returned to Germany, Ufa (Universum Film Aktiengesellschaft), Germany's main film studio, wanted to showcase him in the first major film to be produced in its new sound studios and invited Sternberg, who had brought Jannings fame in the United States, to direct it. Though Sternberg was no longer fluent in German, he accepted the offer, in particular because an English-language version of the film using the same actors, sets, and screenplay, was to be made concurrently with the German-language version, thus ensuring widespread international audiences for the film.

The Blue Angel is based on Heinrich Mann's novel *Professor Unrath* (1905), which takes place early in the twentieth century and is a critique of the middle- and upper-class educational system in Wilhelmine Germany. The film's screenplay rewrites the ending of the novel, in which the professor gets his revenge on the townspeople, substituting instead a tragic end for the professor. Sternberg also changed the timeframe of the story to the years between 1925 and 1929, the heyday of the Weimar Republic.

Though *The Blue Angel* does feature two separate worlds in opposition to each other, none of the particular upheavals of the period, as they appear in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) or Georg Wilhelm Pabst's *Joyless Street* (*Die Freudlose Gasse*, 1925) enter into the film. In fact, Sternberg's script (prepared in part by the highly regarded author Carl Zuckmayer) took the bite out of Mann's criticism of authoritarianism in the political order, in essence reducing his novel to a tale of passion leading to its protagonist's societal and personal downfall. Indeed, an emphasis on sociopolitical and economic elements might have detracted from the professor's personal tragedy, for—as Sternberg has structured the tale—the external socio-economic situation improves as the professor's personal and psychological situation worsens. Weimar reality is thus reflected not through historical allusions but through the ever-increasing sophistication of the surroundings in which the cabaret troupe performs, indirectly mirroring the improving economic situation between 1925 and 1929 (and not advancing to the October 1929 stock market crash in the United States).

EVALUATION

Ufa, the studio that produced *The Blue Angel*, brought Hollywood director Josef von Sternberg to Germany to create a prestige sound film worthy of the Ufa name. Ufa films, at least with critics (at the time and still today), were noted for their artistry, which was displayed in the technical, narrative, and stylistic quality of the studio's silent films. *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Robert Wiene, 1920) adapted the expressionism of theater and art to create an outer world that reflected the psychological terror of the movie's story and the physical angst of a defeated Germany. *Der letzte Mann* (*The Last Laugh*, F. W. Murnau, 1924) introduced a fluidity of storytelling that could narrate without intertitles. *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1927) dazzled with special effects, monumental sets, and choreographed crowds. In *The Blue Angel*, Sternberg continues the Ufa tradition of making entertaining and artistic films. He introduces sound to serve the film's story rather than have the story conform to the needs of sound, the case with many early sound films. He continues Ufa's tradition of telling a story through multilayered, symbolic visuals, and he presents characters that are archetypal at the same time they are individuated.

The opening few scenes introduce all of the above-mentioned elements: multilayered visuals, naturalistic sounds, expressionist symbols, and individuated archetypes. In the series of short establishing shots, viewers see a group of houses with gabled rooftops packed together and filmed at an angle, several threateningly extending into others. It is not easy to tell where one house ends and another begins. Some houses slant in one direction, their roofs in another. Others extend far upward, leaving only small patches of the spacious sky visible. The shot creates uncertainty, claustrophobia, and tension. Viewers suspect they are in the world of German expressionism and its attendant, often-unspecified terrors.

The following shot belies the first impression. A morning delivery of live geese is taking place, probably at a town market. As they are individually unloaded, the geese fill the air with their healthy, uninhibited cackling. Now viewers might wonder if the film is taking place in an idyllic small town still filled with natural sounds. Following the geese come scenes of a poster of the seductive Lola, scantily dressed, and a doorplate on which the name "Professor Rath" appears. That there will be some sort of connection between the two opposites—Lola and the professor—seems obvious. But the other motifs introduced in the series of establishing shots will also be connected. For example, Professor Rath lives on the top floor of one of those slanting houses, probably of the one with the most dangerously protruding roof.

Though the first two shots show outdoor areas, the film contains very few segments taking place outside. The three times the professor is filmed in the open, the outside environments also represent his inner state and prescribe for the viewers various moods of uncertainty, tension, and foreboding, much as the initial establishing shot does. The first two times the professor is on the way to *The Blue Angel*, a very unfamiliar territory for him. The film alternates scenes of Lola in the cabaret with shots of the professor on his way there. As Lola sings a song with lines about jabbing a man in his sides and stepping on his feet, words clearly signaling that she may be a harmful lover, the film crosscuts to the professor, with mainly his back in

view, firmly walking forward on a perilous, foggy night. In classic expressionist filmic style, low, threateningly slanting houses with jagged edges and protrusions flank the street. The beer drinking song "*Es war einmal ein treu' Huszar*" ("There was once a loyal soldier"), a tune whose words express a cavalry soldier's undying love for a woman, accompanies the professor part of the way toward Lola Lola's territory. The song is one of several melodies heard in the background during the film. These melodies foreground the new audio technology as they sound out from nearby taverns, ring through open windows, or blare through opened doors. At the same time, they comment on the narrative. The one on the loyal soldier serves to induce viewer premonition that a tragic fate similar to the soldier's is to befall the professor. The visual scene at this point emphasizes that the woman the professor passes is a prostitute. This disorients the professor, causing him to confusedly turn around in a circle before proceeding on his way. After a crosscut to *The Blue Angel*, the professor is seen continuing his walk. The closer he comes to Lola, the more dangerous the walk appears. The fog becomes worse, the streetlights cast more shadows, the houses seem to slant more, and the professor seems to stagger and lunge toward his goal as a fog horn sounds in the distance, reinforcing the viewers' awareness of the perils that await the professor.

The professor repeats the trip to *The Blue Angel* on the following night, walking this time with more confidence. His walk is reprised at the end of the film, when he walks the route in reverse from *The Blue Angel* to the school. Utterly degraded, he leaves *The Blue Angel*—both the establishment and the woman—to embark on the return path, the path to his old school. This time viewers see a frontal view of the professor instead of the back view that dominated when he had gone toward *The Blue Angel*. As the professor tumbles from one street post to another, from one house facade to the next, he casts threatening shadows on the buildings. The foghorn, one of the few clear signs that the film takes place in a port city, punctures the outdoor silence as it had on the professor's first two walks, but now more loudly and more threateningly. Not present before, the patches of ice and snow on the streets also spell greater dangers. When expressionistic visuals (e.g., darkness, searchlight, shadows) dominate in the school building as well, viewers are prepared for the tragic death that occurs in the classroom.

The stark differences between the professor's world and Lola's are accentuated visually throughout the film, as well as by the frequent crosscutting between the two worlds. Expressionist shadow techniques, for example, occur only in scenes with the professor and the domains associated with him. Thus the professor's walks up or down a staircase produce fearsome shadows on the walls. His students also cast terrifying shadows, particularly in the segment when viewers see the grotesquely distorted, magnified shadows of two students on the wall behind the bed of Angst, the professor's favorite student, before they see the students themselves. It is a shot suggesting danger and reminiscent of the shadows cast by the monsters in two of the silent era's best-known German films, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* and *Nosferatu*. The fear of danger is justified, for the students do attack Angst, just as the fearful shadows connected with the professor also correctly predict a negative outcome.



Lola Lola (Marlene Dietrich) and Professor Rath (Emil Jannings) at their wedding.

The *mise-en-scène* of the professor's world and that of Lola contrast sharply. The professor's housekeeper makes his bed flawlessly and immediately notices everything that is out of place in his apartment. The professor's classroom is austere. There is nothing on the walls and very little even in his desk drawers. Barrenness characterizes his world. When the professor is shown either in his apartment or in the classroom, he seems to fill most of the frame. There is very little to distract viewers from looking at him. The opposite holds true for Lola's environment. Barely any space remains unused in her dressing room: clothes of the greatest imaginable variety hang everywhere on the walls; all sorts of makeup paraphernalia are on her large table; there is a large, three-partitioned mirror and a partition behind which Lola can change clothes or students can hide; there are several small mirrors on Lola's table, hats all over the room, glasses and bottles, fishermen's nets, curtains of many sorts, plants, vases, posters—including one of Lola. The prominent circular staircase in the middle of the dressing room takes up valuable space, but it is merely a larger object in the midst of all the others. Despite the disorder, Lola always immediately finds what she is looking for. She seems to reign over the multitude of things; she is certainly not swallowed by them. Above all, when she is in the room, she still commands all the attention.

In contrast to the professor's solid yet rigid bourgeois world of orderliness, loyalty, and duty, Lola represents a variety of worlds. Engaged in entertainment, in show business, Lola masterfully fabricates a world of make-believe from the abundant costumes and the multitude of disparate objects cluttering up her dressing

room. During most of her appearances in her dressing room, she is either putting on new makeup or changing attire, not in the least concealing the artificiality of her constructions. Others are welcome to observe her in the processes of self-invention that add to her glamour rather than unmask it.

Lola does not hide her wigs. Occasionally, stiff, cardboard-type materials simulate her skirts. At other times she adorns herself almost exclusively with frills and feathers. Her curious skirts are cut off in the front or in the back, apparently custom-made to expose her thighs. She is an expert at inventing an abundance of sexually provocative poses. In a sense, because of her inventive self-creations, Lola deserves the artist title that Professor Rath accords her at their first encounter. She, more so than the establishment, embodies the idealized color blue of the German Romanticists—that is, *she* is The Blue Angel.

On the one hand, Lola's constant self-reinventions indicate artificiality; on the other, they suggest creative participation in the flux of life. The bird happily chirping in her bedroom also implies that her world is brimming with life. Yet, despite her varied, magical outward appearances, Lola has retained her down-to-earth self. After one of her songs, she sits down on stage, flanked by several fat women who make her seem thinner, to take a chug of beer from a beer mug. Her no-nonsense Berlin humor readily deflates any pomposity uttered in her presence. When one of the students says "I luv you" to her (surely not the kind of English he learned from Professor Rath), Lola tells him to quit producing such silly English sentences. She quickly reformulates the professor's stiff, stylized marriage proposal—that he wants to ask for her hand—into the equivalent of the English "you wanna marry *me*?"

Lola, the femme fatale who remarks that eventually all men return to her and who likens her power over men with the light that entices and then destroys moths, also has a nurturing, motherly side. In the breakfast scene, for instance, she turns into a warm and kind variant of the professor's housekeeper: she does not merely place sugar on the table but puts sugar cubes into the professor's mouth, very solicitous about how many he wants.

She helps him into his coat as the housekeeper had done but insists that he stop wiggling so that she can put a flower in his lapel, a flower to help him think of her. Like the housekeeper, Lola remains on top of the stairwell as the professor departs. Again motherly, Lola tells him to watch out for traffic on his way to school.

Lola is alternately kind and heartless toward the professor once he becomes a member of her troupe. Though she certainly could have severed their relationship when his money ran out, Lola does not abandon the professor, not even when he stops shaving and looks more and more unkempt. While Lola criticizes the professor when he denounces their audience as a bunch of uneducated people, reminding him that they after all owe their livelihood to these people, she also defends the professor, telling the director to stop molesting him with excessive demands. Still, knowing that he is totally subjugated to her, she fully exerts her control over him once the troupe returns to The Blue Angel. Filmed at low angle in a medium frontal shot on her circular staircase, her hands on her hips, she haughtily looks down at the professor standing at the foot of the stairs, demanding that he go on stage.

Besides showcasing sound through Lola's singing, Sternberg uses sounds masterfully in this first notable German sound film. He contrasts the professor's stilted language with Lola's down-to-earth language, much as he contrasts the professor's stilted behavior with Lola's uninhibited movements. He relegates the professor to many stretches of silence, but Lola is rarely at a loss for words. Often utter quiet commensurate with the barrenness of his life envelops the professor, whereas lively noise surrounds Lola. The one time the professor opens a window (when he asks the students to write a composition in the classroom), the song "*Ännchen von Tharau*" (also known as "*Der Palmbaum*" ["The Palm Tree"]) is heard in the background, an indication of the professor's subconscious longing for the everlasting love expressed by the song. While songs and sayings associated with the professor have been well known to several generations of Germans, Lola's songs were specifically crafted for her and thus truly appropriated as her own. To the public, she embodies the messages of her songs. Any time a door in Lola's dressing room opens, which is a frequent occurrence, music almost always enters the room. The music heard covers a wide range of styles, usually unpredictable, from German beer hall songs to Mideastern bazaar tunes.

As the movie ends, the juxtaposition of the film's two major musical motifs reveals the gulf between the professor's world and Lola's. On the stage, Lola, dressed in slacks, straddles a chair in a dominant masculine position as she sings what became Dietrich's signature song, "*Von Kopf bis Fuß auf Liebe eingestellt*" ("Programmed for Love from Head to Toe"). The song, whose English title and opening lyrics "Falling in Love Again" soften the erotic message, represents love in all its forms—romantic, illusionary, idealistic, inclusive, unavoidable, destructive. Both versions of the song stress Lola's amoral nature in matters of love. Whether we see her infidelity as the realist's "programmed for love from head to toe" or the romantic's "falling in love again, what else can I do," Lola herself has no choice. Her view of love clashes with that of the professor, whose attitude in such matters is represented by the simple melody of a German folk song whose words are:

*Üb immer Treu und Redlichkeit
Bis an dein kühles Grab,
Und weiche keinen Finger breit
Von Gottes Wegen ab.*

Be ever faithful, ever honest
Until you reach your cold grave,
And do not stray a hair's breadth
From God's paths.

The melody of the folk song also supplies the first notes of Papageno's aria from Mozart's *The Magic Flute*: "*Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen wünscht Papageno sich*" ("Papageno Longs for a Maid or Wife"). The closing moments of the film juxtapose the amoral sentiment of a femme fatale, who can't help it if men are drawn to her like moths to a flame, and the romantic longings of a lonely man shaped by apparently outmoded concepts such as fidelity. (MS)

QUESTIONS

1. It is clearly Sternberg's intent to foreground the new sound technology in his film. Yet he also wants it to serve his narrative rather than have sound merely for its own sake. Locate those instances in the film when sound is most obvious (besides dialogue) and explain how it serves to point to itself (i.e., the use of the new technology) and how it serves the story.
2. Identify as many songs as you can in the film and explain how they advance or comment on the narrative.
3. The only "angel" anywhere in the film is a cupid on the stage of the cabaret. Yet the title has more significance than this angel from which the cabaret gets its name. Discuss the meaning of the title. Be sure to refer to the many instances of winged figures in the film.
4. The professor, Lola, and the magician are archetypal figures from melodramatic films: lonely man, femme fatale, and catalyst for tragedy. Yet each also has highly individuated characteristics. Discuss the characters as archetypes and as individuals.
5. Discuss the role of the clown as doppelgänger in the narrative. Locate and describe the scenes in which he appears.

RELATED FILMS

The Blue Angel (Edward Dmytryk, 1959), a remake of the 1930 movie.

Lola (Rainer Werner Fassbinder, 1981), the second film of Fassbinder's trilogy on post-war West Germany.

The Last Laugh (*Der letzte Mann*, F. W. Murnau, 1924) is Jannings's best-known movie of the Weimar period.

Morocco (Josef von Sternberg, 1930) is one of the many romantic Africa movies Hollywood produced, such as the better-known *Casablanca* (1942). When offered a role in *Morocco*, Dietrich followed Sternberg to Hollywood. Other Dietrich/Sternberg Hollywood productions include *Blonde Venus* (1932) and *The Devil is a Woman* (1935).

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M

(Fritz Lang, 1931)



Elsie and Beckert's shadow.

CREDITS

Director Fritz Lang
ScreenplayThea von Harbou
Director of PhotographyFritz Arno Wagner
Editor Paul Falkenberg
Production Design Emil Hasler, Karl Vollbrecht
Producer Seymour Nebenzahl
Production Company Nero-Film, Berlin
Length117 minutes; B/W

Principal Cast

Ellen Widmann (Mrs. Beckmann), Inge Landgut (Elsie Beckmann), Peter Lorre (Hans Beckert), Georg John (The blind beggar), Otto Wernicke (Inspector Lohmann), Gustaf Gruendgens (Schränker), Ernst Stahl Nachbaur (Chief of Police).

THE STORY

M is divided into three distinct sections. In the first, Lang shows the killer, the victim, and the urban landscape in which the crimes occur.

As the movie opens, children gather. The first shot introduces the theme, with children gathering in a circle to sing the song of the notorious 1920s Hanover mass murderer Haarmann: "Wait, wait only a little while, then he will come to you too, Haarmann with his little hatchet, and he will make mincemeat out of you." (*Warte, warte nur ein Weilchen, bald kommt auch zu dir, Haarmann mit dem Hackebeilchen, und macht Hackefleisch aus dir.*) What the children find amusing and playful is scorned by the laundry woman who walks away from the children into the apartment building (the camera follows and moves upward with her), where she delivers laundry to Frau Beckmann. In a quick succession of shots, the Beckmann apartment is established, the poverty, the cleanliness, and Frau Beckmann's preparation for lunch with her daughter. The movie then cuts to children leaving a school. Among them is a little girl who walks toward a wanted poster. The camera follows the girl as a figure enters from the right in front of the poster. It is the killer, casting his shadow onto the poster. We then hear his voice—"You have a very nice ball" (*Du hast aber einen schönen Ball*)—followed by a question about the girl's name, which she answers with the cheerful "Elsie Beckmann," Frau Beckmann's daughter. This shot establishes the first of several memorable images in the movie, many still in the expressionist tradition of fusing shadow and light.

This disturbing scene is followed by a series of shots where the murderer establishes his relationship with the girl. He buys her a balloon, and she thanks him by curtsying. The murderer whistles a tune, which has been identified as a melody from Edvard Grieg's *Peer Gynt Suite*, a tune he will later use over and over until it becomes a leitmotif that will prove instrumental in his capture.

Back in the apartment building, Mrs. Beckmann is realizing that her daughter Elsie is late. The connection between Mrs. Beckmann and her daughter is established first with a shot of Mrs. Beckmann checking the cuckoo clock, followed by a shot which shows the children leaving school. Mrs. Beckmann's nervousness is expressed in a rapid succession of still shots—the cuckoo clock, the stairs, the empty lunch plate, the empty attic room with Mrs. Beckmann's voice shouting out Elsie's name with increasing anxiety. The sequence of shots finishes with Elsie's ball rolling out from the underbrush and the awkward, manlike balloon figure the murderer had bought for Elsie now dangling from telegraph wires. This rapid sequence of opening shots in *M* is one of the most memorable beginnings of any film. It shows Lang at the height of his craft. The viewer realizes that the movie relies heavily on symbolism, which will engage on a visual and on an intellectual level.

The director's discreet rendering of the murder of Elsie Beckmann compels the viewer to imagine what is not shown—as Lang wrote, "forcing each individual member of the audience to create the gruesome details of the murder according to his personal imagination" (Eisner, 123). This first sequence of the movie ends with a gradual fadeout.

The second sequence continues with the murderer, Beckert, at a desk writing a note to a newspaper in which he incriminates himself. His confession changes

the film from the rapid pace of a police drama to a cat and mouse game, with the viewer as a knowing observer. Most of the action of this second sequence of the movie is made up of the activities of the two groups whose interests are most threatened by Beckert's activities: the police, who must satisfy an hysterical populace, and the criminal underground, whose economic interests are jeopardized by increased police scrutiny because of the killings. The hysteria is shown in a bar scene (a *Stammtisch*), where the patrons accuse each other of being the murderer. This macabre scene seems to be copied directly from a satirical drawing of the Weimar artist George Grosz.

The police activities are shown almost in documentary style, with a voice-over by the police inspector who explains to his superior the various police search activities, which include raids on underground bars and clubs such as the Crocodile Club. These bar scenes give Lang the opportunity to use expressionist shots of dark arches and shadowy figures. The underworld activities are dominated by Schränker (Gustaf Gründgens), who meticulously plans the shadowing and capture of Beckert with the help of all the organized criminals in Berlin. These scenes are undoubtedly influenced by Brecht's *The Three Penny Opera*, which had just been released in Germany as a movie. Like Brecht, Lang wanted to highlight the similarities between the legal and the illegal world as representing part of the same corrupt society.

As in his other crime films, Lang presents the police and the criminals as indistinguishable, intercutting between parallel scenes of each, strategizing on how to "kill the monster." Some of the police station footage has a documentary feel, as then-new technologies like fingerprint analysis are methodically examined. In spite of the superior technology of the police, the criminals capture Beckert.

Beckert's capture by the underworld criminals and their trial, which has been called a "kangaroo court," represent the third part of the movie. Here Peter Lorre as Beckert creates a cinematic psychopath that he made famous in many subsequent films, with his pudgy frame, his bulging eyes, and his panicked grimaces. His breakdown speech before the mob demanding his death gives a powerful look into the mind of a madman: "I can't help myself! Always . . . always! I haven't any control over this evil thing that's inside me—the fire, the voices, the torment! I just have to! I hear it, as if I were running behind myself. I have to run, I want to run away. The ghosts are running, they're always there, except when I do it. Then I don't know anything anymore. I don't want to do it, I have to!" ("Kann ich denn anders? Dieses verfluchte Ding in mir, das Feuer, der Strom, die Qual. Immer muss ich, ich höre es doch, als ob ich selber hinter mir her liefe. Ich muss rennen, ich will weg, die Gespenster rennen, sind immer da, nur nicht wenn ich es tue. Dann weiß ich nichts mehr. Ich will nicht, ich muss!")

The movie ends with the police arriving just in time to remove Beckert to a regular trial.

BACKGROUND

The story of *M* is based on that of the infamous serial killer Peter Kürten, the vampire of Düsseldorf who drank the blood of some of his victims. Kürten brutally attacked forty-one people, nine of whom died. He was finally arrested on May 24,

1930. Before his final arrest, over twelve thousand leads were followed, over two hundred people surrendered themselves claiming to be the killer, and three hundred psychics and occultists offered their help. The two letters Kürten sent to local newspapers sparked a flood of copycats, and the public was in a state of mass psychosis. Kürten was the perfect example of a serial killer with the appearance of an average citizen. Surviving victims and witnesses described him as well dressed and friendly. They said he instilled trust and appeared respectable. Kürten was executed July 2, 1931, in Cologne.

M turned out to be Fritz Lang's first and most powerful sound film. Fritz Lang, born in 1890 in Vienna, was one of Germany's greatest film directors. He celebrated his first successes during the Weimar Republic with movies such as *Metropolis*. Lang left Germany in 1933, emigrating via France to the United States in 1934, where he continued to tie political aspects into his work. His best-known films from his work in Germany include the two-part cycle *Die Nibelungen* (1922/24), *Metropolis* (1925/26), and *Das Testament des Dr. Mabuse* (*The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*, 1933).

M is considered one of the first movies with elements of "film noir" whose roots go back to German expressionism. Many components of noir are present: the dark cityscape, an unstable environment in which children play in the street singing chants about bogeymen and murderers. Then there is the paranoid pathology of the twisted Beckert, who courts and kills his young victims for reasons he can't express, and a frenzied mob that brings its own brand of justice against him. Many of the following classic "noirs" of the 1940s and later follow *M*'s attention to the details of the manhunt. Most important, though, is the sense of doom that colors the film, a fatalism Lang renders through lighting effects and high-angle shots that suggest a malevolent spiritual presence hovering above the city and guiding its denizens to their doom.

M made Peter Lorre famous, an Austrian theater actor whose bulging eyes, round face, and nasal voice with a thick Austro-German accent became familiar to millions of moviegoers. The Nazis used Lorre's portrayal of Beckert as a Jewish prototype in their propaganda film *Der ewige Jude* (1940). For Americans, Lorre became the classical bad guy. His film career spanned thirty-three years and ranged from classics—like the two great American film noir works *The Maltese Falcon* (1941) and *Casablanca* (1942), or Disney's *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* (1954)—to the respectable if bizarre "Mr. Moto" series (1937–39), in which Lorre played a Japanese detective modeled after the Chinese film detective Charlie Chan. Lorre returned to Germany after World War II to direct and act in his last film, *Der letzte Mann*, in which he plays a serial killer.

EVALUATION

Film historians accord *M* a high place in German film history, calling it many things—frightfully good, the predecessor to all serial-killer thrillers such as *Psycho* and *The Silence of the Lambs*, and one of the defining movies of European pre-World War II cinema. Remastered releases of the film indicate that its powerful and original images still frighten and that the film has aged well, still seeming fresh. Not

only does *M* demonstrate an excellent command of camera, lighting, and editing, but it also examines human sexuality, sin, and redemption. It is the chain-linking of images, that gives such force to the masterful scenes.

This film has been called Fritz Lang's ultimate vision of urban space, where the film structure portrays space through allegorical images. Lang shows that the city of the 1920s had become a space of danger and warfare. In early twentieth-century metropolises, the police were losing their grip on the city, and the underworld was slowly taking over, not just in Weimar Germany, but in other crime-ridden urban areas as well, such as Chicago, New York, and London. Lang's parallel cutting juxtaposes the two competing worlds with the emerging social group of imaginative criminals. The film accomplishes this with its semi-documentary feel, giving its Weimar audience a tour of Berlin's different social layers as the camera moves like a flaneur or casual walker through parts of the city that would have been inaccessible to most viewers. Weimar citizens had always been afraid of the big city and its unleashing of life's perversities. The film feeds on that sentiment by focusing on the need for surveillance, something provided only a few years later by the perfectionist system of the Nazis.

As the film shows, Fritz Lang's art is the art of arranging objects, similar to the literary style called "New Objectivity" (*Neue Sachlichkeit*) that developed during the Weimar Republic. Objects in these texts show more than the surface reality they represent. Objects in these texts are merely signs, or to use the linguistic term, signifiers, that represent reality.

This symbolism can be demonstrated through the film's central image of Beckert's reflection in shopping windows. They are external images of Beckert's tormented soul, with the shopping window as mirror to his confused madness. The image of Beckert in a reflection of knives laid out in a diamond shape inside the store is a good image of this externalization. The reflection of the chalk marking of "M" in another scene represents the central image of Beckert's realization of being a murderer. In this shot, Beckert stares straight into the camera for the first time and then tries to run away as he seems to realize that his anonymity has been revealed. Once marked with the "M," Beckert has lost the magical invisibility that he possessed in the first part of the movie.

This doppelgänger motif of a split personality plays a central role during the chase scene, where underground figures appear everywhere to surprise Beckert. After the chase, Beckert is caught almost simultaneously by the police (they discovered his room where he wrote the incriminating letter to the newspaper) and by the underworld organization, who found his last hideout in an office building and captured him just before the police arrived. This race between police and underworld to find Beckert first creates the film's tension, which continues into the final sequence of the movie.

M, Lang's first sound film, weaves together powerful visual and auditory elements. One of the most striking uses of sound in *M* is the repeated, obsessive whistling of "The Hall of the Mountain King" from the Peer Gynt suite by Edvard Grieg (1843–1907). This orchestral suite was an adaptation of the poetic drama of the same name by the Norwegian Henrik Ibsen. Lang used Grieg's well-known tune as a "leitmotif" or musical sign that identifies a character or theme. This spooky



Beckert sees his reflection.

melody is used to increase the suspense, because the viewer knows the murderer is near when they hear his whistling. To demonstrate the power of sound, Lang deliberately used a blind beggar—Tiresias, the seer priest in Greek mythology—to identify Beckert as the murderer. *M* is really a movie that lives through its sound and its absence of sound. In that sense the beggar is an essential icon of this movie. “I am a musical moron who can’t carry a tune but I decided to dub the whistling myself,” Lang said in an interview. “It was off-key and turned out to be just right since the murderer himself is off-key mentally” (Grant, 182).

After Beckert’s discovery, the movie is concerned only with the explorations of Beckert’s inner motives for killing. Without providing an ultimate verdict on Beckert’s guilt, the film culminates in his chilling monologue at the end. With this open ending, *M* becomes both a critique and example of the fascination with crime as in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* and other famous movies of that time. Siegfried Kracauer presented his verdict in his book *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* that *M* is a reflection of the time in which it was made, and that the film is an expression of the inevitable development of fascism in German society. As a result of Kracauer’s thesis, Anton Kaes observed that Beckert’s perversity was exploited by the Nazis as ostensibly Jewish.

As a document of the New Objectivity or *Neue Sachlichkeit*, *M* is a superb representation of the tormented social and political landscape of Germany at the end of the Weimar Republic. But its universal appeal lies in the fact that the viewer wonders what might be going on inside the killer's head. Through Lang's symbols, images, and reflections, viewers are privy to Beckert's inner world and become his psychiatrist. Through the movie's refusal to answer the question of what kind of justice pertains to Beckert, the viewer also becomes his judge. (RZ)

QUESTIONS

1. Considering that this is Lang's first non-silent film, choose a couple of relevant scenes to discuss the use and importance of sound in *M*.
2. Name other movies or books that may have been influenced by *M*.
3. Explain how Lang sets the tone of the film in the opening scene involving the disappearance of Elsie Beckmann.
4. The conclusion of *M* is open ended. Why do you think Lang chose to end the film this way? What is your interpretation of the ending?
5. How does *M* reflect the political situation in Germany during this time?
6. Analyze the sequence from 51:00 (Beckert in front of the store) to 55:00 (Beckert in the outdoor restaurant), with a focus on how sound informs Beckert's behavior.
7. Discuss how the children's song in the first scene reflects the story of the movie. "Wait a little while, till Haarmann will come to you with his little chopping axe, and turn you into minced meat." (*Warte noch ein Weilchen, dann kommt Haarmann auch zu dir. Mit dem Hackebeilchen, macht er Hackefleisch aus dir.*)

RELATED FILMS

Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari (*The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, Robert Wiene 1920) is considered the quintessential work of expressionist cinema. The movie tells the story of an insane hypnotist who uses a somnambulist to commit murders.

Die Mörder sind unter uns (*The Murderers Are Among Us*, Wolfgang Staudte, 1946) is the first post-World War II film and labelled a *Trümmerfilm* (rubble film).

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III. NAZI FILM 1933–1945

Films reflect the political and social problems, concerns, and interests of the period in which they are made. For films of the Weimar period, this led to an era of films rich in allusions to war, revolution, economic and political turmoil, and aesthetic and technical innovation. The breadth of Weimar films contributes to the period's reputation as the golden era of German film.

In 1919, after its defeat in World War I, Germany established a constitutional democracy known as the Weimar Republic, which lasted from 1919 until 1933. The country was governed during this time by a president and parliament, whose leader, the chancellor, was appointed by the president. For its brief history, the Weimar Republic faced difficulties brought about by strong disagreements among its many political parties. The Communist Party and the National Socialist (Nazi) Party often clashed in the streets in the early years, with the Communists attempting to set up soviet republics in 1919 and the Nazis attempting a putsch in 1923. The relatively prosperous period of the mid- to late 1920s, however, brought some stability to the country, and moderate parties were able to form coalitions that ruled in relative peace. The stock market crash of 1929, with the subsequent worldwide depression and its accompanying high unemployment, reawakened the militancy of the far-right and far-left parties. As late as 1928, the most extreme parties, the Communists and the Nazis, had managed to win only 12.8 percent of the vote, 10.6 percent for the Communist Party and 2.6 percent for the Nazis. Neither party supported the democratic principles that were the basis of Weimar's parliamentary government. After the stock market crash, Germany's economy deteriorated rapidly. As unemployment rose, so too did the strength of the extremist parties. Street fights between thugs of the two parties and violent disruptions of opponents' political meetings occurred increasingly after 1928, culminating in the Altona (today a suburb of Hamburg) riot of 1932, precipitated by a march of Nazis through the working-class and predominantly Communist district of Altona.

The clashes in the streets were reflected in the disagreements among opposing parties in parliament. Although lacking the violence of the actions outside of government, the disagreements eventually led to governmental standstill and a suspension of parliamentary government by Germany's president, General Paul von Hindenburg. He declared a state of emergency that allowed him to rule for sixty days until the next election. In that election of September 1930, the Nazis increased their membership in parliament to 18.25 percent, almost doubling their number of seats; the Communists increased to 13.13 percent, and the Social Democrats, ostensibly the only party to support the Weimar parliamentary democracy, fell to 24.53 percent. In the election of July 1932, the Nazis increased their base to 37.27 percent, the Communists increased to 14.32 percent, and the Social Democrats fell to 21.58 percent. The election of November 1932 suggested some hope for continuing Weimar because the Nazis lost seats, dropping to 33.09 percent, but the Social Democratic

Party also fell to 20.43 percent. The Communists increased to 16.86 percent. In spite of the loss of seats, Nazis remained the strongest party, and on January 30, 1933, Hindenburg, in agreement with conservative leaders in government and business, appointed Adolf Hitler chancellor.

After Hitler's appointment as chancellor, Weimar's democracy was doomed. On February 27 of that year, the *Reichstag* or German parliament building was set on fire. The German government used the arson as a cause to ban the Communist Party. With the Communist Party banned, Hitler called for new elections. On March 5, the National Socialists won 44 percent of the vote. On March 23, Hitler declared a state of emergency and was given power to rule without consent of parliament for four years. In short succession in 1933, Hitler established the secret state police (*Gestapo*) (April 26), took over local governments (April 26), and outlawed trade unions (May 2). On May 10, university students across Germany burned thousands of books they proclaimed as subversive, an act that reflected the anti-liberal and anti-Semitic policies of the Nazis. Most of the books were by Jewish and foreign authors, but books of non-Jewish authors that the Nazis deemed too liberal were also destroyed. Among the works burned were those by the nineteenth-century author Heinrich Heine, who in his play *Almansor* (1821) had written in reference to the burning of the Koran during the Spanish Inquisition, "*Dort, wo man Bücher verbrennt, verbrennt man am Ende auch Menschen*" ("Where they burn books, they will, in the end, burn human beings too"). The words have become arguably the most cited quotation against book censorship. On May 14, 1933, Hitler banned all political parties except for National Socialism. Hitler's dictatorship was now almost ensured but required two more steps. Hitler and his immediate followers faced opposition to his leadership from the leftist or Socialist wing of the Nazi Party. On the eve of June 30, 1934, the *Schutz Staffel* (or SS) and *Gestapo* (secret police) murdered members of the *Sturmabteilung* (SA), including eventually the group's leader, Ernst Röhm. The event, which has become known as the "Night of the Long Knives,"¹ eliminated Hitler's final opponents. When General von Hindenburg, still the president of Germany, died on August 2, 1934, Hitler combined the positions of president and chancellor and became the sole leader of the country. The way was clear for him to continue to bring all German institutions under his control, a process that had begun already in 1933. The country began to rearm itself, to build up those industries needed for military hardware, and to prepare for war, all the while assuring European leaders and the United States that Germany wanted peace. When war was declared on September 1, 1939, Germany was thus able to conquer in under a year Poland, Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, and France. In spite of its heavy bombardment of England, known as the "*blitz*," Germany never conquered Britain. When Hitler and his generals decided to also attack Russia, they were defeated in the winter of 1942–43 outside Stalingrad.

1. The Night of the Long Knives has been the subject of several fictional films, most notably *The Damned*, by Italian director Luchino Visconti (1969) and *Bent*, by Welsh director Sean Mathias (1997). Hitler also obliquely alludes to the purge in a speech to the Nazi Party at a 1934 convention in Nuremberg, a speech included in German Leni Riefenstahl's tribute to Hitler, *Triumph of the Will* (1935).

The Allied counterattack on Germany, which was begun at Normandy, June 6, 1944, created pressure from the west. Beset by the Russians in the east and the Allies in the west, Germany was eventually defeated and surrendered on all fronts on May 8, 1945. Hitler committed suicide on April 30, as did some of his ministers, including Josef Goebbels.

Once Hitler gained political power through his appointment as chancellor, he began a campaign against his political opponents, primarily the Communists and Germany's Jews, whom he saw as allied with the Communists in an "international conspiracy" to control Europe. Nazi rhetoric conflated Communism and Judaism, accusing them of causing Germany's defeat in World War I and the country's present economic ills. In late February, the Communist Party was banned. The Nazis began arresting political opponents, judged as anyone criticizing the government, and by the end of 1933 had imprisoned over 40,000 opponents, some of whom were Jewish and arrested for their oppositional political views. The first and best known of these camps opened at Dachau (a suburb of Munich) March 22, 1933.

Although the Nazis did not arrest and imprison Jews in the early years of the Third Reich for being Jewish, they imprisoned those who they thought had been critical of the government. They had also begun the marginalization of Jews from Germany and eventually from European life. In April 1933, the government called for a boycott of Jewish-owned stores. Later in the year, Jews were excluded from being in the arts, from being newspaper editors, from owning land, from being certified in law, and from serving in the military. In 1934 Jews were also denied national health insurance, and in 1935 the Nazis enacted the Nuremberg Race Laws, which deprived German Jews of their rights of citizenship and forbade Jews to marry or have sexual relations with Aryans or to employ young Aryan women as household servants. That which constituted "being Jewish" had been decreed already in 1933 as "anyone descended from non-Aryan, especially Jewish, parents or grandparents. One parent or grandparent classifies the descendant as non-Aryan . . . especially if one parent or grandparent was of the Jewish faith."² Mass deportations to the concentration camps and eventually to extermination camps did not begin until the late 1930s. But in November 1938, during the government-sanctioned pogrom against German Jewish communities which has become known as *Kristallnacht* or "Night of Broken Glass," government police arrested and sent about 20,000 Jews to camps.³ Also in 1938, Jewish doctors lost the right to practice medicine, Jewish shops had to have Aryan proprietors, and Jewish children were expelled from Aryan schools. All of this was a prelude to an all-out attack on Jewish culture and Jewish people in Europe.

2. A debate on this question is dramatized in two postwar fictionalized accounts about the Wannsee Conference held in a suburb of Berlin in 1943 to discuss the killing of Europe's Jews—German director Heinz Schirk's *The Final Solution: The Wannsee Conference* (1984) and American director Frank Pierson's *Conspiracy* (1992)—and also in a documentary by Dutch director Willy Lindwer, *The Wannsee Conference* (1992). The question is also debated in Jonathan Littell's novel *Les Bienveillantes* (*The Kindly Ones*, 2006).

3. The Night of Broken Glass plays a part in a number of postwar films, including *Marriage in the Shadows*, by East German director Kurt Maetzig.

In January 1939 in a speech to the Reichstag, Hitler proclaimed, "I said that I would one day take over the leadership of the State, and with it that of the whole nation, and that I would then among other things settle the Jewish problem. . . . If the international Jewish financiers in and outside Europe should succeed in plunging the nations once more into a world war, then the result will not be the Bolshevizing of the earth, and thus the victory of Jewry, but the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe."⁴ Hitler's rhetoric became reality as Jews were forced into ghettos. Ghettos, confined areas in which Jews were allowed to reside (had to reside), had existed since the Middle Ages. But as forced living spaces they had largely disappeared in Western Europe. They reappeared under the Nazis. After Germany conquered and occupied Poland at the start of World War II, Reinhard Heydrich, the Nazi leader in charge of Jewish affairs, ordered that Jews from Germany and the newly annexed areas of Austria and Czechoslovakia be deported to ghettos in Polish cities. Although Jews were at first free to move about the cities, eventually the ghettos were surrounded by walls and barbed wire, and Jews could leave only for work or other official business. Curfews required their return in the evening. In July 1941 the first mass killings of Jews began in the Baltic area with specially built trucks that cycled carbon monoxide into the vehicles, suffocating the occupants. In December 1941 the first extermination camp was established at Chelmno. Auschwitz-Birkenau was set up for mass killing in January 1942. Also in January 1942, a meeting took place at Wannsee, a suburb of Berlin, to discuss what is now referred to as "the final solution." Bureaucrats from the government ministries and military officials met under the leadership of Heydrich to discuss how best to eliminate European Jewry from all of occupied Europe. Mass gassings in the extermination camps began shortly later. The last gas killings took place in Auschwitz in 1944, and the camps were liberated by the Allies beginning in the spring of 1945.

Even before the National Socialists came to power in January 1933, they were indirectly influencing film exhibition through disruptions of left-leaning films. One of the most notorious incidents of disruption involved the American film *All Quiet on the Western Front* (Lewis Milestone, 1930), based on Erich Maria Remarque's novel *Im Westen nichts Neues*, a pacifist war story told from the perspective of German soldiers. The novel had been a bestseller, read by millions, and was translated into multiple languages. German officers had verified its portrayal of war and battle as authentic. Nonetheless, the right viewed the film as Socialist propaganda. The brown shirts, the Nazi's paramilitary army, demonstrated against the film version when it premiered in Berlin in 1931, disrupting its exhibition with stink bombs and the release of mice in the theater, thereby causing the government to ban the film (Riess 1977, 157).

Given this turbulent beginning to Nazi film history, one might expect that National Socialist films were overtly propagandist. Yet that is not the case for the majority of films. Most of the eleven hundred feature films that Nazi Germany

4. Quote and English translation from <http://www.historyplace.com/worldwar2/holocaust/h-threat.htm> (accessed February 2017).

produced from 1933 to 1945 were relatively free of the extremes of Nazi rhetoric.⁵ To be sure, those films which were propagandist in nature were so extreme that they are still not offered for exhibition to the general public. Moreover, the entertaining nature of the non-propagandist films detracted from their use as tools of the Ministry of Propaganda. Most of the non-propaganda films were nevertheless indebted to Nazi ideology and uncritically embraced fascist values such as “my country, right or wrong,” unquestioning allegiance to authority, and the place of women in society (*Kinder, Kirche, Küche*, or children, church, kitchen). Nonetheless, unlike the few overtly propagandist films that are still banned, such as *Der ewige Jude* (*The Eternal Jew*, 1940), *Hitlerjunge Quex* (*Hitler Youth Quex*, 1933), or *Jud Süß* (*Jew Süss*, 1940), other films produced by the Nazi film industry found a second life on German television after the war or in the collection of WestGlen Films, which distributed German films in the United States. When viewed out of the context of Nazi Germany, films starring Luis Trenker and Heinz Rühmann, among others, for example, seem particularly inoffensive. Of course, films cannot be completely devoid of the historical and political context that produced them. In the case of the cinema of the Third Reich, as already stated, even the non-political films supported Nazi ideology through the fascist values implicit in the narratives. Moreover, they supported the extremism of the Third Reich in their tendency to divert or obscure viewer attention from the abuses of an ideology manifest in extreme anti-Semitism and steeped in hatred of those who were different.⁶

Three early films, *Hans Westmar* (Franz Wenzler, 1933), *SA Mann Brand* (Franz Seitz, 1933), and *Hitlerjunge Quex* (*Hitler Youth Quex*, Hans Steinhoff), continued the Nazi rhetoric that was presaged in pre-Third Reich clashes with the opposition. The first work is based loosely on the life of Horst Wessel, the composer of the Nazi marching song known as the “Horst Wessel Lied.” The second tells of a young man converted to the cause of the SA. Through scenes depicting beatings and arrests, they suggest to the audiences at the time what lay in store for Germans who did not subscribe to the policies of the new regime. Marching through the streets, Nazi brown shirts, the Party’s paramilitary army, clash with the opposition, sometimes endangering bystanders. The brown shirts who the public is meant to support and trust seem thuggish and scary. The tone and politically violent nature of the films caused Josef Goebbels to decry the state of German cinema early in his career as minister of propaganda. Goebbels, an enthusiastic filmgoer and critic, criticized the excessive marching and overtly propagandist messages in these early Nazi films, remarking at a conference in 1933 that “the SA’s rightful place is in the streets and not on the cinema screen” (Welch 1983, 62). *Hitlerjunge Quex*, the third film from 1933, is also about the conversion of young people to the Nazi cause, but it was more favorably received by Goebbels. For rather than focusing on the party’s

5. See Gerd Albrecht, *National Socialist Film Policy*, Hanser: Munich, 1969.

6. See for example film analyses in Eric Rentschler, *The Ministry of Illusion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); Mary Elizabeth O’Brien, *Nazi Cinema as Enchantment: The Politics of Entertainment in the Third Reich* (Rochester, NJ: Camden House, 2006); and Robert Reimer, ed., *Cultural History through a National Socialist Lens: Essays on the Cinema of the Third Reich* (Rochester, NJ: Camden House, 2000).

military appeal and showcasing brown-shirted Nazis marching and fighting in the streets, *Hitlerjunge Quex* focuses on National Socialism's emotional appeal. It highlights young people searching for substitute family figures and for a sense of purpose and belonging. That is, the film identifies Nazism as a surrogate parent and equates the party with protection and security rather than with violence. At the end of *Hitlerjunge Quex*, as the hero has died refusing to let his Nazi banner touch the ground, Nazi youths march across the screen singing "*Die Fahne hoch*" ("Raise the Flag"). The emotional effect far outweighs the political information that the visuals supply. This is similar to the end of a film produced and directed by the Communist playwright, Bertolt Brecht, *Kuhle Wampe*, 1932, which ends with a parade of youths moving forward and singing "*Vorwärts und nicht vergessen*" ("March Forward and Do Not Forget"). Such an appeal to emotion was hardly exclusive to German filmmakers. The Hollywood film *Footlight Parade* ends with a musical number showing American sailors forming pictures of first the U.S. flag, then of President Franklin Roosevelt, and finally of the eagle symbol of the Economic Recovery Act.

Goebbels had complete control over film production, from script approval to release of the finished film. As a result, the films produced during the Third Reich followed his prescription. The more propagandist of them touted the virtues of submitting completely to Nazi ideology and of sacrificing the self for Germany. For example, early in the Third Reich, Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* solidified Adolf Hitler's role as supreme leader by portraying him as Germany's savior from the chaos of the preceding fifteen years (the Weimar Republic), the country's hope for economic prosperity, and its guarantee of peace and security. Riefenstahl's film legitimizes Hitler as Germany's *Führer* who will help the people overcome the shame of the defeat in World War I and position the country as a world leader. She seems to say in her next film, the two-part documentary of the 1936 Berlin Olympics, that her prophecy of a secure and respected Germany has been borne out. The opening sequence in the two-part film traces a direct line from the ideals of the games in classical Greece to the 1936 games in Berlin. The parade of nations shows the extent of international participation as athletes from country after country march past Hitler, acknowledging his presence with a turn of the head or the traditional Olympic bow of their flag.⁷

As already mentioned, until the outbreak of the war in 1939 the tone of most of the eleven hundred films made under Goebbels's supervision was nonthreatening, their themes avoiding for the most part direct references to Nazi ideology, even if set during that period. *Glückskinder* (*Lucky Children*, Paul Martin, 1936), for example, is set in the United States, and like its model, *It Happened One Night*, generates laughter from the tension between a hardboiled reporter and a spoiled heiress.⁸ The film starred Lilian Harvey and Willy Fritsch, two actors who had been playing opposite each other since the late 1920s in comedies and musicals. Their presence in post-1933 films was thus reassuring and a sign of continuity of policies for the film industry and audiences alike. Moreover, their appearance assured there

7. The United States team does not follow this custom in any Olympic ceremony.

8. Actually, Martin changes the spoiled heiress of the Hollywood original into a pauper who pretends to be rich.

would be an audience, as the pair was very popular. It is important to note that Harvey⁹ and Fritsch were just two of the film celebrities that were part of the Nazi star system, a commercial model that was used internationally almost from the beginning of narrative films.

Other prominent actors and actresses that were major stars included Marika Röck, Marianne Hoppe, Hans Rühmann, Luis Trenker, and Hans Albers. Most of their films could be categorized as entertainment and light on propaganda. Other major stars in the system included Heinrich George, Emil Jannings, Ferdinand Marian, and Kristina Söderbaum, who starred in some of the regime's most egregiously propagandist films. George, Marian, and Söderbaum had the leads in *Jud Süß*, a film set in eighteenth-century Württemberg, which ends with the hanging of Süß Oppenheimer and the expulsion of Jews from the duchy, a scene reminiscent of what was occurring in Germany in 1940, the year the film was released. The virulent anti-Semitism in the film occasioned special scrutiny of its participants by the Allies after the war, and the film has remained on a controlled list of Nazi films, which may not be sold in Germany or previewed without special permission.

Other actors are less easy to categorize. Film diva Zarah Leander, for example, retained her Swedish citizenship and moved back to the country in 1943. A few of her films, however, although easily classified as entertainment, have propagandist subtexts in their ultraconservative themes. Most notable among these are *La Habanera* (1937), *Heimat (Magda)*, (1938), and *Die große Liebe (The Great Love)*, (1942). On the one hand, her roles, which always spotlighted her musical performances, were mainly in melodramas whose emphasis was on love and suffering. On the other hand, the films also emphasized sacrifice, honor, and duty without reflecting on the object of one's allegiance. *Die große Liebe* contains two of Leander's and Germany's most successful musical numbers, "*Davon geht die Welt nicht unter*" ("The World Is Not Going to End") and "*Ich weiss, es wird einmal ein Wunder gescheh'n*" ("I Know That There Will Be a Miracle"). Both are clear references to Goebbels's admonition to hold on to the end, and both contain clear rhetoric that the war is not lost. Besides the leading actors, the Nazi film industry also included star directors, who like the actors can be classified as less or more propagandistic. Among those whose films were less propagandist are Detlev Sierck (who later directed in Hollywood as Douglas Sirk), Helmut Käutner, and Géza de Bolváry, who also had careers after the war, with Käutner making two successful films for Hollywood. In contrast, Veit Harlan and Hans Steinhoff made some of the most propagandist of the era's films, including *Hitlerjunge Quex* (Steinhoff) and *Jud Süß* (Harlan).

Once the war began, films became more overtly propagandist. In 1940, for example, one year after the beginning of World War II, two virulently anti-Semitic films were released: *Der ewige Jude (The Eternal Jew)*, a quasi-documentary directed by Fritz Hippler, and the aforementioned *Jud Süß (Jew Suess)*, a fictional narrative. *The Eternal Jew* was a compilation film composed of clips from German and Hollywood films, archival newsreel footage, and staged documentary scenes. The film's objective was to deny Europe's Jews their humanity by casting them as a criminal

9. Harvey had a difficult time working within the industry and left Germany not long after the release of *Glückskinder*.

class and a diseased people that would infect Germany if not dealt with. *Jew Suess* was equally anti-Semitic in content and tone and could be understood as a fictional companion piece to Hippler's film. It depicts the Jews as conspiring to infiltrate German society back in eighteenth-century Stuttgart and justifies their eventual expulsion from the city as the only viable solution to keeping Germans safe. Working in tandem, *Jew Suess* and *The Eternal Jew* overtly condemn Europe's Jewish residents, equate Jews with pestilence, and support Nazi Germany's mass deportation of Jews first to ghettos and then to concentration and extermination camps, which was just beginning at the time of the films' release.

Other propagandist films made during the war years focused on anti-British sentiment, portraying Germans as victims. Other films emphasized the difficulties that lay ahead, admonishing viewers to stay the course even unto death. In the first category is *Stukas* (Karl Ritter, 1941), a film that gets its name from the German dive bomber. The film's ending sequence shows a young air force officer, who had been convalescing, excitedly leaving the hospital to the smiles of the nurses and doctors so that he can join his comrades in an air raid on England. The final scene shows in quick succession the film's flying heroes in their planes as they fly across the Channel, singing about dive bombing to defeat England. A second anti-British film, *Carl Peters* (Herbert Selpen, 1941), relates the career of the title character, who helped found the colony German East Africa. Its story contains both anti-British and anti-Semitic sentiments. In the film, Peters struggles against the opposition of the British as well as against the opposition in the German parliament, which is portrayed as under the influence of Jewish Socialists. A third film, *Ohm Krüger* (*Uncle Krüger*, 1941), is similarly set in colonial Africa. Directed by Hans Steinhoff, who had made *Hitlerjunge Quex*, the movie depicts the defeat of Krüger at the hands of the British during the Boer War. It starred Emil Jannings, the winner of the first Academy Award in 1929,¹⁰ and is particularly noteworthy because of the imagery it uses in depicting the Germans as victims. Steinhoff portrays the treatment of Germans during the war in a way very similar to how the Germans were treating the Jews at the time of the film's release. It shows civilians imprisoned behind barbed wire, provided with meager rations of rotting food, and eventually massacred as they rise up against their conditions and incarceration. The sequence in which the prisoners protest the bad food and their eventual massacre references scenes from Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), including the Odessa Steps sequence which is cited in most film histories as a masterpiece of propaganda. In *Ohm Krüger*, after beginning their protest, the Germans are gunned down as they rush forward down a slope, reinforcing the image of the evil British in the eyes of the German audience. A fourth programmatic film of 1941, *Heimkehr* (*Homecoming*, Gustav Ucicky), likewise presents the Germans as victims, but in this film they are being persecuted by Poles rather than the English. The film depicts German nationals living in eastern Poland who suffer persecution at the hands of the Polish majority. In the same cynical irony displayed by *Ohm Krüger*, the persecutor and persecuted roles are reversed. Polish authorities arrest and punish Germans for simple acts of

10. Emil Jannings won this first acting award given out by the Academy of Motion Arts and Pictures for his roles in *The Way of All Flesh* (1927) and *The Last Command* (1928).

disobedience, such as refusing to sing the Polish national anthem in a theater. The film also depicts a pogrom against the Germans by the Polish populace.

Whereas the films of 1941 could be optimistic in outlook, as Germany still seemed to be heading for victory in the war, by the following year, after the defeat of the German Sixth Army at Stalingrad, those few films which were not a diversion from reality had a decided shift in emphasis. While on the surface they reflected Goebbels's call to the nation for "total war," the subject matter and tone reflected a more somber mood. As early as 1942, *Die grosse Liebe* (*The Great Love*, Rolf Hansen) was including air raids on German cities. The film also introduced two popular songs, "*Davon geht die Welt nicht unter*" ("It's Not the End of the World") and "*Ich weiss, es wird einmal ein Wunder gescheh'n*" ("I Know That There Will Be a Miracle"). Both were sung by the film's star, Zarah Leander, whose titles and words may be understood as encouraging a fight to the end but also ironically as calling into question any hopes of victory for Germany. The 1944 film *Die Degenhardts* (*The Degenhardts*, Werner Klingler) leaves little doubt that defeat is imminent. Although the film takes place in 1942 in Lübeck, the first German city to be bombed, its release in July 1944, a time by which many cities had witnessed massive destruction, leaves little doubt that the film was meant to prepare Germans not for coming hard times but for the country's inevitable defeat. Veit Harlan's *Kolberg*, released in 1945, shows defeat not as inevitable but as *fait accompli*. The film had been a pet project of Goebbels. Its budget consumed resources at a critical time in the war. Troop trains and individuals that could have been used at the front were diverted to the production of the film. Its message is clear: Germans would continue fighting to the death. The film, which is set in early nineteenth-century Germany, became an allegory of Germany in 1945. At a special screening of the movie before the film's cast and film industry dignitaries, Goebbels admonished his audience that the future would judge them just as viewers at a film judge the characters on screen. "Gentlemen, in 100 years people will show another wonderful color film which depicts the terrible days we are now living through. Don't you want to play a part in this film, to be awakened to a new life in a hundred years? Each of you now has the opportunity to select the part he will play in this film. . . . Stay firm, so that in 100 years the audience does not boo and whistle when you appear on the screen" ("*Inventing Dr. Goebbels*"). The film ends with Nettelbeck, a main character played by Heinrich George, comforting his daughter, played by Kristina Söderbaum, an actress that often played parts demanding sacrifice. He reminds her that what she has done has been for the greater good: "You have sacrificed everything that you had, Maria, but it wasn't in vain . . . You are great, Maria. You didn't budge from your spot, you fulfilled your duty, you weren't afraid of dying. You too were victorious, Maria." *Kolberg* was the last major production of the Third Reich. A few months after its premier, Germany surrendered. (RCR)

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Triumph des Willens

(Triumph of the Will, Leni Riefenstahl, 1935)



Mise-en-scène of crowds and ceremonial banners at Nazi rally.

CREDITS

Director Leni Riefenstahl
Screenplay Leni Riefenstahl, Walter Ruttmann
Directors of Photography Sepp Allgeier, Karl Attenberger,
Werner Bohne, Walter Frenz, Willy Zielke
Editor Leni Riefenstahl
Music Herbert Windt
Producer Leni Riefenstahl
Production Companies Leni Riefenstahl-Produktion, NSDAP-Reichsleitung
Length DVD version 110 minutes; B/W

Principal Cast

Appearing in the documentary are Adolf Hitler, Joseph Goebbels, Rudolf Hess, Hermann Göring, Alfred Rosenberg, and other dignitaries of the Nazi Party.

THE STORY

Triumph des Willens (*Triumph of the Will*, 1935) documents the party rally of the National Socialists (Nazis) held in Nuremberg in 1934. The film opens with a preamble of statements that express mourning for Germany's defeat in 1918 and follow through to Hitler's rise to power in 1933. The words promise vindication for what the Nazis saw as Germany's humiliation in World War I at the hands of the Allies; and, in the eyes of the Nazis, also as a result of pacifist actions by Socialists and Jews. The opening credits are followed by Hitler's arrival in Nuremberg, his tumultuous welcome by crowds of people, and a lengthy segment that films participants at the party rally, showing them washing up, having breakfast, and engaging in physical games of various sorts. This is followed by a hymn of praise to Hitler that climaxes with an emotional ode to the soldiers who fell in World War I. These highly evocative opening sequences are followed by scenes of marching, mustering of troops, and speeches by the leadership of the Nazi party. In the center of all activity is Hitler as orator, commander, and leader.

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BACKGROUND

Leni Riefenstahl (1902–2003) is arguably the Third Reich's best-known filmmaker. Her career and fame, however, have been marked by controversy. She made very few films, acting in eleven and directing eight. She was a personal friend of Adolf Hitler. Yet she claimed that although she admired the man, she was never a Nazi nor had she ever subscribed to Nazi ideology. While many film critics consider Riefenstahl a filmmaking genius, others, including those who celebrate her talent, refuse to forgive her collaboration with the Nazis (see Berg-Pan, Hinton, Kracauer, and Bach, among others). She was twice exonerated by the courts when accused of collaboration with the Third Reich, in 1948 and 1952. Nonetheless she found it impossible to resume a film career the way many of her colleagues had, who were also accused of being fellow travelers. To be sure she tried various projects. She released *Tiefland* (*Lowlands*, 1940–44) in 1953, a film she had finished shooting before the end of the war and in which she plays the starring role of a Gypsy dancer in love with a shepherd but married to a wealthy aristocrat. The film, however, was a commercial and critical failure. In 1975 she published a photo essay on the Nuba in Africa, which contained photos of the Nuba tribe, the subject of a documentary that was never realized. In the early 1990s, at the age of 90, she learned scuba diving and made a film about the coral reefs, *Impressionen unter Wasser* (*Impressions under Water*), which she released in 2002. The photo essay of the Nuba occasioned a highly negative response from essayist Susan Sontag, who noted that Riefenstahl was still apparently an unreconstructed ideologue who subscribed to Nazi aesthetics (Sontag 1975).

Riefenstahl began her film career as an actress in the mountain films of Arnold Fanck in roles that emphasized and used the athleticism still apparent in her scuba diving. In 1932, she directed her own mountain film, *Das blaue Licht* (*The Blue Light*), and cast herself in the starring role of an outsider, a beautiful young woman

mysterious and misunderstood and therefore persecuted by the townsfolk. The film, which emphasizes the lyricism and mysticism of the mountains rather than the awesome power found in Fanck's films, gave Riefenstahl a chance to highlight her physical beauty. After the war, she again cast herself as an outsider subject to both the disparaging and lustful looks of flatlanders. Playing a Gypsy, Riefenstahl underscores the physicality of her beauty that was exploited in Fanck's mountain films.

In spite of her beauty and her physicality, Riefenstahl's fame rests on two films she directed and in which she did not appear, *Triumph des Willens* (*Triumph of the Will* 1935) and *Olympia* (*Olympia* 1938). The first allowed the director to find an aesthetic voice, one which experimented with filmic elements, including camera movement and angles, editing, carefully crafted mise-en-scène, and sound mixing, to create a new style of documentary: part reportage and part constructed narrative, part documentation and part orchestration. *Triumph of the Will* presages today's fascination with creative editing, rock concerts, and constructed personality. *Olympia* continued Riefenstahl's experiments and innovations with documentary, creating a deification of the human body and physical perfection, both tenets of the classical ideal, while positioning Nazi Germany as the rightful inheritor of antiquity. More than a film about sports, it represents the fulfillment of *Triumph of the Will*, physical prowess and beauty made manifest.

Triumph of the Will has its roots in a film Riefenstahl made a year earlier on the 1933 Party Congress, *Der Sieg des Glaubens* (*The Victory of Faith*, 1933). Running sixty-one minutes, that film is an hour shorter than *Triumph of the Will* and possesses none of the later film's powerful editing and evocative imagery. Indeed Riefenstahl later distanced herself from the final result by suggesting that the film was rushed into production at the last minute, had a limited budget, and that she had only three cameramen to assist her, thus limiting the amount of footage from which to edit the film (Hinton 1978, 28; Rother 2003, 47).

According to Riefenstahl, Adolf Hitler asked her to direct *Triumph of the Will* as a way to make amends for the obstacles which Joseph Goebbels, the minister of propaganda, threw in her way during production of *Victory of Faith* (Infield 1976, 62). Although she at first refused, hoping to work on the feature film project *Tiefeland*, she finally consented to make the film after Hitler met her conditions, foremost of which was to have complete control of the project (Hinton 1978, 30). There is little to no evidence that Riefenstahl's version of the genesis of her film is accurate, but she uses the story as evidence that the film was not made under the supervision of the Nazi Party and is therefore not propaganda for Germany. In an interview in Ray Müller's documentary on her life and work, Riefenstahl claims she would have made the same movie, only with different characters, if Stalin and the Communist Party had commissioned the film for the Soviet Union (Müller 1993).

Controversy has accompanied Leni Riefenstahl since the release of *Triumph of the Will*. Considered by many film historians, even those highly critical of her politics, to be one of the best propaganda films ever made, the documentary nonetheless prevented Riefenstahl from having a film career after the end of the Third Reich. Many have argued that the film documents a rally staged for the aggrandizement of Hitler and the Nazi Party and hence is itself not a true documentary, but a construction of an ideology (Kracauer 1947, 302). The facts are, however, that the

rally took place and would have taken place whether Riefenstahl had made her movie or not (Hinton 1978, 55). But it is also true that by focusing on certain aspects of the rally and by inserting staged speeches by Nazi leaders, the film goes beyond documenting the event and instead helps to structure, if not create, the event.

Even during the Third Reich, before World War II had started, Riefenstahl found her reputation in the United States tarnished (Graham 1993). On a tour to promote her film of the 1936 Olympics, critics in the press referred to her as Hitler's girlfriend (Salkeld 1997). After the war, while other German directors were resurrecting their careers, in spite of having made films for the Nazis, Riefenstahl was defending herself against charges of being an unreconstructed Nazi. Although critics also sometimes cited her film of the 1936 Olympics as proof of her Nazi ideology, for the most part, the evidence of her Nazi sympathies came from her participation in *Triumph of the Will*. Amidst all the criticism, Riefenstahl refused to acknowledge the moral issues inherent in having made a film for the Nazis. In spite of the film's obvious and aggressive championing of the Nazi cause, she never wavered in her insistence that she was not a Nazi and that the film was not made to promote Nazi ideology. Riefenstahl died on September 9, 2003, at the age of 101.

Riefenstahl maintained that her primary intent in making *Triumph of the Will* was to show Germany as a land of peace and employment under Hitler and the National Socialists. To this end she devotes a number of visually striking sequences to Germany's labor corps, its youth, and its cheering populace. Furthermore, she includes numerous speeches with abundant references to Germany's desire for peace. Finally, she edits the scenes in a fashion that produces a feeling of forward movement, of a land progressing under the leadership of its *Führer*, Adolf Hitler. Thus quiet scenes are followed by busy scenes, night scenes by day scenes. Shots that might otherwise be static are given movement through editing. The processions of peasants, soldiers, and motor vehicles seem endless.

Riefenstahl's critics maintain that she intended the film as a propaganda piece for Hitler and the Nazis (Berg-Pan, Kracauer, Sontag, among others). That is, the film's main purpose was to sell Hitler and the Nazis to the German people and also to the rest of the world. Moreover, the film was meant to show the people and the world Germany's military presence. Thus, they point out, she alternates scenes of speeches about peace with scenes of marching troops and scenes of workers reciting in chorus to a memorial for the fallen soldiers of World War I. She also includes a scene of the laying of a wreath at the tomb of an unknown soldier, a military presentation of tanks and other war machinery, and a workers' corps as disciplined as any army.

The nature and degree of propaganda that Riefenstahl included in her film becomes clear when the film is placed in its historical-political context. Hitler became chancellor of Germany in January 1933, when the Nazis were in control of only one-third of the *Reichstag* (parliament). Moreover, in spite of harassing the Communists and other political opponents, the Nazis won only 43.9 percent of the vote in the March 1933 elections. To achieve the power he wanted, Hitler introduced an enabling bill that would in effect make him dictator. But after silencing much of the opposition, and in order to get the three-fourths majority needed for passage, Hitler still had to offer the Catholic Centre Party a quid-pro-quo protection in exchange



Riefenstahl's relationship with Hitler haunted her during her entire career.

for its support. Even the burning of the *Reichstag* on February 27, 1933, which is still shrouded in mystery (Hett 2014), did not give the Nazi Party the total allegiance it sought. Despite these facts, Riefenstahl's goal in *Triumph of the Will* was to present Hitler and the Nazi Party to the world, but particularly to Germans, as the legitimate heirs to Germany's past and the beneficent leaders necessary for a peaceful and prosperous future. At the same time the film was also to show Nazi leaders, in particular Hitler, as all-powerful.

EVALUATION

Over the years, *Triumph of the Will* has become more than a film which introduced Hitler and the Nazis to the Germans and the international community and extolled Hitler as a bringer of peace and prosperity. To be sure, the film's visual and aural texts lend Hitler and the Nazi Party legitimacy by connecting Germany present to Germany past. Moreover, the film offers the Nazis a place in world history. First, given that the Nazis came to power with a plurality rather than majority of voter support, the leadership's task was to continue the momentum after the takeover of the government and persuade the German public that the National Socialists were the country's legitimate leaders, which the film succeeds at doing. Second, after the Nazis came to power, historical accounts depict a struggle between left and right wings of the Nazi Party for control of the political agenda. Members on the right, among them Hermann Göring and Heinrich Himmler, worried that the growth of

the *Sturmabteilung* or SA, the private army of the National Socialists under Ernst Röhm's control, posed a threat to their leadership. Eventually, with Hitler's sanction, Röhm and hundreds of his men in the SA were arrested and eventually executed on charges of treason (see among other accounts Hancock 1998, 617). In one of his speeches in the documentary, Hitler obliquely acknowledges the political infighting in general and this event in particular, known as the "Night of the Long Knives."¹ Finally, the arrest and placement in camps of the Communist opposition, ironically a subject of an early Nazi film, *SA Mann Brand*, made clear that the Nazis were not yet in complete control of the people's minds. Riefenstahl's film speaks to these concerns for the Nazis by putting a positive spin, to use the cynical language of today's politics, on the party's problems.

The film opens with a written prologue that establishes Nazi Germany as the rightful heir to the Germany of the Second Empire under Kaiser Wilhelm. In Gothic script, the prologue places the time of the film twenty years after the start of World War I and sixteen years after the beginning of Germany's suffering, a reference to the end of the war and the founding of the Weimar Republic. Nazis attributed the Allies' victory over Germany to the country's betrayal at the hands of the Socialists, Communists, and Jews. Indeed, betrayal by Socialists and Jews had been a refrain in Nazi speeches and writings as early as 1923, when Hitler advanced the "stab in the back" (*Dolchstoß*) theory in his autobiography *Mein Kampf* (*My Struggle*). The credits close with an indication that Hitler is opening the congress nineteen months after Germany's rebirth, which here is equated with the coming to power of the National Socialists. The opening sequence thus conflates prewar Germany and post-1933 Germany at the same time that it marginalizes Weimar Germany and discredits its democratically elected government. Riefenstahl appeals in this segment to the Nazi sentiment that Germans are victims of the Communists. The religious tone adopted by the prologue through the use of the rhetorical device of repetition found in catechisms identifies Germans as Christian martyrs. This theme of martyrdom is reinforced a few scenes later, when a workers' chorus invokes the memory of fallen comrades. Even the format of the textual titles—Gothic script designed to resemble woodcuts—relates the Third Reich to Germany's rich history, as the woodcut letters pay homage to Nuremberg, the site of the meeting and the home of Albrecht Dürer, a sixteenth-century artist famous for his woodcuts. The prologue had actually been written by Walter Ruttmann, who was scheduled to direct the film. Riefenstahl kept the format after he backed out. Ruttmann remained an assistant on the film, although his exact contributions remain unclear (Rizvi 2014; Rother 2003, 196).

Two sequences stand out above all others in the film. Both valorize the underlying text of celebrating Hitler and the Nazis as the legitimate heirs to Germany's historical past. After the prologue, the film cuts to the inside of an airplane, showing its descent from the perspective of its chief occupant, Adolf Hitler. We watch as the plane descends through clouds, seeing even the shadow of the plane on the ground

1. The "Night of the Long Knives" has been dramatized in the films *The Damned* (Luchino Visconti, 1969) and *Bent* (Sean Mathias, 1997).

as it glides to its landing. Noted film historian Siegfried Kracauer interpreted the sequence as showing Hitler as Germany's savior coming to free the people (Kracauer 1947, 291). One need not resort to religious imagery, however, to read the important historical allusions of the scene. For the sequence that directly follows the plane's landing shows Hitler disembarking to a throng of cheering crowds as if he were a Roman emperor returning after battle. A later sequence shows a chorus of workers, in military-like formation, as they introduce their regions, their duties, and also recite an ode to Germany's fallen.

What makes this scene so remarkable is the Eisenstein-like juxtaposition of two images to create an ideological image in the viewer's mind. The manner in which the film has been edited—Riefenstahl alternates contrasting images and scenes—makes the whole greater than its parts. The scenes alternate group shots with close-up shots of individual faces with shots of feet and shovels. Spliced into these are shots of Hitler or the Nazi flag whenever the text mentions Germany. In this way, individual workers become one mass force, their *Heimat* or region becomes one united Germany, and Germany becomes the Nazi flag—but also and most importantly, Germany becomes Hitler.

Similar to the visual text, Herbert Windt's musical score for *Triumph of the Will* establishes Nazi Germany's ties to the past, in particular the Germany of nineteenth-century romanticism. In the opening sequence, for example, Windt alludes to Germany's past greatness with lush orchestration reminiscent of Richard Wagner. The Wagnerian melodies give way to the Nazi anthem, "*Die Fahne hoch*" ("Raise the Flag"). In a subsequent scene, as the visuals show Nuremberg's cathedrals at dawn, the orchestra plays a melody from Wagner's *Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. Windt continues to intermix the grandeur of Wagner with other musical forms, including martial music for the many parade scenes, the German national anthem during extremely patriotic moments, and the military song "*Ich hatt' einen Kameraden*" ("I Had a Good Friend") for more sentimental moments. Except for the Nazi anthem, the music—whether it is Wagner-like, actual Wagner, folk music, or martial music—references the pre-1918 Germany of German romanticism. (For a thorough discussion of music in the movie, see Morgan [2006].)

In spite of the controversy surrounding the director and her film, and perhaps because of the controversy, *Triumph of the Will* has a major place in German film history. Its influence can be seen in the aesthetic values of films such as Paul Verhoeven's 1997 *Starship Troopers* (Strzelczyk 2008), and heavy metal rock groups such as Rammstein (Weinstein 2008). Ironic references can also be found in the final scene of George Lucas's *Star Wars* (1977) and the scene of the Arab leader's speech in Lewis Teague's *Jewel of the Nile* (1985). Perhaps the most outrageous reference comes near the end of Jim Sharman's *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975), in which the character Magenta tells Frankenfurter that Rocky, his creation who is a blond, blue-eyed Aryan, is a "triumph of your will." (RCR)

QUESTIONS

1. Give a detailed breakdown of the sequence in which the members of the workers' chorus first introduce themselves to the point where their comrades lower and then raise flags in honor of Germany's war dead. Be sure to describe both the content of the visuals and how they are filmed. Include the audio track in your description.
 - a. Locate on a map the regions from where the workers come. What is Riefenstahl suggesting during this part of the recitation about Hitler and about Germany under Hitler?
 - b. How many shots does Riefenstahl use to equate Hitler with Germany and show him as the leader of the Nazi party?
 - c. What is the significance of the battles mentioned during the flag ceremony?
 - d. What is the purpose of including a workers' brigade in the ceremony?
2. Locate all scenes with Hitler. How does Riefenstahl use film techniques and story to create an image of the man?
3. What elements in the film might contradict Riefenstahl's assertion that the film is an unstructured documentary of the Nuremberg rally?
4. Many people today find this film tedious. Why do you think this is the case? What parts of the film do you find most effective? Which do you find least effective?
5. *Triumph of the Will* has been described as a film of alternating rhythms. Considering the sequences of the films, what do you think is meant by this?

RELATED FILMS

Der Sieg des Glaubens (Victory of Faith, Riefenstahl, 1933). The film is Riefenstahl's documentary of an earlier Nuremberg rally.

Der heilige Berg (The Sacred Mountain, Arnold Fanck, 1926). Riefenstahl began her association with Arnold Fanck and Luis Trenker, the director and star of a popular genre in both Weimar and Nazi cinema.

Das blaue Licht (The Blue Light, Riefenstahl, 1932). After acting in several mountain films directed by Fanck, Riefenstahl acted in one she directed. The film focuses on the mystical beauty of the mountains, whose secrets only Riefenstahl's character can penetrate. The mountain's and Riefenstahl's natural beauty and strength become one in the film.

- Tiefland* (*Lowlands*, Riefenstahl, 1954). Filmed before the end of the war, *Lowlands* tells of a Gypsy dancer loved by a simple shepherd and mountain man but forced into a relationship by a cruel baron. The director used Gypsies imprisoned in Nazi camps as extras in the film. She herself played the lead.
- Jud Süß* (*Jew Suess*, Veit Harlan, 1940). *Jud Süß* is one half of a pair of anti-Semitic films made in 1940, the other being the pseudo-documentary *The Eternal Jew*. It is still banned from public exhibition because of its anti-Semitic content.
- Der ewige Jude* (*The Eternal Jew*, Fritz Hippler, 1940). Soldiers and students were required to attend showings of *The Eternal Jew*, one of the most anti-Semitic films ever made and like its narrative counterpart, *Jud Süß*, still banned from public exhibition.
- Deutschland erwache* (*Germany Awake*, Erwin Leiser, 1968). Using film clips, Leiser introduces viewers to the major themes of Nazi cinema.
- Die Macht der Bilder: Leni Riefenstahl* (*The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl*, Ray Müller, 2000). The director interviews Riefenstahl at length and allows her to comment on her films and editing techniques.

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Olympia

(Leni Riefenstahl, 1938)



Athletes at Parade of Nations, some with Olympic and some with Nazi salute.

CREDITS

Director Leni Riefenstahl
Screenplay Leni Riefenstahl
Directors of Photography Numerous but all uncredited
Editor Leni Riefenstahl
Music Herbert Windt
Producer Leni Riefenstahl
Production Companies Olympia Film GmbH, International
Olympic Committee, Tobis Filmkunst
Length Part One ca. 120 minutes, Part Two ca. 90 minutes; B/W

THE STORY

Riefenstahl's *Olympia* is divided into two parts—*Fest der Völker* (Festival of the People) and *Fest der Schönheit* (Festival of Beauty). The titles reveal that the film is more than a document of the athletic competitions that took place at the Olympic Games in Berlin in 1936. Rather, it is a hymn to the spirit of the games as personified in physical perfection and beauty. It offers a counterpart to Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*. Whereas that film focuses on Germany's might under Hitler as a newly reborn pan-Germanic nation, *Olympia* emphasizes Germany's place within an international community and its role as inheritor of Europe's past glory. To that effect, *Fest der Völker* begins with the ruins of ancient Greece, which through a series of camera dissolves slowly change into the Berlin Olympic Stadium. This is followed by a sequence showing a series of runners passing a torch which had been lit in Athens along a route that eventually leads to Berlin. This scenario, which is a tradition that started at the 1936 Olympics, is familiar to all who have watched Olympic coverage on television. The opening twenty minutes also include partially clothed athletes reenacting ancient events and young women waving their arms in synchrony in front of flames. These are followed by the parade of nations and a shot of Adolf Hitler, who opens the games. This first part of the film also includes track-and-field events and ends with the marathon. The second part of the film begins with idyllic scenes of a forest, bubbling brooks, and naked swimmers, followed by individual athletes warming up for the day's events, which include team sports and the swimming and diving competitions. *Olympia* closes with a brief three-minute ceremony of bells ringing, focusing on the Olympic flame whose rays form a sun that fills the screen as the last shot of the documentary.

BACKGROUND

The Olympic Games were awarded to Germany in 1931, two years before Hitler came to power. Historical accounts suggest that he had opposed the games, declaring them "an invention of Jews and freemasons" and that they "could not possibly be put on in a Reich ruled by National Socialists" (Walters 2006). Joseph Goebbels, the minister of propaganda, convinced him that the games could serve to show the world a "new Germany" and also bring in much needed foreign currency (Hilton 2006).

The Berlin venue for the games was controversial in the international community as early as 1934. Because the Germans had not kept secret their anti-Semitism, news of Germany's treatment of Jews was fairly well known in the West. Jewish athletes in Germany were excluded from sports associations, prevented from using public practice fields and sports facilities, and eventually excluded from the German Olympic team. Among them were Jewish tennis star Daniel Prenn and Gypsy middle-weight boxer Johann Trollmann. Theodor Lewald, the president of the German Olympic Committee, was removed from his position when Nazi officials discovered he had a Jewish grandmother. Finally, Jewish athlete Gretel

Bergmann, who had been practicing for the Olympics and had set the women's record for the high jump in Stuttgart on June 30, was dismissed from the team in mid-July, two weeks before the start of the games. Because of the international community's outcry at Germany's treatment and exclusion of Jewish athletes, Helene Meyer, a partially Jewish fencer, was allowed to compete.

In the United States, criticisms of holding the games in Berlin were vocal. Led by the Amateur Athletic Union, Jewish leaders and organizations, college presidents, and trade union leaders, the movement to boycott the Berlin Olympics was strong. Avery Brundage, Olympic Committee President, was originally opposed to U.S. participation but changed his opinion after a visit to Germany, where he was well received and where overt anti-Semitism had been toned down. With his eventual support, the athletes voted by a narrow margin to participate. The team fielded nine black and five Jewish athletes. Some Jewish athletes did, however, refuse to participate. Individual Jewish athletes from France, Canada, England, and Austria also declined to join their national teams. Historical accounts attest that during the time of the games, the ubiquitous signs in front of hotels, restaurants, and other public establishments announcing that Jews were not welcomed had been removed.

Critics and politicians received Riefenstahl's documentary with ambivalence. On a tour to the United States in 1938, the director had hoped to convince the American public that she was a filmmaker and not a Nazi. However, dogged by reporters as to whether she was Hitler's girlfriend, Riefenstahl had to defend the apolitical nature of her film, a stance she continued to espouse until her death at age 101. In interviews and print, she has repeatedly argued that *Olympia* is not a documentation of Hitler's or the Nazi's Olympic Games but a film about the Olympics. Hoping to have a ban on her film in Germany lifted, she appeared before the *Filmbewertungsstelle* (Committee of Film Review) in 1958, arguing that "until its premiere, no National Socialist official had seen any of the film," and that the movie "had no scenes that glorified the National Socialist regime" (Graham 1993, 280). Many critics, however, argue that her friendship with Hitler, her previous film *Triumph of the Will*, and the tone of the movie indicted her sincerity (see Schneider and Stier 2008; Sontag 1975; and Witte 1993, among others).

EVALUATION

The ambiguity of Riefenstahl's intent in *Olympia* follows both from the content and style of the film as well as the way the director tells the story of the events of the film. On the one hand, the film is a documentation of athletic contests. It focuses on performance, endurance, physical prowess, and athletic form as they are found in any sporting event that includes the best in the field. Thus Riefenstahl's focus on physical beauty should be expected, as athletes tend to be physically fit and young. She herself had been a dancer and athlete, and thus the aspect of beauty was important to her. Outside the film's context of documenting an event in Nazi Germany, little in the film makes this a fascist work, unless performance sports can be seen as fascist. Yet *Olympia* is also a documentation of the setting for the games. That is, Riefenstahl herself has placed the film in a context of Nazi Germany and not in an

apolitical international arena. Thus, the events in the film can be judged against a fascist backdrop.

The film has three major themes—individual accomplishment in sports; the power of competition to create community; and the identification of a new Germany, both mythic and modern, gracious and strong. The expert camera work displayed in *Triumph of the Will* to showcase Adolf Hitler as Germany's savior—editing, mise-en-scène, lighting, and music—is used here to structure sports competitions, elevating them from mere athletic contests to celebrations of individual strength and beauty as they are found in the collective community of athletes. The fledgling state of Nazi Germany found in *Triumph of the Will* here becomes Nazi Germany, the inheritor of Western antiquity and new leader in Europe.

The film's presentation of individual contests supports an apolitical reading of the film. Yet just how apolitical such a reading could be is open to debate since Riefenstahl released different language versions of the film in different countries. Each had its own audio track, and a few added or deleted scenes in order to appeal to the viewers in the targeted countries (Downing 2003, 174). Nevertheless, all seem to devote significant footage to events where non-German athletes were often the victors, even though that meant excluding shots of Germans. She highlights the successes of African American track star Jesse Owens in his events. She devotes a ten-minute sequence to the decathlon, where the top three participants were Americans, and includes the awards ceremony as three U.S. flags are raised to the playing of the U.S. national anthem. In events where Germans are strong, she of course focuses on their accomplishments. Moreover, in the German language version, there were more shots of German athletes.

Riefenstahl used forty-three cameramen filming from every conceivable angle. Her crew filmed from high platforms and from within special trenches so as to capture action from every perspective. Hans Ertl, her preferred cameraman, constructed special cameras and a boat to film swimmers and divers from the best perspective, including underwater (Thurman 2007). Her crew also filmed with cameras specifically constructed to race along on tracks next to the runners. Finally, Riefenstahl used footage from practice sessions, a time when there was more room for the camera team to maneuver, for the best angles; and when she had not obtained good results filming some contests, she had the winners reenact the competitions.

At times Riefenstahl's choices run contrary to expectations of sports reporting, where ordinarily the focus is on the competition of the event and not the aesthetics of the contest. In the javelin throw, for example, the camera stays on an individual athlete's form as he runs and releases the javelin rather than following the object to see how far it has been thrown. From the five-hour pole-vaulting event, she created a ten-minute sequence in which athletes appear silhouetted against an ominous sky until they become forms in shadow.

Arguably the most famous sequence of the movie is a nearly five-minute diving sequence that supports apolitical and ideological readings of the film. As the sequence begins, Riefenstahl chooses shots that focus on individual divers as they spring from the board, glide through the air, and enter the water. As the sequence continues, the tempo increases such that the time between dives is reduced at the same time that less emphasis is placed on divers entering the water. Eventually the

shots focus on the start of the dive, as athletes spring from the board and glide, even fly, through the air. In one instance, a reverse shot carries a diver first into the air then backward so he soars like a bird. Increasingly the divers are filmed from below, silhouetting their bodies against clouds in the sky. Finally, divers, singly and in twos, are filmed falling off the high platform, their arms outstretched as if falling on faith that they will be caught, as indeed the angle that highlights their silhouettes sailing through the sky suggests. As Riefenstahl's supporters might note, the individual event in the sequence has transformed into a display of abstract beauty, devoid of political or ideological intentions. Detractors, on the other hand, might say that the divers have been transfigured into objects or film props for illustrating the idea of sacrifice. (RCR)

QUESTIONS

Riefenstahl is a master of visually portraying the essence of the various sporting events:

1. How does the director characterize the marathon? The event occurs at the end of Part One. Describe camera angles, images, lighting, and music to justify your answer.
2. During the parade of nations, how do the athletes from various countries pay respects to the dignitaries on the rostrum? Why do you think the countries differ in how they salute the podium?
3. How does Riefenstahl create suspense in the decathlon event?
4. Describe the events in which Jesse Owens competes.
5. Describe any moments in the film which you think specifically glorify the Third Reich.
6. The audio tracks for the German- and English-language versions of the film differ somewhat. Choose one or two sequences and compare the information given by the narrator/reporter.
7. Compare Riefenstahl's portrayal of Olympic events with coverage of Olympic Games you are familiar with.

RELATED FILMS

Der Sieg des Glaubens (*Victory of Faith*, Riefenstahl, 1933). The film is Riefenstahl's first attempt to document a National Socialist rally in Nuremberg.

Der heilige Berg (*The Sacred Mountain*, Arnold Fanck, 1926). Riefenstahl began her association with Arnold Fanck and Luis Trenker, the director and star of a popular genre in both Weimar and Nazi cinema.

Das blaue Licht (*The Blue Light*, Riefenstahl, 1932). After acting in several mountain films directed by Fanck, Riefenstahl acted in one she directed. The film focuses on the mystical beauty of the mountains, whose secrets only Riefenstahl's character can penetrate. The mountain's and Riefenstahl's natural beauty and strength become one in the film.

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Jud Süß (*Jew Suess*, Veit Harlan, 1940). *Jud Süß* is one half of a pair of anti-Semitic films made in 1940, the other being the pseudo-documentary *Der ewige Jude* (*The Eternal Jew*). It is still banned from public exhibition because of its anti-Semitic content.

Der ewige Jude (*The Eternal Jew*, Fritz Hippler, 1940). Soldiers and students were required to attend showings of *The Eternal Jew*, one of the most anti-Semitic films ever made and like its narrative counterpart, *Jud Süß*, still banned from public exhibition.

Deutschland erwache (*Germany Awake*, Erwin Leiser, 1968). Using film clips, Leiser introduces viewers to the major themes of Nazi cinema.

Die Macht der Bilder: Leni Riefenstahl (*The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl*, Ray Müller, 2000). The director interviews Riefenstahl at length and allows her to comment on her films and editing techniques.

Triumph des Willens (*Triumph of the Will*, Riefenstahl, 1935). Riefenstahl's second attempt to document a National Socialist rally in Nuremberg. The film corrected the errors she made in her first attempt, *Der Sieg des Glaubens* (*Victory of Faith*, 1933) and is often cited as one of the most powerful propaganda films ever made.

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Münchhausen

(Josef von Báky, 1943)



In the most iconic image from the film, Baron Münchhausen rides a cannonball to the palace of the Turkish Pasha.

CREDITS

DirectorJosef von Báky
ScreenplayErich Kästner as Berthold Bürger
Director of Photography Konstantin Irmen-Tschet and Werner Krien
Music..... Georg Haentzschel
ProducerEberhard Schmidt
Production Company Ufa
Length.....Varies over time. Present KINO DVD restored
version 110 minutes. Agfa Color

Principal Cast

Hans Albers (Baron Münchhausen), Brigitte Horney (Catherine the Great), Ferdinand Marian (Graf Cagliostro), Hermann Speelmans (Christian Kuchenreutter), Marina von Ditmar (Sophie von Riedesel), Käthe Haack (Baronin Münchhausen).

THE STORY

The film begins on the dance floor during a ball in a sumptuous eighteenth-century manor house. A man and a woman flirt, but when the woman makes an advance, the man rejects her and escorts her to her Mercedes parked in the circular driveway. Actually, we are in the twentieth century circa 1943, the year *Münchhausen* was released. The apparent heir to the title has been throwing a fancy dress ball. The next day, the baron and his wife invite the young woman and her fiancé to tea. At the urging of the young man and to the worried looks of the baron's wife, Münchhausen begins the story of the exploits of his heroic ancestor, Baron Münchhausen, and his servant, Christian, who in the telling have returned from their latest adventure. Christian amazes his family with a crème that makes hair grow instantly, causing the barber much consternation and putting a beard on his young son. He also introduces a rifle that can shoot accurately miles into the distance. The baron and Christian soon begin a new adventure as he is summoned to the court of Catherine the Great, Czarina of Russia. Before arriving at court, he meets with the magician Cagliostro, who offers him a deal if he will help him seize power. Münchhausen refuses, but later in his adventures he will warn the magician of an assassination plot, thereby saving his life. As a reward, Cagliostro will give him an invisibility ring and immortality. At court, Münchhausen, who is quite the lady's man, has an extended flirtation with the Czarina. She sends him to war against the Turks. On the battlefield, Baron Münchhausen, who seems impatient for action, rides a cannonball directly to the palace of the Pasha, then rescues a Venetian princess who has been abducted and returns her to Venice. In Italy he fights her brother in a duel, humiliating the man. As he is being pursued by the Inquisition, he and Christian get into a hot air balloon and voyage to the moon. On the moon, they meet the wife of the man in the moon, who can separate her body from her head. As time moves faster on the moon, Christian grows old very quickly and dies. Because of his immortality, the baron is unaffected. At this point the story returns to the frame and Münchhausen confesses that he himself is the original baron. The couple leaves, and Münchhausen in a display of true affection for his wife decides he no longer wants to be immortal and that he will now grow old with her.

BACKGROUND

The historical Karl Friedrich Hieronymus Freiherr von Münchhausen was born in 1720 and died 1797. He fought in Russia and was imprisoned for a while in Turkey. After his retirement, he entertained others with tales of his exploits so exaggerated that he gained the nickname *Lügenbaron* or "the lying baron." His fantastic stories were the subject of books by Rudolf Erich Raspe and later Gottfried August Bürger, whose work included a translation into German of Raspe's English edition as well as additional exploits. Münchhausen has also been the subject of films. The first was *Les Hallucinations du baron de Münchhausen* (*Baron Munchausen's Dream*, 1911) by Georges Méliès, an imaginative filmmaker who introduced the possibility of special effects into cinema. The 1943 version is by Josef von Báky, a Hungarian-born

German filmmaker. The most recent English language filming is by Terry Gilliam, *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen* (1988), a film that references much of Báky's film while focusing on the contrast of imagination and rationality (Keser 2004). There is also a German television film, *Münchhausen – Die Geschichte einer Lüge* (*Münchhausen – the Story of a Lie*, Kai Christiansen, 2013).

Josef Goebbels, Nazi Germany's minister of propaganda, commissioned Josef von Báky to make a prestige movie that would rival Hollywood in scope of story and special effects. It was made to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of Ufa, the giant film studio that produced most of Germany's major films in the 1920s and which under National Socialism had been consolidated with other German studios to establish Ufa-Film, in effect creating a state-controlled corporation that oversaw all film production. Film distribution was an important source of income for the Third Reich, and Goebbels wanted to ensure that German movies would be available in markets open to them and would be able to compete in them with films of quality. Potential markets included Germany's allies, such as Italy; conquered countries, such as Holland, Norway, and Hungary; and neutral lands, such as Sweden, Spain, and Switzerland.

Münchhausen had a budget of almost five million Reichsmarks, a large sum for a film in that era.¹ Goebbels asked Báky for ideas for a film that could rival producer Alexander Korda's British film *The Thief of Bagdad* (1940), whose special effects and tale of daring-do was an international success. Film historians report that Báky turned to Erich Kästner for advice. Nazis had burned Kästner's books in the infamous bonfire of 1933, and afterward he was blacklisted as a writer because of his opposition to National Socialism. He nonetheless had stayed in Germany. The author recommended a film based on the legend of Baron Münchhausen, as his penchant for lying resembled Goebbels's own mistruths (Smith 2003). Goebbels surprisingly allowed Kästner to write the screenplay as long as the author remained uncredited. In addition to Báky, who had a wide reputation for his musical films, and Kästner, the film also starred Hans Albers, one of the most popular of the Third Reich's actors, and a host of other luminaries from Ufa who could showcase the studio's breadth of talent. *Münchhausen* was Germany's fourth film in color. Cinematographer Konstantin Irmen-Tschet, who had worked with Báky on *Frauen sind bessere Diplomaten* (*Women Make Better Diplomats*, 1941), the first feature-length film in color, created a different color palette for each of the sequences of the film. The scene of Russian peasants in the street, for example, has a myriad of colors that give it the look of a Breughel painting. Irmen-Tschet and Ernst Kunstmann, who had worked on Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, studied Korda's *The Thief of Bagdad* so as to be able to duplicate the effects. In addition to Münchhausen's iconic ride on a cannonball, they had figures float through space, a headless woman, and a painting in which a nude with her back to the viewers teasingly turns to the audience.

Most film histories of the Third Reich describe Báky's *Münchhausen* as popular with critics and the public. The original length of 2½ hours was cut to 133 minutes for release and later to 118 minutes. There were two separate versions for

1. Writing in the *Daily Mail*, David Gerry compared a four million Reichsmark budget in 1943 to 100 million dollars at the time of his article, February 26, 2012.

export (Smith 2003). After the war, a 90-minute version was popular with German audiences. In 2003 the film was remastered almost to its original film quality and released in a 110-minute version. Reviews, while alluding to the film's origin as a prestige release of the Third Reich, remain mostly uncritical of any possible propaganda elements in *Münchhausen*.

EVALUATION

A film such as *Münchhausen* presents a paradox when trying to evaluate it. On the one hand, the content is apolitical and phantasmagorical. One could imagine it being made by Hollywood or France with only minor adjustments to correspond to cultural norms. On the other hand, it was made during the Third Reich. Moreover, it was a prestige movie produced to celebrate Ufa's twenty-fifth anniversary and impress the international film community with the high quality of German cinema. If one considers that the film, as an entertaining distraction, corresponds to Goebbels's film-and-propaganda philosophy that movies should deliver their propaganda indirectly, if not subliminally, then the film is certainly a product of Nazi Germany. For it distracts viewers from the reality outside of the movie house, namely, air raids, rationing, and death.

Film scholars for the most part do not separate National Socialist films of entertainment from those of propaganda, recognizing that all films reflect the ideology or zeitgeist of the time when they were made. That is, they are all propaganda. Thus, as devoid of an overt Nazi program as *Münchhausen* may seem, it is still a product of its time. Siegfried Kracauer, for example, wrote that "all Nazi films were more or less propaganda films, even the mere entertainment pictures which seem to be remote from politics" (Kracauer 1947, 276). In an insightful and influential essay, Eric Rentschler analyzes the film's fascist and sexist structure as follows: "[The film] celebrates the triumph of male will while intimating the travail of male anxiety" (Rentschler 1990, 22). That is, for all the subversive, anti-Nazi elements that admirers of the film may find in *Münchhausen*, the film projects a conservative view of male superiority stemming from an inherent fear of women. For Rentschler, for example, the woman on the moon represents both "a bad joke and serious wish. Male dominion in the Third Reich meant female servitude" (Rentschler 1990, 21). Considered in this vein, we can identify two other sexist jokes. Dismissing Louisa La Tour's flirtations, Baron Münchhausen alludes to the dangers of getting involved with her, remarking to his horse, "where other women have a heart, she has only cleavage." That women must be controlled is displayed in a later film gag as well. The magician Cagliostro and Münchhausen are admiring a painting of an odalisque with the subject's back to the viewer. Cagliostro uses his magic to control her so that she turns to face the men, but as she does so, the baron remarks, "I like her better from the back," and Cagliostro reverses her movement. Carola Daffner likewise focuses on the theme of control in the movie. Analyzing the most widely quoted scene of the movie, namely, Münchhausen's ride on a cannonball, she writes, "The ride on the cannonball quickly becomes a spectacle, in which instead of expressing anxiety or remorse, Münchhausen gains control over the situation and



Münchhausen talks with the head of the wife of the man in the moon.

even has time to smile and wave into the camera. In this moment, we come face to face with Nazism's love of the self, as an idealized image of Aryan strength looks us straight in the eye. Münchhausen's acknowledgment of our presence lifts us up to his height and turns us into his mirror image" (Daffner 2011, 44). In brief, the scene turns viewers into fellow travelers of the Nazi's ideology of superiority.

And yet, there are enough moments in *Münchhausen* to suggest alternate, less Nazi-controlled readings of the film. Indeed, no film can be completely contained by the intentions of its producers. What Roland Barthes wrote concerning literature—that the author of a text is not the ultimate arbiter of that text's meaning—certainly holds true for film as well, especially given that it has more than one "author." Actors, writers, directors, cinematographers, and others all add to the meanings found in the film. Their individual contributions produce a surfeit of information within the movie in the form of references, iconography, characterizations, and settings that leave viewers free to understand the movie in multiple ways. Moreover, it is probable that a film whose screenplay was written by an opponent of the regime and whose main actor was himself not an adherent of National Socialist philosophy might contain ambiguities and ambivalences that produce alternate readings. If one considers that the movie is produced by a totalitarian regime in the middle of a war that is not going well, some of the baron's comments readily lend themselves to subversive readings. For example, in a meeting with Cagliostro, the baron refuses to enter into a political intrigue to conquer Poland, remarking, "You want to rule, I want to live." Furthermore, his flight occurs because he is pursued by the Inquisition, which like the *Gestapo* seems to have its eyes and ears everywhere. Finally, when the baron is on the moon, where one day equals one

year and thus his watch becomes inaccurate, he laments that it is not his watch that has broken down but rather time. Even the self-reflexivity of the film can be understood as a comment on the outside world in which things are not as they seem.² When Albers as Münchhausen winks at the audience from his portrait, he could be commenting on the falsehoods outside the theater as well as those in the movie.

The film's nudity and sexual innuendos also seem to run counter to Nazi film policy, which tended toward the prudish. But are bare-breasted women and sexual dalliances truly subversive elements? Rentschler (1990) suggests they are merely moments that the censors allowed to enter the film in order to present the image of a less-controlling state apparatus. His point is well taken. If we look at other National Socialist films, one can find the same seemingly subversive elements. Helmut Käutner's *Auf Wiedersehen, Franziska!* (*Goodbye Franziska*, 1941), a film with clear propaganda undertones, for example, contains an extended scene of a jazz musical and dance number, a music form detested by Hitler and Goebbels and therefore banned by the Third Reich. Similarly, in *Große Freiheit # 7* (*Port of Freedom*, 1944), Käutner includes scenes in a bordello located in Hamburg's notorious red light district. *Große Freiheit # 7*, however, was banned in Germany but released for exhibition abroad as well as to troops stationed in occupied countries.

In the final analysis, whether one sees *Münchhausen* as "nothing more than colorfully adorned male fantasies" ("*nichts anderes als bunt ausgeschmückte Männerphantasien*," Henkelmann 2005) or as "an idealised image of Aryan strength" (Daffner 2011, 44) depends to what degree one is willing to separate the message from the messenger. Can a film made under the auspices of a corrupt totalitarian regime be considered free of the ideology of that regime? Moreover, is there any way to determine this? To be sure, there are ample reviews of the film in the press of the Third Reich. Yet the press was controlled by the government, and their reviews of films would have been controlled as much as the films themselves. Thus, what critics write about the film may not be what audiences of the time saw in the film. Indeed, audiences during that time probably saw the same film we see today, one full of adventure, fantasy, and some titillation. The difference is that in 1943, the release date of the film, such entertaining distractions were turning viewers' attention away from the hardships, away from the war, and away from the crimes being committed by their government. That is sufficient reason to call the film propaganda. (RCR)

QUESTIONS

1. Compare one or two scenes from Terry Gilliam's 1988 *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen* (available at <https://www.youtube.com>) with their counterparts in Báky's film (available at <https://www.youtube.com>). What similarities and what differences do you find? How do these affect the meaning of the scenes? Does viewing the Gilliam

2. Rentschler (1990), on the other hand, interprets the self-reflexivity as a comment on the power of technology to control the message.

- version support a reading of the Báky film as a Nazi film or as a non-political film?
2. Describe the difference in color palette between the various sequences of the film (in court, at Cagliostro's, in the Seraglio, in Venice, and on the moon). Why do you think the choreographer chose a particular color scheme for each sequence?
 3. How does the frame of the movie serve the episodic nature of the film?
 4. Identify all the women in the film with a speaking role. Assuming they are cyphers or symbols of ways in which men consider women, comment on how they fit a conservative interpretation of the film.
 5. Why do you think Münchhausen decides to grow old at the end of the film?
 6. To what extent are your actions and ideas influenced by the films you see? Do you feel there are any topics, characterizations, or visual images that should be banned?

RELATED FILMS

The Adventures of Baron Munchausen (Terry Gilliam, 1988). The film tells a similar story to that of Josef von Báky's film but without the frame and perhaps with a bit more whimsy and anarchy.

Baron Munchhausen's Dream (Georges Méliès, 1911). Méliès was a pioneer of fantasy films and special effects. In this short he shows the nightmarish dreams of a drunk Baron Münchhausen.

Unter den Brücken (*Under the Bridges*, Helmut Käutner 1945). Although made during the Third Reich, the film was not released until after the end of the war. Its portrayal of life aboard a working barge combines scenery and a love story to reveal a work that is remarkably uncharacteristic of National Socialist films.

Titanic (Herbert Selpin, 1943). Selpin tells the story of the doomed Cunard Line ship from a National Socialist perspective that, although mostly free of propaganda, focuses on the greed of English capitalism and the strong character of a German officer.

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IV. POSTWAR FILM 1945–1949

In broad daylight on May 2, 1945, a Red Army soldier reenacted for cameras the late-evening hoisting of the Soviet flag over the Reichstag in Berlin that occurred on April 30. As it later turned out, a photo taken on April 30 would actually have been premature, since Berlin officially capitulated in the Battle of Berlin only in the early morning hours of May 2. Whatever the date, for the Soviets the photo signified Soviet supremacy and glory; for the Germans, though, it illustrated the victory of the enemy in World War II they had disparaged the most. Thus it was a particularly rankling icon of defeat, one in keeping with a distasteful fact conveyed to them also on May 2: unlike the version of Hitler's death conveyed on April 30, namely, that he had fought the Bolsheviks to his last drop, Hitler had actually committed suicide.

There were of course many other unsavory deeds associated with the German defeat. Of utmost importance among these were the large numbers of rapes, including gang rapes, committed by Allied soldiers, in particular from the last week of April 1945 to Germany's unconditional surrender. Regardless of age or outward appearance, women in the areas occupied by Soviets feared, above all, two short German words carrying an unmistakable message: "*Komm Frau!*" ("Woman, come!"). Though rapes by the other Allied forces were mentioned off and on, for a long time only the Soviets were associated with them.¹ But in 2015, a new book caused shock waves with its detailed revelations on the raping sprees of soldiers serving with the Western Allies. It presents the following likely numbers of World War II rapes: 45,000 by the British, 50,000 by the French, 190,000 by U.S. troops, and 430,000 by soldiers of the Red Army (Gebhardt 2015, 38). Why, then, the widespread postwar silence about the rapes? Shame of course played a large role—foremost the shame felt not only by the victimized women but also German men for not having been able to prevent the rapes.

Could they, on the other hand, have prevented the horrors revealed in the German concentration camps that were liberated in April 1945, the month before the ultimate German defeat: Buchenwald, April 11 (by U.S. troops); Bergen-Belsen, April 15 (by the British); Sachsenhausen, April 22 and 23 and Ravensbrück, April 30 (both by the Soviets); and Dachau, April 29 (by U.S. troops)? Except for Bergen-Belsen in Lower Saxony, which the British found intact, the SS had already evacuated the camps by sending all but the most ill inmates on death marches many could not possibly survive. From Dachau, for example, 7,000 inmates were sent on a march toward the Tegernsee (a lake where they could be drowned); if they stumbled excessively on the way, they were simply shot and killed. The SS attempt to remove most traces of the concentration-camp system was of course futile. The liberators

1. For example, in Helke Sander's 1991 book *Befreier und Befreite* and the film by the same name, as well as in the book and 2009 film *Anonyma*—their English versions titled *A Woman in Berlin*.

of the camps were aghast at what they saw even after the evacuations. Convinced that the perpetrators of such an inhumane system deserved strong punishment, they strengthened their resolve to defeat Germany.

Germany's unconditional surrender actually occurred twice—first on May 7 at General Eisenhower's headquarters in Reims in northeastern France and then again with higher ranked, more representative signatories shortly after midnight on May 8—to be precise, on May 9—at the Soviet military headquarters in Berlin, located in Karlshorst, a section of the Berlin district Lichtenberg. To this date, the countries of the former Soviet Union celebrate their victory over Nazi Germany on May 9; elsewhere Germany's capitulation is commemorated on May 8.

In a landmark speech delivered on May 8, 1985, in the German Bundestag—that is, forty years after Germany's unconditional surrender—Richard von Weizsäcker, at that time the president of the Federal Republic of Germany, stressed that May 8 was not a day of celebration for Germans. How could it be in view of shattered illusions, despair at having aided the inhuman goals of a criminal regime, countless deprivations, and anxieties about the future? But Weizsäcker thought it was time to stop thinking of May 8, 1945, as a tragic breakdown. Firmly he declared it instead “a day of liberation,” for it had liberated Germans “from the inhumanity and tyranny of the National Socialist regime” (Weizsäcker 1985, 2). By now, Weizsäcker's view has become the prevalent one. Nonetheless, in 1945 it would have been decidedly alien for many Germans, perhaps also for those who could not decide whether 1945 should be designated a “zero hour” (*Stunde Null*)—that is, a time of total physical and spiritual breakdown—or whether the tabula rasa implied by the term “zero hour” was just as impossible as a complete erasure of the past.

The expression “zero hour” was, however, an apt term for the physical devastation of Germany's cities. The relentless American and British saturation bombings (the British bombed at night, the Americans during the day) had already turned at least twenty-eight kilometers of urban Berlin into a landscape of unmitigated rubble. Most landmarks had disappeared; it was impossible to tell where many of the streets had been. More than 90 percent of the centers of Cologne and Dortmund were completely destroyed. Frequently overcrowded, the dark, musty cellars of demolished buildings often provided the only housing possibilities. Yet the rapidly multiplying fortune tellers and psychics seemed to have no difficulty staking out places underneath the rubble from which they could lure passers-by longing to escape the day's bleak realities, even if only with prefabricated dreams.

And there was no shortage of people passing by, even if most of them had no idea where they were headed (Büscher 1998, 7; Kossert 2015, 31–33). Millions of people were quite simply “on the move” through the parts of Germany that were still left. Of the twelve million expelled from eastern territories (e.g., East Prussia), ten million had reached Germany alive. There they were joined by millions of others: prisoners of war, displaced persons (DPs), people evacuated from forced labor camps, and former concentration-camp inmates who had survived the death marches. How were these millions to be integrated into German society? And would there be a Germany at all? If so, how and by whom was Germany to be governed in the wake of the German capitulation and in the absence of a peace treaty? There were many questions, many uncertainties, and countless rumors.

The first answers came with the Berlin Declaration of June 5, 1945—all four Allied forces would govern Germany (France had announced its participation in the occupation and administration of Germany on May 1); Germany would be reverted to its borders of 1937 and would be divided into four occupation zones. Its capital, Berlin, would also consist of four sectors, each governed by a different Ally (in a sense, Berlin would be the microcosm of the four-part Germany). The highest authority would reside in the Allied Control Council (*Alliiertes Kontrollrat*), consisting of the supreme military commander of each Ally. Berlin, in turn, would be governed by the Allied Kommandatura (*Alliierte Kommandantur*), also composed of one high-ranking military representative from each of the four Allies.

The Potsdam Conference (July 17–August 2), attended by British prime minister Winston Churchill (replaced on July 26 by the new British prime minister Clement Attlee), Soviet leader Joseph Stalin, and U.S. president Harry Truman, confirmed the Berlin Declaration of June 5 but changed territorial borders considerably. Approximately one-fourth of Germany's 1937 territory (e.g., much of Pomerania and most of Silesia) was given to Poland in compensation for Poland losing several of its own large territories to the Soviets.

Since many Germans had feared even greater retaliatory measures from the Allies, they were immensely relieved at the outcome of the Potsdam Conference. Above all, it did not call for dissolving Germany as a nation. Many policies could vary from one occupation zone to the next, but the four military commanders constituting the Allied Control Council would ensure that in the most important matters Germany would be governed as one entity. When it would be allowed to govern itself again was not yet an issue. For the time being, the so-called d's were to constitute the main goals in each occupation zone: denazification, demilitarization, democratization, decentralization, and deindustrialization.

In the interests of denazification, all four Allies were committed to bringing the major German war criminals to justice but disagreed about procedures. Represented by Churchill, the British, followed by the French and the Soviets, were in favor of "swift justice." They saw no benefit in dallying. The Germans were obviously guilty; their major war criminals should simply be executed as quickly as possible. Robert H. Jackson, designated as the American chief prosecutor, disagreed, pleading eloquently for a fair trial. His view prevailed.

Though some of the worst war criminals had already committed suicide (Adolf Hitler, Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels, and Heinrich Himmler, head of the SS and chief of the German police), twenty-three others were ordered to stand trial starting October 6, 1945. The trial actually started in Berlin but was moved to Nuremberg (Nürnberg) because Nuremberg's Palace of Justice (as opposed to Berlin's government buildings) had not been bombed and, conveniently, even had a prison.

The trial itself was like no other. For the first time, military representatives of different nations (France, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States) appeared together as one tribunal; for the first time leaders of nations were held accountable by other nations for international crimes first specified for this trial—for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and crimes against peace. Verdicts were announced approximately one year later (October 1, 1946): twelve were to be hanged,

seven received prison terms of varying lengths, and the remainder was acquitted. From December 6, 1946, to April 13, 1949, there were twelve other Nuremberg trials, each focused on a different category of Nazi perpetrators (e.g., doctors, judges), but the first one was the most sensational.

Despite disagreements on meting out justice—with the Americans on one side and the three remaining Allies on the other—the deeper rifts among the Allies had another constellation, with the Soviets on one side and the Western Allies on the other. They were in fact already laying the foundations of the Cold War. In particular, the Western Allies disapproved of the excessive dismantling of German industry and of the large-scale transfer of machinery to Russia, a process that had actually started even before the Americans and British arrived in Berlin in July 1945. Rifts became even wider when the western sectors accepted the European Recovery Plan, widely known as the Marshall Plan (named after its initiator), and when the Soviet Zone rejected it (as expected).

To achieve the currency reform that was the precondition for receiving Marshall Plan aid, the Western Allies decided in March 1948 in London to form their own political entity, a decision that caused the Russian representative to walk out of an Allied Control Council meeting (the four-member organization never convened again). The Russian representative on the Allied Kommandatura, the entity charged with administering Berlin, also left the Western Allies, but only on June 16, 1948, not long before the currency reform introduced by the Western Allies in its sectors went into effect—an event that meant, in essence, the establishment of a separate state and thus, regardless of protestations to the contrary, the start of a divided Germany.

West Berliners too were eager to exchange their Reichsmarks for the German Marks given to the populations in the Western zones on July 20, 1948. They strongly protested when the Western Allies initially did not include them in the currency reform because of adhering to their decision to define Berlin as an entity separate from the four Allied occupation zones—that is, as a locality to be governed not by one Ally but by all four. The Soviets, however, thought that their chance had come to attach West Berlin to its own Berlin. Thus they too instituted a currency reform (very soon after the Western Allies had established theirs), but theirs was meant for West Berlin as well. Reacting angrily, the Western Allies changed their minds and extended their currency reform to West Berlin. This in turn infuriated the Soviets.

The Western Allies had of course expected Soviet anger, but they were completely unprepared for the blockade of all land and waterways leading to West Berlin, which the Soviets imposed on July 23. How could this be circumvented? Someone remembered that there was no written regulation preventing airway access to Berlin. Thus, on July 26, 1948, the Americans and British launched the *Luftbrücke* (airlift) that supplied West Berliners with necessities such as food, medicine, and coal. By May 12, 1949 (the official end of the airlift), 278,000 flights with 2.34 million tons of food and supplies, as well as the *Rosinenbomber* (special planes showering Berlin's children with chocolates attached to small parachutes), landed at Berlin's Tempelhof Airport. By then, the relationship between the Western Allies and West Germans, as well as West Berliners, had changed dramatically: for the

Germans the occupation forces had turned into protectors; the Western Allies, in turn, began to see the Germans as friends.

Soon after the blockade was lifted—on May 23, 1949—the Federal Republic of Germany was founded as a provisional German state with Bonn as its (provisional) capital. Rather than a constitution, which would have implied nationhood, it chose to be governed by a *Grundgesetz* (basic law). Not long afterward—in October 1949—East Germany founded the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Ignoring the previous unanimous Allied decision that Berlin was to remain a single entity to be governed by all four Allies, the GDR simply removed the word “East” from its part of Berlin and declared it as its capital. It would of course have liked to remove the word “West” from West Berlin and to incorporate it into its own Berlin. But it had to make do with banning West Berlin from its maps, replacing it with a white spot that had no name. West Berlin, however, continued to exist as West Berlin, not incorporated into the Federal Republic of Germany. It remained an island under the governance of the three Western Allies, though the German Mark, its media, and its political institutions closely connected it with West Germany.

At the outset of the postwar period, however, when the prime focus was on denazifying the errant Germans, there were more commonalities than differences among the Allies. All turned to film—in particular, documentary footage on the liberation of the concentration camps—to jar Germans into recognizing the atrocities they had either committed or tolerated. The Soviets produced two of the films themselves—*Majdanek* (1944) and *Auschwitz* (1945)—but in 1946 they entrusted Germans to create *Todeslager Sachsenhausen* (*Death Camp Sachsenhausen*), thereby becoming responsible for the only concentration camp documentary film attributed to Germans. In 1945, the Americans contributed *Todesmühlen* (*Death Mills*), focused on the liberation of several concentration camps but known almost as well for its footage of the shocked reactions of the citizens of Weimar during their American-mandated tour of the Buchenwald camp. Most other documentary footage on concentration camps appeared in news reels, such as the weekly *Welt im Film* (*World in Film*) jointly produced by the Americans and the British. Even the French atrocity film, *Les Camps de la mort* (*Death Camps*), was initially filmed for a French newsreel (*Brandenburgische Landeszentrale*).

Whether the concentration camp films were effective in helping to reeducate Germans who were, more often than not, reluctant to watch them remains debatable. When other documentary films, even on cultural topics, also didn't fill the movie theaters that the occupying powers were reopening as quickly as possible, the Allies turned more and more to importing feature films from their own countries. Trusting that any U.S. film would turn into a democratizing force, the United States flooded its occupation zone with American films, regardless of type or quality, and often did not bother to dub them into German or to provide German subtitles. Understandably, enthusiasm for watching American films waned, and there were fewer to watch anyway, since Hollywood began to send fewer films to a market by no means considered lucrative (Brockmann 2010, 192). Like the Americans, the Soviets imported a large number of films. Yet their films too were of varying quality (in particular with regard to their technical aspects), and they often didn't manage to dub or subtitle as

many films as they had intended. The British tried to choose films that portrayed the British way of life positively (Mühl-Benninghaus 2004, 218–22); the French were more committed to promoting film culture. Thus the French sponsored many film discussions, founded film clubs, and even organized a one-week film festival (Mühl-Benninghaus 2004, 222–23). Still, the French too—in accord with the other Allies—eventually concluded that most Germans were more interested in German entertainment films than in foreign productions.

To keep their movie theaters filled, and also for promoting the democratizing news reels (shown by themselves they did not draw large audiences), all occupation powers decided to allow showings of Nazi entertainment films, but only if they had no Nazi content. Thus each occupation zone set up its own elaborate licensing system predicated on countless hours of viewing and rating Nazi entertainment films. For example, of the 1,016 films the British licensing board viewed, 701 were released to distributing houses, but 245 of these only after the removal of questionable content (Clemens 1997, 319). Often oblivious to hidden propaganda, the American control board approved a large number of Nazi entertainment films. The French, on the other hand, always made sure that there was never a time when more German than French films were running in their movie houses.

Nazi entertainment films may have filled the cinemas but did not contribute to the monetary profits of the Allies, since the Ufa films were not their property. Thus the Americans and British became significantly more interested in producing new German films—a process well under way in the Soviet sector. In September 1945, the Soviet zone had already compiled a list of Germans experienced in various facets of filmmaking. Several became members of the Filmaktiv, a group asked to make concrete suggestions for reshaping German film. In November 1945, the Filmaktiv members and others professionally involved with film met in Berlin's famous Hotel Adlon, still severely damaged, to discuss the establishment of a German film industry in the Soviet sector—at that time meant to serve all Germans rather than merely the ones living in the Soviet occupation zone (Byg 1999, 23). Thus representatives of all occupation powers and film enthusiasts from all occupation zones were present at the official founding of DEFA (Deutsche Film AG/German Film Company) on May 17, 1946, in Potsdam-Babelsberg—not on the grounds of the severely damaged Ufa-studios that were turned into the DEFA site later but in a nearby studio. The opening ceremony highlighted the moral mission of the German films to come: to focus on contemporary reality, awaken conscience, drive out all remnants of Nazism and militarism, provide answers to essential questions of life, and—above all—to educate youth in democracy and humanism.

Inter-zonal cooperation “for the broad exchange of views” continued to be encouraged at the first postwar conference of filmmakers, held June 1947 in Potsdam-Babelsberg. Despite the success of two 1946-DEFA films in particular—*Die Mörder sind unter uns* (*The Murderers Are Among Us*) and *Irgendwo in Berlin* (*Somewhere in Berlin*)—conference participants worried about the scarcity of quality scripts, claiming that many available writers were trapped in melodramatic cinema modes of the past (Allen 1999, 5). How to find and nurture authorial talent then became a question debated back and forth in 1947, and in a particularly heated manner in the film journal *Der neue Film*. But by November 1947, and despite the

critical success of Kurt Maetzig's *Ehe im Schatten* (*Marriage in the Shadows*), which premiered in October, other matters took precedence. Soviets came to own 55 percent of DEFA, with Germans owning the other 45 percent. This imbalance in ownership was reflected in the rearticulation of goals. Rather than proceeding on an uncharted German path toward Socialism, Germans were to emulate Soviet ways. By the time the GDR was founded, the SED (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*, or Socialist Unity Party of Germany) held political sway over the DEFA Film Commission, an entity that rejected or accepted scripts, oversaw first and last versions of DEFA films, and gave its seal of approval before a film could be distributed. Slatan Dudow's didactic *Unser täglich Brot* (*Our Daily Bread*, 1949) became exemplary of the heightened Socialist orientation (Hake 2008, 94).

In contrast to the centralizing tendencies of the Soviet zone, the Western Allies allowed their German film industry to revive only in decentralized fashion—that is, the Americans and the British encouraged the establishment of a wide spectrum of smaller German film studios (e.g., those in Munich, Hamburg, and Göttingen). Though the French too contributed to the licensing and production of at least a small number of films, there were no studios in their occupation zone. All in all, the four occupation zones produced ten German films in 1947; by 1949, the number had risen to sixty-eight (Clemens 1997, 139).

Like most Soviet-supported postwar films, the first German film sponsored by the United States—*Und über uns der Himmel* (*And the Sky Above Us*, 1947), directed by Josef von Báky—was also a rubble film and, unexpectedly, a big hit. To be sure, Báky, who had directed *Münchhausen* (1943), the most lavish entertainment film of the Nazi era, knew how to please crowds. And as in *Münchhausen*, he again chose the immensely popular Hans Albers as his leading man. Repenting at the end of the film for his shady black market dealings, Albers's protagonist—while singing the movie's theme song—encourages viewers too not to give up, since “things have to continue anyway” and “because this existence can also be beautiful.” That the film was so popular despite such banalities is probably also attributable to viewers strongly identifying with the protagonist's self-pity, lethargy, and his later focus on his family's material well-being (Filminstitut Hannover). In 1949, though, the American sector sponsored Fritz Kortner's *Der Ruf* (*The Last Illusion*)—one of the most substantive and daring films of the postwar period. It dealt with several topics many would have preferred to ignore: the need to shed the collective guilt mentality in favor of accepting personal guilt and personal responsibility for the past; the persistence of fascist thinking in academia; and the rise of anti-Semitism among students.

As a whole, the British-financed German productions were highly regarded. But even in 1947—relatively early in the immediate postwar years—many objected to yet more reminders of the days between 1933 and 1945, such as those depicted in Helmut Käutner's *In jenen Tagen* (*In Those Days*), although conceding that the novel idea of presenting a broad range of stories from the past from the viewpoint of a car had its merits. Devoid of a conscience, a car can't be blamed for its actions. The fact that it ends up as a wreck, incapable of resuscitation, does not necessarily have to mirror the fate of Germans.

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The bland nature of the title *In Those Days* is topped by the title of another 1947 film by Käutner: *Film ohne Titel* (*Film without a Title*). It encapsulates, on the basis of a simple love story, the many earnest and impassioned film discourses of the times in satiric and ironic ways. It plays with indecisiveness and lack of orientation. What kind of film should one make? It shouldn't be a rubble film, a propaganda film, a political film, a film with a returnee from war, and by no means a tactless anti-Nazi film. In fact, the film shouldn't be either for or against anything. In a humorous cabaret mode, Käutner is of course trying to improve the film tastes of the public, as well as their critical abilities. His pluralistic approach to the possibilities of film boded well for the newly established German film industry. (MS)

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Die Mörder sind unter uns

(The Murderers Are Among Us, Wolfgang Staudte, 1946)



Susanne Wallner (Hildegard Knef) and Hans Mertens (Ernst W. Borchert) look out the window of their apartment. Staudte reveals his indebtedness here to the films of German expressionism in the high-contrast lighting, the broken shards of glass in the windowpane, and the intersecting vertical, horizontal, and diagonal lines. The external elements reflect the inner demons of the characters, in particular of Hans, whose face is partially obscured by the cross lattice of the windowpane.

CREDITS

Director Wolfgang Staudte
Screenplay Wolfgang Staudte
Director of Photography Friedl Behn-Grund and Eugen Klagemann
Music Ernst Roters
Producer Herbert Uhlich
Production Company DEFA (Deutsche Film AG / German Film Company)
Length 85–91 minutes; B/W

Principal Cast

Ernst W. Borchert (Hans Mertens), Hildegard Knef (Susanne Wallner), Arno Paulsen (Ferdinand Brückner), Robert Forsch (Mondschein), Albert Johannes (Bartolomaeus Timm).

THE STORY

Time and place are clearly specified at the outset of the film: 1945, Berlin, after Germany's capitulation. The surgeon Dr. Hans Mertens had already returned to Berlin after having served in the war. Traumatized by his wartime experiences, he is by no means ready to resume his profession, to start a new life, or to help with the rebuilding of Germany. Having found living quarters in an abandoned apartment, he spends his waking hours discharging cynical statements to anyone willing to listen and attempting to drink himself into oblivion in one of the many amusement places that had sprouted up in Berlin at the end of the war. But Susanne Wallner, a concentration camp survivor, interrupts his self-destructive lifestyle when she returns to the apartment as its rightful inhabitant. Allowing Mertens to stay, she slowly helps him overcome his aversion to all humankind and succeeds in gaining his love.

The film is well on its way before the cause of Mertens's trauma comes to light: the execution of the innocent population of a Polish village on Christmas Eve of 1942 ordered by his commanding officer, Ferdinand Brückner—an execution Mertens had tried to prevent. Accidentally discovering that Brückner was still alive and living in Berlin, Mertens pays him a visit. He finds Brückner in prosperous surroundings in the midst of a loving family, successful in postwar Germany as the head of a factory that turns war helmets into cooking pans. Resentful and angry that Brückner shows no signs of remorse at his unjustified wartime order, Mertens makes two attempts to kill him, the second one on Christmas Eve, 1945. But when Susanne, who had read his diary and had surmised his intent, arrives at the scene of the potential murder, Mertens drops his gun, conceding that individuals have no right to personal acts of revenge. He emphasizes it is the individual's duty to raise accusations but the province of the court system to enact justice. The film ends with Brückner behind the bars of the factory gate looking as if he were behind the bars of a prison cell.

BACKGROUND

Wolfgang Staudte's *Die Mörder sind unter uns* (*The Murderers Are Among Us*, 1946) is the first German film produced after the Second World War and also the first German film to confront issues of guilt pertaining to the Nazi era. That a German was allowed to produce a film so soon after the war was in itself a minor miracle. Even several months before the final German capitulation—in November 1944—the four Allies (France, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States) had released Law 191 of the Military Government intended for Germany, which stipulated that Germans halt production of printed media, news broadcasts, and all forms of entertainment, including films and music. On May 12, 1945, four days after the unconditional German surrender, the Allies amended Law 191 to allow the licensing of print media and film production, specifying that each of the four occupation zones was to determine its own licensing system. In practice, this meant that

films approved in one occupation zone could be shown in another only if the licensing board of the other occupation zone also gave its approval.

Since film had been the medium most instrumental in transporting Nazi ideology, whether with its flood of carefully controlled images or propagandistic narratives, it had turned into the most suspect Nazi art form and thus also the one initially most guarded by the Allies. Wolfgang Staudte, for example, may have received a license for film production from the British (he lived in the British sector of Berlin), but he was unable to receive either permission or money from the British to produce *The Murderers Are Among Us*. He was equally unsuccessful in the French and American sectors of Berlin. The words of Peter van Eyck, the German-American who headed the U.S. Film Section of the Information Control Branch (later he was to become a well-known actor in German films) stung Staudte the most. Treating Staudte like a Nazi as he mustered him from head to toe, Peter van Eyck declared that in the foreseeable future no Germans would be allowed to produce films (film critics quoting this conversation, all basing their comments on recorded interviews or conversations with Staudte, vary as to the number of years van Eyck had predicted for the exclusion of Germans—five, ten, and twenty years are the figures related most often).

Daunted, but not enough to give up, Staudte turned to the remaining occupying power. Unexpectedly, the Soviets treated him in friendly fashion and agreed to read his script. When Staudte returned after three weeks, the Russian in charge of film licensing astonished him by being able to quote many parts of the script verbatim. Staudte then received permission to film—on the condition that he change the ending of the film from one emphasizing personal retribution to one placing decisions of guilt and subsequent acts of justice under the jurisdiction of the court system. The Russian insisted that the chaotic times called for constructive filmmaking, a view Staudte readily embraced. Thus he also changed the film title from the original *The Man I Will Kill* to *The Murderers Are Among Us*, the title Fritz Lang had initially planned for his film *M* (1931). No other compromises were expected from Staudte. The ideological strictures imposed on films in the eastern part of Germany began only after his first postwar film.

It is in retrospect not at all surprising that the Soviets were the ones to first grant a German permission for filming. The Americans, for instance, subscribed most fervently to the tenet of collective guilt—that all Germans were guilty and all had to be reeducated before being allowed to rejoin the family of nations. On the one hand, the documentaries they had produced of the death camps became obligatory viewing for those in the American sector. On the other hand, however, they hoped to meet the demand for entertainment and escapism so prevalent in the German postwar population by flooding their occupation zone with American films. Many of these were of dubious quality (the better Hollywood films were saved for a time when they could draw profits). Soon the prospect of watching yet another second-rate cowboy film—usually neither dubbed nor subtitled—kept many Germans away from the movie theaters. To entice them to return, the Americans turned to German films of the past, above all to Nazi entertainment films that passed the scrutiny of the American control board evaluating them (often, however, the control board was oblivious to propaganda aspects). Films of concentration

camps or newsreels and Nazi entertainment films—these combinations often became the filmic fare in the American sector. With the start of the Cold War (1947) and the attendant American wish to draw Germans to the capitalist side, the tenet of collective guilt faded from policymaking, and denazification measures too were largely abandoned. This also meant that the German film industry was allowed to revive, but in a decentralized fashion—that is, instead of promoting one major studio to represent German film, as Ufa had done in the Weimar and Nazi periods, the Americans, along with the other western Allies, encouraged the establishment of a wide spectrum of smaller German film studios in all of the western occupation zones.

Like the Americans, the Soviets were convinced of the need to reeducate the Germans. But they relied on the Communist German émigrés to Russia during the Nazi era to initiate the necessary cultural reeducation of Germans upon their return to Germany in the postwar period. In keeping with Lenin, who had considered film the most important art for influencing the masses, the Soviets and the Communist German émigrés agreed at the outset to reestablish the German film industry as soon as possible. Rather than banishing from important roles Germans like Staudte who had remained in the German film industry during the Nazi era, the Soviets actively sought humanistically inclined Germans for leadership roles.

In November 1945, filmmakers, writers, and others active in the field of culture met in Berlin's legendary Hotel Adlon to discuss establishing a new German film industry. Despite its projected location in the Soviet sector, it was meant to serve all Germans. Speakers stressed the need for German films clearly committed to humanism, antifascism, and democratic principles.

The official founding of DEFA (Deutsche Film AG/German Film Company) occurred on May 17 in Potsdam-Babelsberg—not at the severely damaged Ufa studios that later became the DEFA site but in a nearby studio. All occupation zones were strongly represented at the opening ceremony that again highlighted the moral mission intended for future German films, such as the need to eradicate all vestiges of militarism and to promote humanitarian solutions for vexing contemporary problems. After the ceremony, the guests—Peter van Eyck among them—were invited to observe Staudte directing a scene for *Die Mörder sind unter uns* in a nearby studio (Staudte had been permitted to start filming for DEFA several days before its official founding).

By openly confronting questions of German guilt and focusing on integrating a surgeon, plagued by wartime nightmares, in postwar life so that he would be useful in the process of rebuilding Germany according to humanistic principles, Staudte's film clearly exemplified the ethical ideological concerns of DEFA's founding fathers. Yet the pacifistic Staudte had been prompted to write his screenplay not by postwar developments but by an unpleasant chance meeting with a pharmacist acquaintance during the last weeks of the war. The pharmacist, a fanatic Nazi, had discovered that Staudte was in hiding, attempting to the end to avoid army service. With the film industry at a standstill, Staudte was no longer relieved of war duties—as he had been when he acted as an extra in several films, among them the infamous *Jud Süß* (*Jew Süß*, Veit Harlan, 1940), and when he was directing

minor comedies during the Nazi era. When the somewhat intoxicated pharmacist was apprised of Staudte being in hiding, he angrily directed a gun at him. Though the pharmacist refrained from pulling the trigger, Staudte was angered, silently vowing retribution at the end of the war. This translated into the screenplay for *Die Mörder sind unter uns*, finished even before Germany's official surrender.

Staudte's film was the first of several "rubble films" produced in Germany until the currency reform of 1948. While Germans soon tired of this genre, wishing the cinema to distract them from their bleak existence rather than reenacting it on the cinematic screen, there is no question that *Die Mörder sind unter uns* succeeded in touching the nerve of the times. Its premiere date, October 15, 1946, was the night before the first Nuremberg Trial's sentences were to be carried out. In fact, the newspaper *Sonntag*, produced in the eastern zone, carried reviews of Staudte's film in the same issue that reported on the execution of Germany's top war criminals.

There was much at stake with the first postwar German film. Its importance was underscored at the premiere, attended by whatever celebrities there were in occupied Germany, film lovers from all German-speaking areas, and high military officials from the American, French, and Soviet occupation zones (the British absence was due to a protest against the male lead). The first German film was expected to answer many questions, among them the following: Could a German who had remained in Nazi Germany possibly produce a film untainted by Nazi cinematography and Nazi ideology? Could Germans be trusted at all in democratizing cinema? Was it realistic to hope for the revival of the German film industry? Could a German film promote any humanistic values at all? Could a completely new German film language be created? If not, what filmic conventions would be chosen to bridge past and present? Many sensed that it would be wrong to make the first German postwar film a comedy, but could a German film provide substance without being overbearing? Would a topical German film end in escapism? How would a German depict the end of the war and the occupation forces governing most areas of life? How would a German portray other Germans? Was any German capable of producing a film that could act as an effective tool for educating the young? Would Staudte's film initiate the rebirth of the German individual and, by implication, the German nation?

With so many questions and so much accumulated tension preceding the premiere, it is understandable that the first postwar German film fell short of universal acclaim. Yet, as a whole, the film garnered far more praise than negative comments. The general consensus was that it indeed represented the rebirth of the German film industry. By 1951, viewer numbers in eastern Germany alone topped the five million mark. Though it reached mainstream movie theaters in West Germany only in 1959 (until then only film clubs, film festivals, and educational institutions received permission to show it), it again received unstinting praise. Curiously, by that time, DEFA had withdrawn it from circulation in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), regarding it as too individualistic and too decadently aesthetic for its Socialist population, but DEFA continued to export it avidly.

EVALUATION

Flourishing after the First World War in film as in other arts, German expressionism seemed to Staudte the best mode for portraying German sensibilities after the Second World War as well. In his attempt to circumvent the filmic language of the Third Reich, Staudte linked the first postwar German film with the golden age of German cinema, resurrecting for the present the best German cinematic tradition rather than developing a new filmic language, but thereby also reenacting some of the past traumas. Strong contrasts, tilted cameras, precariously slanted surroundings, labyrinthine staircases, doors seemingly opening and closing by themselves, mysterious gazes through many windows, menacing shadows—Staudte drew amply on these hallmarks of German expressionist cinema to portray the chaotic postwar world and the turbulent psychic condition of many Germans. Also like the expressionists, Staudte favors foggy weather and prefers to film at dusk and at nighttime. Given the lack of sufficient film stock and hundreds of other impediments to filming, Staudte's reliance on the filmic language of expressionism, much of it needing technical expertise more than additional materials, can easily be justified.

Staudte frequently uses dissolves to underscore the simultaneity of harshly contrasting events rather than to signal time changes, the more common purpose of dissolves. In the establishing shots of the film, for example, the image of Mertens entering the amusement locale in order to be distracted and entertained dissolves slowly into the rushing train transporting people not comfortably seated inside but precariously hanging on to the outsides of the train cars. Much like the train in Ruttman's *Berlin: die Symphonie der Großstadt* (*Berlin: Symphony of a Great City*, 1927), Staudte's train needs to reach Berlin, its goal, as quickly as possible. It contrasts sharply with Mertens's aimless meandering in the sequence of the establishing shots devoted to him. Yet the train too is disorienting, for it first rushes from left to right, tilted upward at a dangerously steep angle, then abruptly changes its course to proceed from right to left and then again from left to right, suggesting similar jolts in the lives of the people it is transporting. Susanne, however, is not easily disoriented. Exiting from the train station in the midst of a crowd, she walks straight ahead toward the eye of the camera. Not seeking distraction, her gaze fastens on the war wounded, two of them flanking an old, crookedly placed poster with the inscription "Germany." The Germany poster depicts the market square of a romantic-looking German town.

The next dissolve is from the poster to eerie silhouettes of bombed buildings. The camera lingers on them. The violin music that had accompanied Susanne abruptly halts. Now there is utter silence. The sight of this non-posterbook Germany presumably jars Susanne as much as the spectators. The violin music resumes only when Susanne reenters the frame to continue the walk to her home. Another dissolve occurs soon—when the horizontally walking Susanne, proceeding purposefully from the left of the screen to the right, turns into the drunken Mertens weaving vertically upward on a poorly lit roundabout staircase to the apartment he has made into his own. These dissolves, though clearly delineating Susanne and Mertens as opposites, underscore the simultaneity of their activities and thus



Ferdinand Brückner (Arno Paulsen) stands facing his executioner Hans Mertens (Ernst W. Borchert), whose shadow threatens to engulf Hans's former superior officer. Staudte's *mise-en-scène* borrows from German expressionism and film noir, styles that relied heavily on shadows and threatening imagery.

interrelate the two protagonists. This type of dissolve technique is used throughout the film. When Mertens, for example, applies for work in the hospital, the frame dissolves into the sequence of Susanne visiting the Brückner family, and from there back to the hospital where a child's crying triggers in Mertens the war traumas that connect Brückner to him. And when a flashback recreates the events in the Polish village of Christmas Eve 1942, it dissolves into Susanne seated in the apartment—by now comfortably refurbished, reading the description of the same event out loud from Mertens's diary from the point where the flashback left off. That Susanne has gained access to the same thoughts as Mertens, and is in a sense thinking them the same time as he, enables her to rush to his rescue in time.

In the final images of the film, the camera zooms in and out on a Brückner behind bars—presumably prison bars—as Mertens finishes his sentence on the citizens' duty to tender accusations of war crimes on behalf of millions of innocent victims. A faint image representing the innocent women and children is briefly superimposed on Brückner's figure as he continues to deny his guilt in an increasingly desperate voice. The subsequent image of male victims soon dissolves into a medley of crosses dissolving into ever more crosses to suggest the death of countless innocent people and the futility of Brückner's protestations of innocence. Senseless death provides the frame for the entire film: the movie starts with a single cross in front of two mounds in the rubble landscape; the movie ends by focusing on a single cross. Unlike the first cross, this last cross can no longer be ignored, for the

camera zooms in on it and then expands the image to take up the whole screen. This exaggerated focus on Christian symbolism to depict deaths seems misplaced, for surely crosses are more appropriate for Christian Germans who had died as soldiers than for the Jews who had comprised the highest number of innocent victims. Created largely through the final dissolves, the symbolism ending the film seemed to be an escapist device for several reviewers in 1946, mainly because it offered no concrete guidelines for accusations and convictions in everyday life. But the wish for an alternate ending, such as a realistic court trial, with Brückner held accountable for specific crimes and receiving a specific punishment, seems unrealistic as well since the German court system was still a shambles in 1946 and the Allies did not trust Germans to arbitrate guilt and innocence.

The use of shadows to express danger, fear, uncertainty, insecurity, or inner turmoil occurs in the film with a rate of frequency comparable to that of the dissolves. Significantly, parts of Mertens's face are often obscured by shadows, and his is the body most prone to being duplicated as a shadow. His presence on the apartment's staircase almost always provides a reason for casting his shadow onto the wall (Susanne's shadow is shown only once, as she is walking up the staircase with Mertens). When Mertens is first seen in the apartment, rummaging for the camera in the drawers of a cabinet, his shadow is projected onto the cabinet, suggesting that nothing good could come of his attempt to steal the camera. When he looks at a puddle, his shadow reflected in the muddy water soon ominously dominates the frame. Even when he starts to operate on the girl, his shadow appears on the wall, for the girl's mother is holding a lantern to provide at least some light for the operation. As Mertens's confidence during the operation increases, the shadow disappears—in concert with the medium close-up of Mertens filmed from a low angle to indicate his competence and at least the momentary disappearance of his doubts. Still, the expressionist shadow at the beginning of the operation distracts somewhat from the important task at hand, and certain shadows, such as the lingering, exaggerated, sharply delineated silhouette-faces of two gossiping apartment house inhabitants, merely retard the development of the narrative.

Yet the concluding segment of the film exploits the visual potency of shadows in a particularly creative fashion. Arguably Mertens's shadow on the white wall of the factory hall—a shadow that slowly incorporates Brückner's entire figure the more Brückner denies his guilt and the more frightened he becomes of Mertens—has become one of the most memorable visual images of the film, the one that tends to locate the film as Staudte's *Die Mörder sind unter uns* in documentary retrospectives of postwar German cinema. With Susanne's appearance at the scene, the danger of death subsides, visually represented by Brückner leaving Mertens's enveloping shadow. Possibly this episode would have been less effective if shadows had not been employed throughout the film.

A somewhat odd fact emerges from the film reviews written in the wake of the October 1946 premiere: in the course of the film showing, the audience repeatedly clapped in appreciation—not at any of the messages the film was conveying but at particularly impressive shots of the stone rubble Berliners encountered plentifully in their everyday lives. Apparently there was painful silence in the movie theater when Mertens accuses Brückner of having murdered the innocent, and

applause was slow in coming at the end of the film. But there was admiration for the camera's ability to turn a bombed Berlin into an aesthetically pleasing, expressionistic ruin. Several reviewers, however, criticized in particular the abundance of staged ruins in the film, complaining that Staudte's concern with aesthetics was often escapist, or that the aesthetic filming was pursued at the expense of the narrative.

Several of the ruins indeed often seem inserted only for their visual power. During the filming, Staudte frequently spent days at a time to find the most expressive bombed buildings. Even then his cameraman did not simply photograph them. Floodlights—in immense quantities—lit up the ruins or the skies behind them, indeed staging the bombed buildings as if they had been in a studio. Before Susanne starts to walk among the ruins of Berlin, spectators see a lingering shot of somewhat lit-up ruins against the background of a gray sky sprinkled with clouds. In the next shot, Susanne begins to walk, but now the sky has become completely white, enveloped by clouds, accentuating the pitch-black remnants of facades that seem to be sending variously shaped accusatory gestures into the skies.

Yet, in genuine expressionist fashion, most of the ruins depicted in the film not only represent the general inner devastation of the characters but also illustrate specific feelings or foreshadow specific events, even when they seem inserted into the film haphazardly. In one instance, viewers see a close-up of Susanne, a side view, in which she is upset at the drunk Mertens's denigration of her poster and at his refusal to seek work. Suddenly viewers hear dramatic musical chords that extend to the next image—one of beautiful ruins dramatically caving in. Since Susanne remains inside, the ruin seems inserted for no reason other than to show its beautiful demolition. But it actually foreshadows the stormy nature of Susanne and Mertens's next meeting with each other, the scene in which Susanne informs Mertens of having found the Brückner-letter meant for his wife in the event of Brückner's death in the war. Mertens's anger at Susanne turns this episode into the major crisis in their relationship. In fact, like the building caving in, their relationship could now end, for the patient and understanding Susanne is angry enough to leave the house. Mertens of course follows her. They now meet in the midst of splendidly shaped and romantically lit ruins that seem more like castles in a fairytale than the ravaged buildings they in reality are.

At this point, the film seems to slip into the kind of melodrama associated with Nazi entertainment films. Susanne and Mertens walk toward the camera, looking not at each other but into the nebulous sky. Instead of the two embracing each other, Susanne says to Mertens that she will wait for the day when he will be able to love her. It is difficult to view this scene and not be reminded of the last scene in *Die große Liebe* (*The Great Love*, Rolf Hansen, 1942). There Zarah Leander and her pilot interrupt their urge to kiss and look instead into the sky, implying that they will defer their love until the country's missions have been accomplished.

Considering that Susanne and Mertens had just spent an extended period in the midst of splendid ruins, it is at first puzzling that yet another impressive outline of a ruin soon follows. When they return to the apartment building and reach the door to their apartment, the two human figures are immediately replaced by the image of this additional ruin. Again the music highlighting the image is the same

music that had accompanied Susanne and Mertens to the apartment door. What, then, does this ruin have to say about their relationship? Though a slanting ruin like most of the others in the film, its empty rectangles, suggesting where the windows had once been, seem especially symmetrical, as if their frames had been chiseled with particular care. Each rectangle, moreover, allows an unhampered view of the clear sky beyond the ruin. Contrasting markedly with the ruin that had caved in, this harmonious ruin reflects the harmonious state of affairs that had ensued between Susanne and Mertens. Still, this ruin merely reinforces the obvious.

Unquestionably, Staudte lavished great care on each image of ruins. Though his aim was to highlight and distort objects for specific psychological purposes, his ruins are memorable for their isolated dignity and beauty. They actually approximate what Albert Speer, Hitler's architect, had envisioned for Germany: grand, indestructible architecture that remains impressive even as ruins. (MS)

QUESTIONS

1. Staudte had difficulty getting permission to film in the English, French, and American sectors of occupied Germany but received permission from the Soviet (Russian) sector. Why might the Allies have refused and the Soviets consented?
2. Describe the role the city plays in the film.
3. Imagine being a German seeing this film in 1946. How would your reception of the movie be different from your reception today?
4. Explain the title.
5. Discuss Staudte's cinematic style.

RELATED FILMS

In jenen Tagen (*In Those Days*, Helmut Käutner, 1947). Käutner tells the story of a car and its owners during the Third Reich from the perspective of the car.

Irgendwo in Berlin (*Somewhere in Berlin*, Gerhard Lamprecht, 1946). Filmed in the Soviet sector, Lamprecht's rubble film looks to the future.

Germania Anno Zero (*Germany Year Zero*, Roberto Rossellini, 1948). This rubble film by the famed Italian neorealist Rossellini follows a boy through the rubble of postwar Germany.

Land der Väter, Land der Söhne (*Country of the Fathers, Country of the Sons*, Nico Hofmann, 1988). A son confronts his father about crimes he may have committed in Eastern Europe in the Second World War.

Fußgänger (*The Pedestrian*, Maximilian Schell, 1973). A son confronts his father for atrocities he committed during the Second World War in Greece.

Rama dama (Joseph Vilsmaier, 1991). In this latter day rubble film, Vilsmaier sets a romance in Bavaria. The title is dialect for “we’re cleaning up.”

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V. EAST GERMAN FILM 1949–1989

After Germany's division at the Potsdam Conference in July and August 1945 into four occupation zones, each governed by one of the Allied forces that had conquered Germany (Britain, the United States, the Soviet Union), living conditions became unbearable. Most cities had been destroyed by Allied bombing, which resulted in an almost complete obliteration of all industry. Although France had not had a major role in defeating Nazi Germany, they also had control over a small part of Germany. Although there were extreme food shortages, the cultural scene recovered quickly owing to the intense interest of most Germans in being distracted from their miserable living conditions. Culture was also easier to establish than a functioning government. But mostly, the Allied powers were competing for the hearts and minds of Germans in each of their zones. The Allies also knew that after the grandiose failure of the Nazi empire, Germans were completely lost and ready for something new.

The Russians were eager to install Communism in Germany's Eastern zone, and since film had become a major propaganda tool, the Soviet occupation government founded the film company DEFA (Deutsche Film Aktien Gesellschaft). DEFA had originally been conceived as a film production company for all four zones, but when it moved its headquarters to Potsdam-Babelsberg in 1947, it could take advantage of the fact that they operated in Ufa's old facilities in the Soviet-occupied part of Germany, which became the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in 1949. Therefore, film production in Germany's largest film studios provided the Russians with a lead over the Western powers. In 1946 DEFA produced Germany's first postwar film, *Die Mörder sind unter uns* (*The Murderers Are Among Us*), directed by Wolfgang Staudte. The production of *The Murderers Are Among Us* was part of the Soviet reeducation program. It tells the story of a war veteran who wants to kill a fellow soldier for war crimes but is stopped at the last minute and put on trial. The message is clear: the rampant vigilante justice system needed to be channeled toward the official justice system.

When the GDR (the German Democratic Republic) was founded in 1949, control of DEFA was transferred from the Russian administration to the East Germans. Since the GDR established a new government under Russian supervision, this meant that movies were largely Communist propaganda movies that had to support the Socialist ideology and the Cold War. In this war, the GDR saw itself as the better part of Germany opposite the capitalist and revanchist West Germany, often portrayed as Nazi infested in DEFA movies. Interestingly, the Communists had a real chance in 1945 in a country that had almost been bombed into oblivion and felt that a common effort was the only acceptable way out of the disaster. The

GDR's national anthem, "*Auferstanden aus Ruinen und der Zukunft zugewandt*" ("Risen from ruins and facing the future") capitalizes on that sentiment. But this optimism would not last, and in 1953 Russian tanks had to help crush a worker uprising that almost eliminated the GDR government. And more devastatingly, the Soviet-sanctioned policy of turning private property into state-run enterprises, which included the prosperous farms of northern Germany (the *Landwirtschaftliche Produktionsgenossenschaften* [LPGs] or *Agricultural Production Cooperatives*), resulted in hundreds of thousands of East Germans escaping to the West.

Until 1961 Berlin and East Germany had open borders that could be crossed freely. But after the Wall went up, the East became almost unknown territory to Westerners, whether they were from the United States or from West Germany. After 1961, the GDR operated a very limited number of border crossings and established complicated visa regulations and stiff exchange fees, thereby making it very difficult for Westerners to enter. East Germany was trying to live up to its image as a controlled totalitarian state. For people in the West, watching movies "made in the GDR" was an exciting thrill similar to crossing its borders, which was becoming increasingly difficult after the division of Berlin and Germany.

In its forty-year history of film making, DEFA produced more than seven hundred movies, or about ninety movies per year. That is an astonishing record, even more so since East German movies were pretty much limited to screenings in the GDR. There were several reasons for this limitation; foremost, the difficulty of finding proper channels to export movies to the West, which meant mostly the Federal Republic. In addition, Cold War concerns prevented DEFA movies from being exported to the West, with the exception of some of DEFA's legendary children's movies, such as *Die Geschichte vom kleinen Muck* (*The Story of the Little Mook*) and the popular love story *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* (*The Legend of Paul and Paula*). But since the Wall has come down, the popularity of DEFA films has increased steadily and become a cultish phenomenon with a lot of immediate attention given to movies previously banned in East Germany, such as *Spur der Steine* (*Traces of Stone*) and *Das Kaninchen bin ich* (*The Rabbit is Me*).

The role of film in a Communist country differed dramatically from its role in the West. Since the Communists were interested in educating the working class, they gave financial support to many different forms of culture as long as this culture was following the prescribed model of Socialist realism as imported from the Soviet Union. Following Marxist doctrine, Socialist realism had to be partisan toward the proletariat or working class, whose rights the Communist Party or SED (Socialist Unity Party) claimed to protect and defend. As the Communists had stripped property owners of their rights and possession, they granted those rights and properties only to the working class (or the underdogs) in their society. Socialist conflicts resulting from these policies had to focus on a positive outcome that followed party lines; any fundamental discussion that diverted from party lines was discredited as subversive. Criticism of the party normally resulted in some form of punishment.

Watching GDR movies of its classical period during the 1960s provides a challenging game for the mind since the movies negate most of the common beliefs of the West. A major difference between Communist and Western films is the

avoidance of formal creativity. The Marxist philosopher Georg Lukács discredited as decadent Western formalisms such as abstract representations or representations of dreams and other surreal elements. Being a filmmaker in a Socialist country meant never having to worry about the market or a failing project for financial reasons. It was a secure existence that nobody in a Western country could imagine or even understand. The disadvantage of state support for the arts was that criticism was suppressed; critical artists and filmmakers were excluded from any form of official subsidy.

Kurt Maetzig became DEFA's first important director with *Ehe im Schatten* (*Marriage in the Shadows*, 1947), which dramatizes the story of an actor during the Nazi period who refuses to divorce his wife and commits suicide with her moments before the *Gestapo* arrive to pick her up. The film represents the first known attempt to confront the German people about the persecution of the Jews. Another Maetzig movie, *Roman einer jungen Ehe* (*Story of a Young Couple* 1952), portrays the East–West divide in a newlywed actor couple, with the wife drawn to the Communist cause while her husband becomes a star in pre-Wall West Berlin. This stereotypical portrayal of Eastern and Western lifestyle was ridiculed in the West as heavy-handed propaganda.

Maetzig's best-known movies from DEFA's early years are the two-part series *Ernst Thälmann – Sohn seiner Klasse* (*Ernst Thälmann – Son of His Class*, 1954) and *Thälmann – Führer seiner Klasse* (*Thälmann – Leader of His Class*, 1955). The charismatic Thälmann had become the leader of the Communist Party in the Weimar Republic, where he had been Hitler's opponent in the presidential elections. Thälmann was later murdered in the Buchenwald concentration camp. Maetzig's movies helped create "Teddy" Thälmann as an iconic figure for the early GDR period.

With its official ideology of staunch anti-fascism, the GDR was able to attract a large number of prominent émigré authors and filmmakers who had left Germany during the Nazi period. One of them was Arnold Zweig, whose novel *Das Beil von Wandsbek* (*The Axe of Wandsbek*, 1951) was made into a successful antifascist movie by Falk Harnack, who himself had been involved in a resistance group against the Nazis. The movie centers on a butcher who executed the last remaining Communists in Nazi-era Hamburg and who is later ostracized by his neighbors and friends when they discover his political involvement. Both the butcher and his wife commit suicide. *Das Beil von Wandsbek* was criticized by East Germany's ruling SED (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei* or Socialist Unity Party) for emphasizing the butcher and his wife over the antifascist resistance of the workers. As soon became apparent, the SED was walking a fine line in pursuing its Communist ideology while wooing returning exiled intellectuals who had often belonged to the bourgeoisie.

Heinrich Mann, the brother of the famed Nobel Prize winner Thomas Mann, came from one of Lübeck's prominent business families, but he became a Socialist during his emigration from Germany. His novel *Der Untertan* (*The Kaiser's Lackey*, 1951), about a subservient official under the Kaiser, was made into a popular DEFA production. As *Das Beil von Wandsbek* had been criticized, so too was *Der Untertan* for its failure to present the great successes of the militant working class. Other movies in this more general antifascist first phase of GDR movie production were Erich Engel's *Affäre Blum* (*The Blum Affair*, 1948), about a false accusation and

subsequent trial during the Weimar Republic, and Slatan Dudow's *Unser täglich Brot* (*Our Daily Bread*, 1949), about life in Berlin during the postwar depression. Despite their uneasy relationship with authors not from the working class, the GDR leadership was still eager to attract more of Weimar's émigré authors and directors, who were needed to support the claim that the GDR represented the better Germany.

After former Weimar filmmakers and authors such as Mann and Dudow had adjusted to GDR Socialism, East German filmmaking began to find its own style by incorporating movie genres popular in the West. The first decidedly new GDR movie was Gerhard Klein and Wolfgang Kohlhaase's popular *Berlin: Ecke Schönhauser* (*Berlin: Schönhauser Corner*, 1957), which was heavily based on the U.S. coming-of-age movie *Rebel Without a Cause* and Italian neorealist movies such as *The Bicycle Thieves*. Such formal experimentation with inserted plot lines and representations of hallucinations by movie characters was tolerated in the film as long as the story stayed the Socialist course, which it did, with the protagonist ruefully returning to East Berlin after his disastrous adventures in the West.

Another popular mid-1950s genre was the political love story, such as *Eine Berliner Romanze* (*A Berlin Romance*), also by Gerhard Klein and Wolfgang Kohlhaase, which continued the Western look of the divided city that *Berlin: Ecke Schönhauser* had provided. As in the earlier film, the female protagonist is initially mesmerized by the glamour of West Berlin but eventually returns home along with a newly found West Berlin boyfriend, who finds a job in the East. The transformation of a female protagonist turned out to be a successful formula in advocating the superiority of Socialist life.

A popular DEFA genre of the early 1950s was the *Märchenfilme* (fairytale films) produced at the lavish Babelsberg studios, many of which were directed by Rolf Losansky. Of all the films made in East Germany, the *Märchenfilme* were some of the very few that received U.S. distribution since children in both Germany and the United States were familiar with Wilhelm and Jakob Grimm's and Hans Christian Andersen's stories. The films are colorful and imaginative productions, full of fantasy characters and adventure landscapes, among them the wildly popular *Die Geschichte vom Kleinen Muck* (*The Story of Little Mook*, 1953), directed by Wolfgang Staudte, which was reportedly the Vietnamese revolutionary Ho Chi Minh's favorite movie. With close to twelve million viewers (in a country of sixteen million!), *Mook* was the GDR's most successful movie. It is based on a thousand-and-one-night fairytale by popular romantic author Wilhelm Hauff and tells the story of a boy, Little Mook, who with the help of magic shoes can run faster than anyone else. Mook helps his friend Prince Hassan win the heart of the Sultan's daughter. Another DEFA fairytale movie in this category was *Drei Haselnüsse für Aschenbrödel* (*Three Hazelnuts for Cinderella*, 1973), a German-Czech coproduction that presents a variation of the Cinderella story, starring the young Czech actress Libuše Šafránková.

Other DEFA fairytale movies are *König Drosselbart*, *Die goldene Gans* (*The Golden Goose*), *Das kalte Herz* (*Heart of Stone*), and *Das Zaubermännchen* (*The Little Magic Man*). These children's films were based largely on stories by the nineteenth-century author Wilhelm Hauff and still constitute an important part of children's programming on German TV. *Märchenfilme* experienced a cultish revival in post-Wall Germany, most notably *Drei Haselnüsse für Aschenbrödel*, which has become a

Christmas favorite in Germany in a manner similar to the popularity of the British film *A Dinner for One* on New Year's Day.

After the Hungarian uprising in 1956, the Soviet Union put an end to any kind of liberalization; "revisionist tendencies" in film were to be replaced by true Socialist realism. East Germany followed suit, and as SED party leader and head of state Walter Ulbricht explained, social conflicts or antagonisms were part of Western society and should be avoided in a Socialist film. The party was interested only in resolving social conflicts in movies, and the formal experimentation tolerated in the early days was now considered "formalistic" and a clear sign of Western decadence. Although some directors of the early years left for the West, others were eager to help with creating classic GDR Socialist propaganda movies.

Kurt Maetzig's *Das Lied der Matrosen* (*The Sailors' Song*, 1958) is one of those movies. It recreates Germany's reaction to the Russian October Revolution and shows the mutiny that led to the 1918 revolution, which eventually failed to install a Communist government because of opposing strategies among the revolutionaries. This movie, considered the German *Battleship Potemkin*, was regarded as one of DEFA's greatest propaganda achievements. *Fünf Patronenhülsen* (*Five Cartridges*, 1960), a glorification of the Spanish civil war, established Frank Beyer's reputation as a first-rate filmmaker. Like Teddy Thälmann's story, the courageous fight of the Popular Front against Franco's fascist dictatorship became an iconic event in the history of the Communist movement. The movie opens with Ernst Busch's song about the heroic Jarama battle. Another important Socialist propaganda movie, the German–Russian coproduction *Fünf Tage, Fünf Nächte* (*Five Days, Five Nights*, 1960) about the end of World War II, showed the cooperation of Russian and German Communists to establish an international alliance for the post–World War II era. In the movie, a German Communist returning from exile to Dresden is helped by Soviet soldiers to recover Dresden's art treasure that had been robbed by the Nazis.

As East German propaganda movies were first used in reinterpreting historical events to help in establishing a Communist perspective, they were less effective in the late 1950s political climate with the GDR's tremendous loss of citizens. Between 1949 and 1961, almost three and a half million East Germans—or 20 percent of the population—had left the country. The government knew that something had to be done and again tried propaganda films, among them *Zu jeder Stunde* (*Always on Duty*, 1960), a feeble attempt to glorify the border troops.

Though the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961 stopped this constant brain drain, its surprising side effect was a strengthening of the SED since escape from the demands of the party was no longer possible. In hindsight it becomes clear that the 1960s was the only chance the GDR had to build its state and party-controlled Socialism. While this forced internal calm led to a new confidence of GDR officials, filmmakers of the second GDR generation were attempting new contents in the hope that the Wall provided some relief from party domination. But they were wrong, as the movies *Das Kaninchen bin ich* (*The Rabbit Is Me*, Kurt Maetzig, 1965) and *Spur der Steine* (*Traces of Stone*, Frank Beyer, 1966) proved, both of which were banned. Both movies portrayed innovative ways of dealing with social issues in the GDR, ways that were soon testing the tolerance of a party. *Das Kaninchen bin ich* intended to encourage discussion of the democratization of East Germany after

the closing of its borders and shows a young student in an affair with a judge who had sentenced her brother for political reasons. The two lovers discuss justice and law in a Socialist society and conclude that the system is beyond repair and that the only possible way to survive is the pursuit of one's own happiness. *Das Kaninchen bin ich* lent its name to all of the eleven banned films of 1965, which became known as "Rabbit Films."

Spur der Steine is based on Erik Neutsch's epic novel with the same title. It belongs to the so-called *Aufbauliteratur* (reconstruction literature) of this period, when the GDR was engaged in building up its major industrial base in order to keep up with the West. This construction was based on the Soviet industrial combine system in which projects were carried out by huge work teams (brigades) that often displayed a degree of lawlessness similar to the individualistic behavior in American Westerns. The movie shows a love triangle between the two protagonists, the powerful leader of the construction crew (played by Manfred Krug) and the party secretary; between them stands the female engineer Kati. Both book and movie give a realistic portrayal of GDR life during its most powerful reconstruction period. While the book became the GDR's biggest bestseller, the movie was banned with all other Rabbit Films.

As a result of this increased censorship, DEFA returned to its practice of producing apolitical movies by experimenting with genres that were successful in the West, such as musicals, Westerns, and science-fiction movies. *Heißer Sommer* (*Hot Summer*, 1968) was a 1960s GDR teen musical similar to *Grease*, with a group of girls vacationing on the Baltic coast, where they meet a group of boys. Gojko Mitić was one of East Germany's best-known movie stars and played an Indian chief in almost all the Westerns the GDR produced, such as the popular *Die Söhne der großen Bärin* (*The Sons of the Great Bear Mother*, 1966) or *Apachen* (*Apaches*, 1973). The American singer Dean Reed starred in several East German Westerns, such as *Sing, Cowboy, Sing* (1981). Another popular genre that DEFA developed were science-fiction movies, such as *Der schweigende Stern* (*First Spaceship on Venus*, 1960), directed by Kurt Maetzig and based on the novel *The Astronauts* by Stanisław Lem.

When Walter Ulbricht, who had been East Germany's head of state and general secretary of the SED since its inception, became more interested in having the GDR follow a course of greater independence, he was replaced by Erich Honecker in 1971 at the urging of the Soviet Union. Confident of the social progress his country was making after the construction of the Wall, Honecker began his reign with liberalization and the promise of free artistic expression. As part of this climate, East German films were now exhibited more frequently at international film festivals outside the Socialist bloc. *Jakob der Lügner* (*Jacob the Liar*, 1974) directed by Frank Beyer and based on Jurek Becker's novel, was the first East German film to be shown at West Berlin's International Film Festival *Berlinale* in 1975, where Vlastimil Brodský won the Silver Bear for Best Actor for his portrayal of Jakob Heym in the movie. The movie was also nominated for the Academy Awards in 1974, the only East German picture ever to be selected and to this date its best-known film in the United States, especially after the Hollywood-remake version with Robin Williams in 1999. *Jakob der Lügner* tells the story of a barber in a Polish ghetto who uses fictitious radio reports to keep up hope among his neighbors, as

the fear of deportation grows bigger. The movie was not East Germany's first about the Holocaust—that honor belonged to *Nackt unter Wölfen* (*Naked among Wolves*, 1963), directed by Frank Beyer and based on Bruno Apitz's 1958 novel about the Buchenwald concentration camp. But while this movie follows the official party line that the camps were liberated by captured Communists, *Jakob der Lügner* was the first GDR movie to portray Jewish inmates, a topic that had long been taboo for representation in a movie for a Socialist society that did not recognize nationalities and viewed religion as divisive.

The 1970s gave rise to one of East Germany's best scriptwriters, Ulrich Plenzdorf, whose book *Die neuen Leiden des jungen Werther* (*The New Sorrows of Young W*, 1976) was based on Goethe's 1774 book *Die Leiden des jungen Werther*. *Die neuen Leiden* would become an influential text for the second generation of GDR citizens. An admiration for Goethe had become part of the official GDR ideology that focused on the country's classical "Erbe" (heritage) and concluded that a classical literature was needed for a Socialist canon. One such heritage movie pictured Goethe's former lover Charlotte in *Lotte in Weimar* (1974). Plenzdorf's biggest success was his script for the movie *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* (*The Legend of Paul and Paula*, 1973), which like his epistolary *Neue Leiden* novel created a new Socialist genre with this tragicomic film. It is the love story of Paul, a party official in a loveless marriage, and Paula, a free spirit raising her two children. Since Paul is married, the puritanical GDR could not allow this on-screen affair with the unconventional Paula. Paul and Paula thus decide to simply "live for the moment and see what will happen," a motto that would become the motto for the entire second GDR generation.

The period of relative prosperity and limited freedom following the beginning of Honecker's reign ended abruptly in 1976 when the singer and poet Wolf Biermann, one of East Germany's underground culture heroes, was refused reentry to his country after a concert in West Germany. A number of well-known artists and filmmakers signed a letter of solidarity with the banished singer and subsequently left the GDR as well, among them many well-known movie actors, such as Angelica Domröse, Eva-Maria Hagen, Katharina Thalbach, Hilmar Thate, Manfred Krug, and the internationally famous Armin Mueller-Stahl (*Jakob der Lügner*, *The International*). This final brain drain was hard to compensate for as too many important creative people who had once sympathized with Socialism were now missing. The country could never recover from this loss.

As the 1980s were dominated by Gorbachev's accession to power in the Soviet Union and East Germany's refusal to accept Gorbachev's policy of "new thinking" embodied in his concepts of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, the power struggle in the Soviet Union went into its final stage. And as the GDR was still tightly linked to Soviet politics, surveillance by the state police (Stasi) increased on the young generation. Eastern Berlin's rundown working-class tenement quarters around Prenzlauer Berg were now attracting ever-increasing numbers of young artists, writers, and potential filmmakers who prepared the ground for a fundamental regime change. The movie *Solo Sunny* (1980) perfectly captured the mood of young people trapped in a failing political system. It tells the story of a young concert singer who realizes her limitations in East Germany's fossilized society. Unlike

Young Werther, Solo Sunny does not commit suicide but decides to continue in her limited world—as Paula would have put it, she “lives for the moment.”

Solo Sunny was written and directed by Konrad Wolf, one of East Germany’s most prolific moviemakers. One of Wolf’s earlier successes was *Professor Mamlock* (1963), the story of a respected Jewish surgeon in the Weimar Republic who disapproves of his son, a Communist activist, who openly opposes the Nazis. Realizing his mistake, Mamlock commits suicide; the film ends with the words “there is no greater crime than not wanting to fight when fight one must.” Two of Wolf’s movies are explorations of his own biography, *Ich war neunzehn* (*I Was Nineteen*, 1968) and *Mama, ich lebe* (*Mama, I’m Alive*, 1977). They tell Wolf’s story of escaping from Germany to Moscow with his parents and returning to Germany in early 1945 as a lieutenant of the Red Army. As East Germany’s most influential filmmaker, Potsdam-Babelsberg’s own *Hochschule für Film und Fernsehen* (Academy for Film and Television) was named after him.

The demise of the GDR also meant the demise of DEFA. Its best productions will survive, among them Konrad Wolf’s movies and DEFA’s children’s movies. The remaining studio facilities still represent the biggest film studios in Europe, and parts of it survive as a theme park and museum of Germany’s rich film history. In the last twenty years, several important movie projects have been completed on the grounds of the Babelsberg studios, among them Quentin Tarantino’s *Inglourious Basterds* (2009), Roman Polanski’s *The Ghost Writer* (2010) and Brian De Palma’s *Passion* (2012). The TV studios of Radio Berlin Brandenburg (rbb) are also located in the Babelsberg Park, along with most of the archival material of Weimar Germany’s Universum Film AG (Ufa) and East Germany’s DEFA. (RZ)

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Berlin: Ecke Schönhauser

(*Berlin: Schönhauser Corner*, Gerhard Klein, 1957)



Publicity still for *Berlin: Ecke Schönhauser* that belies the film's genre of "social problem film."

CREDITS

DirectorGerhard Klein
Screenplay Gerhard Klein and Wolfgang Kohlhaase
Director of PhotographyWolf Göthe
Music.....Günter Klück
Producer DEFA (Deutsche Film AG)
Length.....80 minutes; B/W

Principal Cast

Ekkehard Schall (Dieter), Ilse Pagé (Angela), Ernst-Georg Schwill (Kohle), Harry Engel (Karl-Heinz), Manfred Borges (Dieter's brother), Raimund Schelcher (Police officer/Volkspolizei Kommissar).

THE STORY

A young man rushes into a police station and announces that “Kohle is dead.” The film then flashes back to the story that got us to this point. Three men in their late teens or early twenties and a girl, age sixteen, hang out on their neighborhood street corner, playing tough and acting bored with the life around them. One of them breaks a street lamp on a dare, and all are hauled off to the police, where the officer in charge assumes a role toward them more like a wise father or older brother than a policeman. Unable to thaw their mean-street demeanor, however, he sends them home.

At this point the film introduces the bleak home life of the four. Angela, the only girl in the gang, lives with her mother, who is having an affair with a married man. Their affair requires that the daughter leave the small flat to allow the couple privacy. Kohle, the boy whose death was announced as the movie opens, lives with an understanding mother who is unable to stop her second husband from beating his stepson. Karl-Heinz is from a well-off family that lives in the hope that the East German regime will collapse. His father turns off the money spigot from which until now the son has been spoiled. Dieter lives with his brother, who is a police officer and also prone to lecture his brother on the virtues of being a good Socialist.

To replace the loss of his parent’s money, Karl-Heinz participates in illegal activities in the West, unable to convince his friends to join him. After accidentally killing a man during a botched robbery, Karl-Heinz returns home only to be confronted by Kohle and Dieter, who want him to pay on a bet he had made with them. Kohle accidentally knocks him unconscious. Believing he has killed Karl-Heinz, Kohle, together with Dieter, escapes to the West. Discovering not everything there is for the better, Kohle swallows tobacco because he thinks it will give him a fever and help him escape from the relocation camp into which Western authorities have placed him. However, the tobacco poisons Kohle, who dies. Dieter escapes from the camp and goes home to East Berlin. It is at this point that the story comes back to the opening scene. The police officer tells Dieter that Karl-Heinz has been arrested and sentenced to prison for manslaughter. He also informs him that Angela is pregnant and is looking forward to his return.

BACKGROUND

After World War II, Germany was divided by sectors among the Allies: America, France, Britain, and the Soviet Union. Berlin, in the middle of the Soviet Sector, was likewise divided into four zones among these same countries. In 1949 the American, French, and British sectors became the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany), and the Soviet sector became the German Democratic Republic (East Germany). In the early 1950s, East Germany established heavy security on its border with the West, intending to keep immigration to the Federal Republic under control. The border between East and West Berlin remained open, with travel checked at official border crossings. However, it was possible to cross from East to

West illegally by avoiding check points. It was not until the completion of the Berlin Wall in 1961 that East and West became almost impenetrably divided.

Berlin: Ecke Schönhauser was made in 1957, the year in which its story also is set, at a time halfway between a populist uprising against the East German regime in 1953 in East Berlin and the building of the Wall. The conditions that had led to workers' unrest—poor central planning, consumer shortages, and increased work requirements—had not been entirely eliminated. Judging from scenes in the film, apartments were small, and opportunities for training in fields attractive to youth were not readily available. Moreover, based purely on material satisfaction, East German youth were behind their counterparts in the West. But young people had clubs to visit, which played contemporary, youth-oriented music, and consumer items from West Berlin were available through a grey market.

In spite of having a healthy outlet for their rebellious energy, the youth of the film represent a threat to East German society. The film's protagonists would have been in their formative years during the 1953 uprising and perhaps even had parents who took part; and the older among the characters, the leader, for example, would have been at an age to have participated on their own. Thus, Dieter, Kohle, and Karl-Heinz—the young men who, like their counterparts in films from Hollywood and West Germany, engage in seemingly meaningless acts of rebellion—add a political and urgent subtext to the film: take care of our youth or there will be more unrest in the future.

EVALUATION

Critics cite *Berlin: Ecke Schönhauser* as an example of neorealism in East German film. Neorealism, a film movement characterized by grainy film images, location shooting, loosely structured stories, and nonprofessional actors, is associated mainly with Italian film, where the style reached its peak between 1945 and 1955, producing classic examples of the style, such as *The Bicycle Thief* (Vittorio de Sica, 1948) and *Rome Open City* (Roberto Rossellini, 1945). To label the film neorealist is only partly accurate. To be sure, it is shot on location in and around Ecke Schönhauser, an area that still shows the scars of war. Rather than an example of Italian neorealism, the film reflects the style of classical German cinema as practiced at different periods in German film history: in Weimar, during the Third Reich, and after the war in both West and East Germany. Visual style, characterization, music, and themes echo material from German predecessors rather than Italian ones, and when the film does borrow from elsewhere, it borrows from Hollywood instead of Italy.

Similar to the films of his German predecessors and contemporaries, Klein gives his film a formal structure, framed by the opening and closing sequences to the film's main story, which is told in flashback. Scenes are not simply found, as in neorealism, nor is the camera simply filming, using available light. That is, Klein strives for state-of-the-art production values. When Dieter first enters the screen, we see him running toward the camera, eventually capturing our full interest as he passes by a sign that reads "You are now leaving the Western zone." Klein is careful to show the sign from both sides, either the West or East, whenever characters cross

the border. Or as an alternate means of signaling change in political locale, he will include hawkers of newspapers that comment on political events that have resonance with the characters' personal situation. One such newsboy in the Eastern sector, for example, sells papers announcing West Germany's plans for armament, suggesting the West's aggressive nature. A newspaper in the Western sector announces that Persian princess Soraya (a favorite subject of the tabloids in the 50s) is expecting a child, this inserted shortly after the seduction of Angela, the film's teenage female lead.

Klein also uses lighting to dramatic ends similar to the films of Helmut Käutner and Wolfgang Staudte, both directors of films for the Third Reich and both with successful postwar careers. Lighting is likewise reminiscent of classical German cinema, as practiced in film eras since the 1920s. Thus, the film at times plays like a film noir, with dramatically lit scenes, such as when Dieter and Kohle confront Karl-Heinz in an attic, shining a flashlight at their prey. The scene's chiaroscuro lighting (a term borrowed from art that refers to dramatic contrasting of light with shadow) reminds us of the trapped murderer in Fritz Lang's *M*, a Weimar film, or Staudte's *The Murderers Are Among Us*, a postwar film.

There are times though that the film is similar to neorealism in style. This is particularly true in street scenes captured from a distance. The opening shot, for instance, or the gathering of a crowd after Kohle, one of the male teens, has vandalized a light, are distance shots that capture the entire street. The scene in a club, in which a young woman accuses Dieter of complicity in stealing an ID out of her purse, is likewise loosely structured. The camera reveals the entire scene, allowing us to find its meaning rather than directing our attention to specifics. Such scenes though are the exception in the film and not the rule. For the most part, Klein controls his subjects, framing and lighting scenes in a classical style. More importantly, he tells a structured story with classical cinematic devices of framing, foreshadowing, symbolic *mise-en-scène*, and music.

Characters are drawn from stock characters in movies of that time and not from the people in the street as in neorealism, even if they represent contemporary youth in East Germany. Dieter, a young man in his late teens or early twenties, is clearly the leader of a group of alienated youth who hang out on the corner of their neighborhood. Seen by the neighbors as rowdies because they prefer listening to rock-and-roll to finding work, the young men seem destined for trouble. Dieter clearly relishes his role as the one the other boys all look to for their actions. He has a job, appears independent, and has a more sophisticated presence than the others, which ensures he has plenty of girls. But he too has trouble coming to terms with living in the German Democratic Republic, a country engaging in a social experiment that seemingly stresses the individual's responsibility to the group. Dieter is unwilling to join any youth organizations and is reluctant to listen to his elders, neither his brother, nor the police, nor the head of the youth organization at his place of work. Whenever confronted by or confronting authority, Dieter postures, assuming a tough-man attitude, in the vein of Hollywood tough guys.

The camera delights in capturing Dieter in poses reminiscent of Brando's bad biker in *The Wild One* (László Benedek, 1953) or James Dean's nascent hoodlum in *Rebel without a Cause* (Nicholas Ray, 1955). And like both of these models, Dieter too

is confused, hurting inside, and ready to fall in love. Dieter likewise resembles young rebels in two West German films, Freddy in *Die Halbstarken* (Georg Tressler, 1956) and Hans in *Die Frühreifen* (Josef von Báky, 1957). As Tressler's and Báky's heroes are modeled after Brando's and Dean's portrayal of troubled youth, the likeness is hardly surprising. The films also resemble each other in their use of the first postwar generation to critique the sociopolitical situation or climate of their respective countries. Youth becomes a voice of protest against the values of the older generation. Unlike the Hollywood and West German films, though, which end without the youthful protagonists embracing the values of the adult world, *Berlin: Ecke Schönhauser* ends with its hero finding a place in East German society.

Gerhard Klein, the director, and Ekkehard Schall, the actor playing Dieter, together create Dieter's look of defiant vulnerability. Schall has a half smile that easily morphs into a smirk or grin or full laugh depending on his attitude toward the situation. His eyes are equally expressive; and often when being lectured by authoritative figures, the actor glances down, avoiding the look of his interlocutors but also precluding communication with the viewer. When he does then glance up, the effect on the statement being made at the time and the comment on the situation in which he finds himself is all the more meaningful. Klein's camera contributes to the subtle messages by slow pans from other characters to Dieter's face, by lingering on his facial expressions longer than another director might, and by situating his expressive facial responses in a context of personal trouble within a social problem. And ultimately, Dieter learns from the context that he is part of a whole that precludes individual rejection or avoidance of others.

Karl-Heinz is Dieter's counterpoint in the film. He too is an individual, he too opts out of the great social experiment. But here the similarities end. He is not an existentialist loner, as is Dieter, but a sociopath (someone who rejects the rules of the social order) for whom individuality is a means to material gain. Karl-Heinz combines character traits and appearances of the heroes and secondary characters in the West's rebel films. The actor's dark hair and features remind one of Horst Buchholz, the rebel star of *Die Halbstarken* (the West German equivalent). His penchant for criminality also brings him closer to Buchholz's character, Freddy, than Schall's character. His hairstyle meanwhile resembles that of James Dean. And his antisocial attitude, the result of privilege stemming from having well-to-do parents, seems borrowed from the character Freddy in *Die Frühreifen*. However, the films were made at the same time, and any similarity is therefore coincidence and not referential.

Kohle is the youngest of the gang; he is also the most vulnerable. Living in a fantasy of Western action films, he dreams of being able to strike back at a world that picks on him. He longs to escape from the abuse he receives from his stepfather. If not as sensitive as Sal Mineo's character in *Rebel without a Cause*, he is nonetheless related in the manner in which he is exposed to the torments of others. And like Mineo's character, he is befriended by the hero, his death providing the denouement that leads to the hero's growth. His death also reflects a convention of the young rebel genre, which generally ends with the death of a friend of the hero in order to bring about a learning experience.

Angela's character remains undeveloped. It is almost as if the film wanted to focus only on men as the builders of the new Socialist state. Thus, Angela never

moves beyond being a love interest for the hero. She serves as a symbol of his responsibility. When Dieter gets her pregnant, the film makes clear that he must return and take care of her. Moreover, before he returns, his brother and the state look after her until she reconciles with her mother. Thus, she serves a dual purpose of highlighting the man's responsibility for his family and also the responsibility of society for those in need. Klein films Ilse Pagé, the actress playing Angela, as a passive onlooker in the drama that is unfolding. Whether she is defying her mother, being part of the gang, or walking with Dieter, she is passive. She leans against walls, moves to the background, makes big eyes when Dieter talks back to those in authority, and in general responds to questions with a shy mumble.

Three sets of parents portray various aspects of absentee caregivers in the film. Angela's mother has more interest in her affair with a married man than in being with her daughter. In an opening conversation that introduces the relationship the two have with each other, the camera circles around a small room as the mother looks in a mirror and applies makeup. Admonishing her daughter to not run around, she is more intent on getting her lipstick on straight than being present for her daughter and is happy that she can get the girl out of the small apartment when her lover arrives. The scene is reprised a short while later when the mother, trying to talk with Angela about her friends and attitude, is ignored as the daughter preens in front of a mirror, applying makeup, even as the mother forbids her to do so. Karl-Heinz's parents are wealthy. Having indulged their son with money, they are surprised to discover how selfish and demanding he has become. The camera moves around the large apartment, creating distance between the son and parents. Kohle's family life is equally dysfunctional. His mother has remarried in order not to be alone, and the stepfather is an abusive, unemployed heavy drinker. Only Dieter seems to have an unencumbered home life, perhaps because his parents are dead and the brother he lives with, although older, is well-intentioned in his admonitions, thinking of his brother and not of himself.

Dieter's brother, one of his coworkers, and the main police official represent enlightened authority. Each in turn tries to talk Dieter into accepting his role in the task of rebuilding Germany as a Socialist state. In line with their positive role in the movie, camera shots of the three are never exaggerated. Lighting shows them fully lit, the camera captures them at eye level, not from above or below, and their proxemic relationship with Dieter is always neutral, never turning completely away from him but also never forcing their presence and hence their ideas on him. It is as if they know he will come around to their way of thinking. Meanwhile, representatives from the West are portrayed as a menacing presence. The black marketers leer, they are in close, threatening proximity to Karl-Heinz, their contact in the East. The officials who run the relocation camp to which Dieter and Kohle temporarily flee are filmed often from below, giving them a threatening demeanor. They sit behind desks or stand directly next to Dieter as they interrogate him. Their manner of speaking, as well as their way of holding a cigarette, suggests stereotypes of Nazis from Hollywood films.

The musical score of *Berlin: Ecke Schönhauser* reinforces the visual elements, underscoring the story of a lost generation looking in vain for love. As the credits roll, discordant sounds segue into an orchestral melody, heavy on brass. The visuals

are of a Berlin street and of a young man running into a room exclaiming, "Kohle is dead." In this opening, Klein has introduced the opposition his music will show throughout the film—discordant jazz or swing sounds (sometimes rock music) and an orchestral melody. Interestingly, though, swing and jazz do not necessarily comment negatively on the action, although sometimes they do. More importantly, the movie's signature melody also comments both negatively and positively.

Klein allows the situation to determine the music's use. Thus, as Angela meets her mother's lover on the stairs, a jazz melody indicates friction. On the streets rock music comments ambivalently, depending on a viewer's taste in music. One could assume parents or adults in the audience might see the music as characterizing a lost generation, whereas young people would appreciate its freshness and coolness. In the club, swing has mainly a positive note as we see young people, for the most part well-behaved, enjoying a night out.

Klein uses the movie's signature melody to support a story telling of youth looking for love they cannot find at home. The melody is introduced during the scene at the club, when the non-diegetic (the music only the audience can hear as it is not a part of the world being depicted on screen) melody we have been hearing behind some of the scenes enters the screen world. The singer also introduces us to the words "Everyone speaks of love, longs for love." Here in the club, the music and words reflect the scene, young people out on a date with their special friend. As background, though, the music tells a different story. For example, as Kohle asks his sister what will happen to him if she leaves, the signature melody appears as a discordant jazz refrain. When Dieter and Angela walk silently through their neighborhood, slowly falling in love, the melody played by violins and then full orchestra ends on a slightly discordant note after the two have consummated their love, a foreshadowing that Angela has conceived a child. In a later scene, as Karl-Heinz is carried injured into his parents' apartment, the melody again sounds, this time plaintively, underscoring the son's need for love and the lack of it in the family. The melody plays as Angela argues with her mother and moves out. It comes back as she is found wandering the streets by Dieter's brother, who offers her a place to live. It plays again in truncated form at the home for asylum seekers, and finally its full orchestral sound at the end supports the film's heavy message that everyone is to blame for the state of affairs (Kohle's death), for "where we are not together, you will find our enemies."

Berlin: Ecke Schönhauser is on the one hand an exposé of the reasons behind the alienation in the postwar generation. In this respect the film resembles its American and West German counterparts, as all these films focus on the generation which was born early in the war years and thus had no part in the war or its immediate aftermath, the Cold War. We can see this alienation in the aimless lives the young protagonists occupy, the music they listen to, the disrespect they show parents and authority, and in their selfishness. The world centers exclusively on what they want at the moment. Dieter best expresses this viewpoint. Even though he works, he is the only one of the group who does so. His attitude is one of defiance as he remarks that what he does after work is his business. He thus chooses not to join any organization intent on building a new Socialist state. This is hardly different from the attitudes of his contemporaries in Hollywood and West German films whose

philosophy is that since they did not make the world the way that it is, they share no responsibility for helping to fix it. The problems that have brought about the state of malcontent among the young are similar in all the films of youthful rebellion. Parents do not understand their children and moreover have little time for them. Economic conditions are constant reminders of the war, at least in the German films. Parents seem intent on making up for deprivations of the war at the same time that they seem to want to forget the past. Young people in general are afraid of joining adult society and of becoming like their parents.

On the other hand, *Berlin: Ecke Schönhauser* is about the unique situation in East Germany in 1957. A few years before the film was released, workers had rioted, demanding reforms in the government. In East Berlin, the proximity of the West was a constant reminder of the consumer society, highlighted by the degree to which West Germany supported the more appealing and spectacular aspects of capitalism. The apartment in which Angela and her mother live is so small that Angela must leave in order for her mother to have privacy for an affair. Dieter and his brother share a small room. Karl-Heinz and his parents live in luxury, awaiting a day when they can either escape to the West or greet a new government. The film addresses these problems in the daily lives of the people.

Whether dealing with the alienation of youth or attributing youthful rebelliousness to parents, economy, or politics, *Berlin: Ecke Schönhauser* also proposes solutions, thus setting it apart from the social-problem films in the West. In the films from Hollywood and West Germany young people die, but the denouement brings about no change in the characters. Instead the films close with enigmatic questions, such as “where will the events we have just witnessed lead or end?” Thus, the Hell’s Angels-like rowdies ride off at the end of *The Wild One*. *Rebel without a Cause* closes with Sal Mineo’s dying character being held and comforted by his friends, played by James Dean and Natalie Wood. They represent a substitute for his missing parents. *Die Halbstarken* closes with a shot of motorcyclists riding down a quiet city neighborhood, signifying trouble ahead. The ending of *Die Frühreifen* most closely resembles the close of *Berlin: Ecke Schönhauser*. As the movie ends, the hero and his girlfriend walk off toward a tower that represents the mine where he works, an indication that the couple is joining the adult world. The final shot of *Berlin: Ecke Schönhauser* shows Dieter slowly walking through the spacious hallway of an apartment complex toward the light of an open door. When he gets to the doorway, he leans up against the side of the door and contemplates the words of a police detective uttered in the previous scene. “Where we are not together, you will find our enemies.” In brief, the existential angst of the teenage rebel movie has been replaced by the idealism of Socialist realism. (RCR)

QUESTIONS

1. Relate this film to more recent films of rebellion with which you might be familiar.

2. What role does the scene of the bomb scare play in characterizing Dieter but also in characterizing the period?
3. Describe in detail the scenes of Dieter's interrogation at the asylum home, comparing them with the scenes of his interrogation by the East German officer.
4. Describe the ways in which the film portrays the West as negative.
5. How does the film characterize East German ideology?

RELATED FILMS

Vergiss Amerika (Forget America, Vanessa Jopp, 2000). Vanessa Jopp sets her coming-of-age film after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the unification of Germany. While her characters don't rebel in the sense of the youth rebel films of the 1950s, they nonetheless are beset with similar problems of dysfunctional home lives, unemployment, and petty criminality.

Die Halbstarken (Teenage Wolfpack, Georg Tressler, 1956). Tressler's film was a popular success in the 1950s, although the critics did not always know what to make of sympathetic petty criminals. The film made a star of Horst Buchholz, who went on also to have a brief career in Hollywood. A literal translation of the title would be the "hooligans" or the "hoodlums."

Die Frühreifen (The Rowdies, Josef von Báky, 1957). Wanting to capitalize on the success of films of youthful rebellion, Báky's film emphasizes the impatience of youth in West Germany to raise living standards for all.

The Restless Years (Helmut Käutner, 1958). Successful German director Helmut Käutner came to Hollywood to make this film of teenage angst and rebellion.

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Die Legende von Paul und Paula

(The Legend of Paul and Paula, Heiner Carow, 1973)



Paul displaying the picture of his triumph.

CREDITS

DirectorHeiner Carow
Screenplay Ulrich Plenzdorf
Director of Photography Juergen Brauer
Editor Evelyn Carow
Music Peter Gotthardt
Producer Erich Albrecht
Production Company DEFA (Deutsche Film AG /
German Film Company) Berlin
Length 106 minutes; Color

Principal Cast

Angelica Domroese (Paula), Winfried Glatzeder (Paul).

THE STORY

Die Legende von Paul und Paula is the most popular DEFA (Deutsche Film AG / German Film Company) film produced in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and portrays everyday life in East Berlin as a tragic love story between a passionate single mother and a complacent married bureaucrat. It came in the wake of renewed interest in tragi-romantic films after Hollywood's huge success with *Love Story* (1970). *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* shows an unusually private story for the GDR, where any unpolitical stories normally caused concern among the authorities.

Paul, a student, meets a beautiful woman ("*die Schöne*"), the daughter of a carnival entertainer, and marries her because she admires his academic background and her possibility for career advancement. Paul also runs into Paula at the same carnival, where Paula falls in love with a carousel worker and has yet another child. Paula longs for a more stable life to escape her job as a supermarket worker. Herr Saft, an elderly, respectable tire salesman, offers her this opportunity, but Paula isn't passionate about Saft. While Paul completes his mandatory military service of three years, his wife, whose only redeemable quality seems to be her stunning beauty, has an affair with her dance instructor.

More than a year later, Paul and Paula happen to be in the same disco. He is there to escape from his bourgeois conventional family life, and Paula is there to live it up one more time before she finally will settle down with Saft in his dacha. The story very much depends on coincidence, suggesting that Paul and Paula are destined for each other in this romantic representation of love. Paul and Paula run into each other again at the disco and fall passionately in love. Paula decides to change her life, while Paul believes he cannot have a divorce as a respectable citizen of the GDR establishment—"you can't always do what you want to do, at least up to now, especially at the expense of others" ("*Keiner kann nur immer das machen, was er will, vorläufig ist das so. Bloß nicht auf Kosten anderer*").

After Paula's son gets killed in a car accident, she feels guilty because Paul and their love diverted her attention. She will no longer see Paul, who now realizes the mistake he made in letting her go earlier. He decides to camp out outside her apartment until she changes her mind. The novel on which the film is based, *Die Legende vom Glück ohne Ende* (*The Legend of Happiness without End*), speaks of an entire summer of Paul's camping out in the apartment complex. Only through Paul's perseverance are the two finally able to fulfill their destiny, which comes about when Paul borrows an ax to break into Paula's apartment and kidnaps her. The neighbors applaud upon witnessing this ultimately romantic scene.

But this fairytale ending continues to a less happy conclusion. Paula is warned by her gynecologist not to have any more children. Ignoring his warning, she decides to have a child with Paul. Paula's doctor anticipates for the viewers the film's unsatisfactory conclusion when he remarks, "The ideal and reality can never merge. There will always be something left over" ("*Ideal und Wirklichkeit gehen nie übereinander. Ein Rest bleibt immer*"). Paula dies at the end of the film.

BACKGROUND

The calm that resulted from the restrictions after the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961 led to a new GDR confidence among the government that they would finally be able to build a Socialist society without interference from the West. The year 1961 can be seen as the beginning of the GDR as an independent state with its own identity. After 1961, a new generation of writers took over. They were eager to help with building Socialism, and therefore “true” GDR topics were taken up for the first time, as in Hermann Kant’s *Die Aula* (*The Assembly Hall*), Karl-Heinz Jakobs’ *Beschreibung eines Sommers* (*Description of a Summer*), Erwin Strittmatter’s *Ole Bienkopp*, and Erik Neutsch’s *Spur der Steine* (*Traces of Stone*), which was made into a movie in 1966. These new writers were interested in overcoming the thousands of “contradictions” in the Socialist system of the GDR. The contradictions were uncovered based on Hegelian and Marxist dialectics and needed time to be resolved. By focusing on contradictions, these authors made sure they did not attack fundamental flaws in their society, which would have amounted to unacceptable criticism. This short period of relative peace and prosperity in the GDR lasted only until the denunciations at the 1965 party plenary session took place, when several movies and books were banned. But after the period of Ulbricht’s leadership finally ended in 1971, GDR literature and filmmaking was beginning to attain enough self-confidence to make it attractive to Western audiences.

Confident of the social progress made in the 1960s that was reflected in the GDR’s new national literature, Honecker announced the continuation of cultural liberalization, as Ulrich Plenzdorf explored in *Die neuen Leiden des jungen W.* (*The New Sorrows of Young W.*, 1972). The following year, *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* was produced, the same year the leadership of the GDR changed from Walter Ulbricht to Erich Honecker. When Honecker declared that no cultural restrictions would be enforced if the artist appeared to be on firm Socialist ground, East Germans believed their time for cultural liberalization had begun. *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* is a result of this policy change, a story that focuses on love and family, not on political issues.

This new freedom should not last however. Only a few years later, in 1976, the singer and song writer Wolf Biermann was thrown out of the GDR—or “expatriated,” as the official account termed it—for having written songs similar to those of the popular rock band Die Puhdys, who feature prominently in *Die Legende von Paul und Paula*. Times had changed again, and Biermann’s expatriation turned out to be the harshest measurement taken against artists. As a result, the GDR lost most of its creative potential, with many of the prominent artists resettling in the West where they were able to continue their careers unabated. *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* in 1973 and the Biermann crisis in 1976 are considered the trigger for the collapse of the GDR fifteen years later.

Ulrich Plenzdorf was also the author of the book and the film script to *Die Legende von Paul und Paula*. Plenzdorf was the main advocate for the cultural freedom granted by the Honecker government. Ulrich Plenzdorf was born in Berlin on October 26, 1934. His father was an active member of the Communist Party and

a photographer for the *Arbeiter-Illustrierte Zeitung*. Plenzdorf attended a school alternative to the state-run school system and then studied philosophy in Leipzig. From 1955 to 1958 he worked as a stagehand at the DEFA studios. After completing military service he studied screenplay writing at the Film Academy in Babelsberg and began working as a scriptwriter in 1964. Plenzdorf became one of the best-known GDR writers and is recognized for his youthful, biting criticism in screenplays, novels, and short stories.

The music soundtrack for the movie is produced by Die Puhdys, the legendary GDR band that in thirty years produced more than twenty LPs and CDs and sold more than eighteen million of them in twenty countries of the world. Twelve times they were chosen the most popular band of the GDR. They played concerts in about twenty countries, including Poland, Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union, and West Germany, where they played to a full house at the Waldbühne, a commercial, open-air venue in Berlin. Die Puhdys participated in five DEFA and TV productions, among them the cult film *Die Legende von Paul und Paula*, to which they supplied the sound track, including two of their most popular hits.

EVALUATION

Die Legende von Paul und Paula centers on Paula. She is a messenger from a past believed long gone but which has come back to haunt a modern, sanitized GDR, represented by Paul. In this light *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* must be seen as a snapshot of the GDR in the early 1970s, an era that represents an important turning point in the country's history. Plenzdorf wanted to shake the conscience of the governing clique and his fellow citizens, urging them not to fall into a regulated complacency. In this vein, Paula's outrageous behavior can be seen as a kind of shock therapy, waking the establishment up to problems in the country.

But Paula's protest is not merely a protest against the establishment; it is also a desire for the unconditional fulfillment of her own interests. Paula's love must be seen as a protest against the established order of politics and science, since her gynecologist warns her against having another child. As science was the ultimate authority for the Communists, Paula's romantic love must be seen as a protest against the established order of the party. In that sense Paula is subversive or anarchist. She is the motor of the story; her desire kindles Paul's passion. He is much more rational and bourgeois—a GDR *Spießler* or narrow-minded bourgeois. Paula, on the other hand, is a free spirit. Paula's fight for Paul is a fight to introduce to GDR society not only romantic ideas but also the notion that although Socialism has come to a standstill, it still has the ability to reinvent itself. As Irene Dölling (2001) writes, Paula counters acceptable standards of the workingwoman's expectations for a happy life, and her behavior is displaced into a utopian space.

One of the most touching moments in the movie comes when Paula attends her first classical music concert with Paul. Just as Paul's pedantry shows him trying to educate his wife, he also wants to educate Paula to all that is "good," that is, all that he learned to appreciate through education. In Paul's mind, Beethoven is part of a good education. Paula is reluctant at first but agrees to go to the open-air



Paul and Paula in a passionate embrace.

concert with Paul. In her naïveté, and to the utter embarrassment of the bourgeois Paul, she applauds after the first movement. The audience at the concert, however, understands Paula's inexperience and happily claps along. While the viewer hears the music playing, the camera focuses on Paula's face as she is transformed from the initial reluctant listener to an intense and passionate participant of the concert. While tears are flowing down her cheeks, she looks at Paul whose love she only now is able to understand with the help of Beethoven's music. This scene, beautifully acted by Angelika Domröse, blends Paul's traditional approach to life with Paula's spontaneous appreciation of creativity. It shows how state limitations can lead to something new and reflects the official policy of reintroducing classical music to the working class.

The director Heiner Carow emphasized Paula's anarchism by enclosing her more bizarre moments in a fantasy world, much like the magic realism in Latin American fiction and movies. This style differs radically from the documentary realism that GDR films had exhibited until then. Paula's daydreams are treated as "real"—for example, when her deceased ancestors applaud her on her bed, which has turned into a floating barge. This dream symbolism is continued in images of

the surrounding city, where old buildings are constantly torn down while new ones go up. As the GDR viewed itself as the legitimate heir to German history, just as Paula's ancestors are applauding her and her lifestyle the movie's symbolism is evident in the contrast between the stable Paul's modern, slick apartment in a GDR *Plattenbau* or high rise, which was seen as the way of the future, and the eccentric Paula's apartment in a soon-to-be-torn-down building across from Paul's place.

Carow's realism counters the GDR's first decades of stale, documentary realism, which was heavily influenced by Soviet models. As Honecker represented a new generation, his appreciation of new film styles reflected the intensity of the country to reinvigorate itself. This notion was not limited to Socialist politicians and their eager artist followers; rather, it reflected a sense shared by many in the GDR. If the GDR were to survive, it had to begin with finding a new art form. The *Aufbruchstimmung* (mood of a new beginning) was copied from West Germany, where anti-Vietnam protests had changed a stale country into a new and exciting one that had elected a left-liberal government for the first time. There were high hopes that this change would produce a new German accord between the two countries, as Brandt's initiative of a German-German treaty, the *Grundlagenvertrag* (basic contract) of 1972, promised.

Audiences in the GDR recognized Paula's role as a thorn in the side of modernizing East Germany; her free-spirited nature, almost an aberration in East Germany in 1973, made *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* the biggest success in GDR film history. Modern audiences in Germany and the United States might have a problem with its 1970s style, a blend between romantic comedy and art film. Today's audiences may also find the bellicose style of communicating unattractive—it seems unbelievable that people would have treated each other with such an intense degree of nastiness in their daily lives, perhaps as a result of continuous irritation in everyday life under Socialism.

Paula's behavior, however, looks revolutionary only on the surface, as Irene Dölling (2001) has pointed out. In the end, Paula sacrifices herself for Paul and the child she wants to have with him, thus taking on a more conventional role in the family. This seems to mirror the notion of East German women, whose emancipation had been forced by Socialist ideology. However, secretly East Germans were yearning for normalcy, as the eager reconnection with West Germany in 1989 showed. When given the opportunity, East Germans would vote conservative, not Socialist or Social Democratic, as expected. The movie thus revealed an overall conservative atmosphere that eventually would play out in reality as well.

Die Legende von Paul und Paula can also be situated within the category of women movies, which typically flourished during the New German Cinema (NGC) in the 1960s, when the feminist emancipation movement began in the West. Through his films *Die Ehe der Maria Braun*, *Lola*, and *Angst essen Seele auf*, Rainer Werner Fassbinder became known as a director who placed women in the center of his movies. Volker Schlöndorff, who capitalized on movies based on literature, is known for his Fontane adaptation of *Effie Briest*. In movies such as *Hannah Arendt*, *Marianne und Juliane*, *Vision*, and *Rosenstraße*, Margarethe von Trotta also contributed a number of movies centering on women. One of the most striking examples

of women movies is *Sophie Scholl: Die letzten Tage* by Marc Rothemund. The GDR produced very few such movies. The only other one beside *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* is Konrad Wolf's *Solo Sunny*. (RZ)

QUESTIONS

1. What are some examples of magical realism in the movie, and how do they enhance the audience's understanding of the lives of Paul and Paula?
2. The Puhdys song "Geh zu ihr" plays a central role in the movie. Here is the English translation of the lyrics. Can you relate the song's theme to the movie?

Go to her, and let your dragons soar
Go to her, for you can't live on moss alone

Close your eyes, then you'll see only this one!
Hold her tight and let your dragons soar

Hey, hey, your dragons
Hey, hey, hey, go to her
Hey, hey, your dragons
Hey, hey, hey, but go to her!

3. Another Puhdys song is "Everything Has Its Time," which alludes to the central message of the movie. Please relate it to the imagery in the documentary with the collapsing buildings and the story characters themselves.
4. How does the director Heiner Carow use music in his film?
5. How does Paula's death symbolize the political and social situation in the GDR?

RELATED FILMS

Angst essen Seele auf (*Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, 1974) is about a foreign worker in post-World War II Germany. It is considered one of Fassbinder's most powerful works.

Die verlorene Ehre der Katharina Blum (*The Lost Honor of Katharina Blum*, Volker Schlöndorff, 1975) is an adaptation of Heinrich Böll's novel of the same name. The movie shows the danger for noncelebrities of getting involved with the tabloid press.

Solo Sunny (Konrad Wolf, 1980) is an East German film about a performer in East Germany.

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VI. WEST GERMAN FILM 1950–1989

In 1962, sixteen German filmmakers signed a manifesto rejecting German films of the 1950s and declaring that *Opas Kino* (Grampy's cinema) was dead. They were demanding that West Germany's cinema apparatus, from funding to types of films made, be rethought. Their demands were not unusual for young filmmakers, as similar demands were occurring elsewhere as well. During the 1960s and 1970s, national cinemas were creating a new vision of film as both entertainment and art. To the new generation, film was something that should reflect the issues of the day that most concerned young people. It was also something that should compete with theater for educated audiences. Questioning the status quo, films such as the French New Wave's *À bout de souffle* (*Breathless*, Jean-Luc Godard, 1959), New Hollywood's *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* (Sydney Pollack, 1969), England's *Morgan* (Karel Reisz, 1966), and New German Cinema's *Michael Kohlhaas: Der Rebell* (*Man on Horseback*, Volker Schlöndorff, 1969) found acceptance among the generation born after the Second World War. While the impetus for the rebellion against the past differed from country to country, and although the films differed in style and topics, there were several elements in common: the films rejected the beliefs of the previous generation, they confronted society and government, and they asked viewers to think about identity and values.

To understand the motivation behind New German Cinema, it is necessary to look at the films of the 1950s and how they addressed, or rather failed to address, the country's recent past. The directors of New German Cinema addressed issues of identity (what it meant to be German) and values (coming to terms with the legacy of the Third Reich) differently than the generation that fought the war or had come of age before its end. They viewed as misguided the international political events of the 50s, which included Germany's membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the expanding and prosperous economy, which became known as the economic miracle. Moreover, they rejected their parents' acceptance of the status quo and decried their reluctance to talk of the past. They condemned the films of the period for precisely these same reasons: a refusal to deal critically with the past and complacency about problems in the present.

West German films of the 1950s, so disparaged by the Oberhausen Manifesto, did not ignore the past completely; but they did avoid any critical examination of the country's National Socialist past. A number of films, for example, portrayed the war from the point of view of the enlisted men. These films, however, were uncritical of the Third Reich and substantiated the later generation's claims that directors were avoiding difficult questions such as guilt and responsibility for what had occurred. For later critics, the war movies were self-serving, intended to rehabilitate the

German military at a time when Chancellor Konrad Adenauer prepared for West Germany's entrance into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). An analysis of the films supports their claims. For war films such as the trilogy *08/15* (Paul May, 1954/55), *Haie und kleine Fische* (*Sharks and Small Fish*, Frank Wisbar, 1957), and *Der Arzt von Stalingrad* (*The Doctor of Stalingrad*, Géza von Radványi, 1958), among others, stressed the bravery, honor, sacrifice, comradeship, and humanity of the soldiers. They portrayed the men as fulfilling the patriotic duty expected of any soldier in any country. In so doing, they obscured the Nazi cause which their soldierly virtues supported. The films were after all meant as entertainment. True, they brought up a not-very-glorious past, but in so doing they consoled viewers by creating a division between the common man, which included both soldiers and people on the home front, and the leaders of the country, which included Adolf Hitler, his command staff, and high-ranking officers. They entertained while assuaging the feelings of guilt that their German viewers might feel about the war. Furthermore, they helped rehabilitate the image of the armed forces, creating support for the reconstitution of a German military under the auspices of NATO.

German films about World War II fail to engage viewers critically. They may end with a message of "never again war," without truly considering the nature of that war. Paul May's trilogy *08/15* (*08/15*, 1954–55) ends with a plea that the events depicted in the film never happen again. Another film, *Kinder, Mütter und ein General* (*Children, Mothers and a General*, László Benedek, 1955) depicts fifteen-year-old boys riding off to the front as their mothers look on. *Die Brücke* (*The Bridge*, Bernhard Wicki, 1959) likewise condemns war through the sacrifice of youth. At film's end, one of seven boys remains alive. The last scene shows him dragging a comrade across the bridge, letting go, and continuing toward the camera, which stays focused on the dead youth on the bridge. *Haie und kleine Fische* (*Sharks and Small Fish*, Frank Wisbar, 1957) ends with a bird's eye view of sailors who wait to be rescued from the water after their submarine has sunk. *Hunde, wollt ihr ewig leben?* (*Dogs, Do You Want to Live Forever?* Frank Wisbar, 1959), a film about the defeat of German's Sixth Army at Stalingrad, rhetorically asks if men will learn from the disaster, cynically suggesting they will not. In spite of the admonitions not to repeat the past and in spite of the disturbing images of the dead youth, these films carry an ambivalent message about war. Emphasis on the virtues of war lend the sacrifice of the men and boys a sense of legitimacy. Moreover, with little to no reference to the cause that they were serving, they are seen to have died heroically.

The structure of the films also diminishes any critical confrontation with the past. Besides obscuring the role that the soldiers played in the war in their support of National Socialism, the films highlight that all criminal war acts were committed by cowardly officers, bureaucratic mix-ups, a misguided High Command, and an uncaring, cold leader, Adolf Hitler. They provide no reason to suspect the motives of the enlisted men. Interestingly, two films made much later, *Das Boot* (*The Boat*, Wolfgang Petersen, 1981) and *Stalingrad* (*Stalingrad*, Joseph Vilsmaier, 1993), widely seen by critics and the public as strong antiwar films, follow the same formula of the films of the 1950s. They too depict ordinary fighting men doing their duty while also having to deal with cowardly leaders and an immoral High Command. The innocence of

enlisted men was strongly disputed forty years later by a photo exhibition that toured Germany. *Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941 bis 1944 (War of Annihilation. Crimes of the Wehrmacht 1941 to 1944)* caused controversy by asserting through photos taken by the troops that ordinary soldiers were implicated in the crimes of the Third Reich. The exhibit toured from 1995 to 1999, and then with some alterations it again toured from 2001 to 2004.

The greater part of West German films in the 1950s were not set during the Third Reich, and most focused on escapist fare. There were exceptions, however, and some films received critical acclaim by examining social issues relevant to the era. One of the more controversial, *Die Sünderin (The Sinner, Willi Forst, 1951)*, upset religious institutions because of its themes of prostitution and suicide and also because of a nude scene by its star, Hildegard Knef. Although the *Freiwillige Selbstkontrolle der Filmwirtschaft (FSK)*, the quasi-voluntary policy set up to oversee censorship, had released the film for ages 16 and older, the Catholic Church condemned the film and warned Catholics to stay away. The Protestant Church also thought that the film should be banned outright. Individual communities tried to stop exhibition of the movie but lost in the courts. Christiane von Wahlers, chair of the FSK ratings approval board, attributed Germany's freedom of expression in film largely to the debate surrounding *Die Sünderin*.¹ Several other films in the 1950s also proved an exception to the predominance of comedies, war films, and films of the *Heimat*. Two of them, *Die Halbstarken (Teenage Wolfpack, Georg Tressler, 1956)* and *Die Frühreifen (The Rowdies, Josef von Báky, 1957)* reflected the teen angst found in Hollywood movies of that time, notably *The Wild One (László Benedek, 1953)*, *Black Board Jungle (Richard Brooks, 1955)*, and *Rebel without a Cause (Nicholas Ray, 1955)*. *Die Halbstarken* starred Horst Buchholz, who played a juvenile delinquent with the American name Freddy. He wore tight black leather pants and a blouson jacket, the uniform of the lost generation in America, England, and France in the 1950s. East Germany also experienced the phenomenon of the youth film at the same time. *Berlin: Ecke Schönhauser (Berlin: Schönhauser Corner, Gerhard Klein, 1957)* was one of several youth films set in East Berlin and is discussed more fully in another chapter of the text.

Thought-provoking films were, however, truly in the minority. Romantic comedies, musicals, detective fiction, and *Heimatfilme* (films about hearth and home) dominated the box office. Without doubt their purpose was to entertain, to help viewers escape in the manner of Hollywood's dream factory. Popular Third Reich actors who had maintained their distance from Nazism continued to be popular in the 1950s. The comedian Heinz Rühmann, for example, had a very successful postwar career, appearing in over sixty films, most of them comedies, between 1946 and his death in 1994. Marika Röck, who had appeared in almost twenty musicals during the Third Reich, likewise continued her musical career after the war, winning the first *Bambi*, an award based on popularity similar to People's Choice Awards in the United States. She won it repeatedly over the next few decades, as did Rühmann, who was honored with a *Bambi* fourteen times between 1962 and 1990.

1. Hans Kratzer, "Der Filmkrieg," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, October 5, 2011, <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/bayern/die-suenderin-in-regensburg-der-filmkrieg-1.1062499>.

The most popular directors of the 50s also began their careers during the Third Reich. Helmut Käutner, Kurt Hoffmann, Paul Verhoeven,² and Wolfgang Liebeneiner resumed their careers after the war. Hoffmann, for example, made *Das fliegende Klassenzimmer* (*The Flying Classroom*, 1954), a children's classic based on a book by Erich Kästner. Liebeneiner directed *Die Trapp-Familie in Amerika* (*The Trapp Family in America*, 1958), a film about the singing family later made famous by the Broadway musical and Hollywood film *The Sound of Music*. Käutner made *Der Hauptmann von Köpenick* (*The Captain of Köpenick*, 1956). Starring Rühmann, the film became a comedy classic. Käutner also directed some of the era's few films that tried to come to terms with the legacy of the Third Reich: *Die letzte Brücke* (*The Last Bridge*, 1954), *Des Teufels General* (*The Devil's General*, 1955), and *Himmel ohne Sterne* (*Sky without Stars*, 1955). This last film, set in Berlin early in the Cold War, is a melodramatic thriller, however, rather than an examination of the international political issues behind the divided city. *Des Teufels General* asks whether an act of espionage against a criminal regime should be condemned as an act of treason or lauded as an act of courage. *Die letzte Brücke* examines the resistance to the Nazis in Yugoslavia.

The most popular genre of the 1950s was the *Heimatfilm*. Narrowly defined, the term refers to a uniquely German genre that developed from a tradition of *Heimat* (homeland or home village) literature, referred to by the Nazis as *Blut und Boden* (blood and soil) literature. Generally set in villages, which allow for local color, the films often contrast the lone individual against overbearing landowners. The stories may be complicated by a love affair between the peasant hero and the daughter of the most powerful of the landowners. However, works of *Heimat* often go beyond this narrow definition and may refer to any work about village life that focuses on the strength of the peasants and the beauty of the landscape. The concept of *Heimat* was prevalent in the Third Reich, which produced several popular films with major stars: *Heimat* (Carl Froelich, 1938), *Der Schimmelreiter* (*Rider on a White Horse*, Hans Deppe, 1934), and *Kohlhiesels Töchter* (*Kohlhiesel's Daughters*, Kurt Hoffmann, 1943). Because of the popularity of the genre during National Socialism and also perhaps owing to the superficiality of many of the films, the term is usually pejorative. Two of the better-known films from the 1950s are Hans Deppe's *Schwarzwaldmädels* (*The Black Forest Girl*, 1950) and *Grün ist die Heide* (*The Heath Is Green*, 1951). Others are Verhoeven's *Heidelberg Romanze* and Hoffmann's *Das Wirtshaus im Spessart* (*The Inn in Spessart*, 1958).

In addition to melodramatic and sentimental stories, *Heimat* films were also filled with nostalgia for the past, ignoring reality in favor of portraying a healthy and safe world. As a result, directors of New German Cinema often parodied them. Volker Schlöndorff, for example, details the lengths to which eight villagers go to escape the misery of peasant life in *Der plötzliche Reichtum der armen Leute von Kombach* (*The Sudden Wealth of the Poor People of Kombach*, 1970). The director keeps the style of the 1824 chronicle on which he based his screenplay, lending the film a sense

2. Paul Verhoeven was a popular German director of musicals in the Third Reich and in the decade after the war. He should not be confused with the Dutch director Paul Verhoeven, who directed such blockbuster hit films as *RoboCop* (1987), *Basic Instinct* (1992), and *Starship Troopers* (1997).

of gentle irony. His outlaws succeed in robbing a tax shipment after five botched attempts only to be arrested, tried, and hanged when they begin spending the money. The hero of Peter Fleischmann's *Jagdscenen aus Niederbayern* (*Hunting Scenes from Bavaria*, 1969) is an ex-convict who is suspected of molesting a young boy in the village. He is saved from a peasant mob at the last minute by the arrival of the police. In contrast to these films, which expose nostalgia for the past as wishful thinking, Edgar Reitz's *Heimat: Eine deutsche Chronik* (*Heimat: A Chronicle of Germany*, 1984) pays loving homage to the genre. Reitz, a signer of the Oberhausen Manifesto, was an early proponent of films that come to terms with Germany's past. Nonetheless, *Heimat* portrays the fictive village of Schabbach lovingly, not as a nightmare of false memories but as a place to be revisited without worry. The fifteen-hour TV film series became a phenomenal hit, its themes being reprised in several sequels. The late 1980s and early 1990s witnessed yet another revival of the *Heimatfilm*: Joseph Vilsmaier's *Herbstmilch* (*Autumn Milk*, 1989), about the normalcy of peasant life under the Nazis, and Franz X. Bogner's *Madame Bäurin* (*Madame Bäurin*, 1993), about love on a Bavarian farm during World War I, show how farmers best the city dwellers, and everyone lives happily ever after. In *Schlafes Bruder* (*Brother of Sleep*, 1995), Vilsmaier reprises the negative vision of village life as seen in the films of New German Cinema. His villagers are neurotic, incestuous, and spiteful.

As the 1960s continued, the discontent of the younger generation as observed in the teen rebel films *Die Frühreifen* and *Die Halbstarcken*, the calls by the signers of the Oberhausen Manifesto for a new direction in film, and the early films of Young German Cinema (later New German Cinema) that criticized the falsity of contemporary Germany's values (their government's values) became stronger. Teenage rebellion of the 50s became student unrest of the late 60s, which deteriorated into terrorism by the late 1970s. But what had been tolerated within limits by the older generation was becoming frequently an unacceptable annoyance. Germany's national newspaper, *Die Welt*, had written about youth, "Without a doubt, this generational conflict is the greatest surprise of the postwar era, probably the greatest surprise of all the unexpected happenings" (Siegfried 2005, 727). By 1967, however, youthful rebellion in West Germany turned more political, away from tight jeans and toward politics. In the late 1960s students at German universities began protesting the rigid educational system in the country, which they felt still reflected the patriarchal controls of the past. Regardless of the origins of the protests—more financial help, greater opportunity for acceptance into popular majors, and restructuring of the lecture hall pedagogy itself—"The Nazi past played a major role in the internal and external definition of the generations, and evolved into a ubiquitous instrument in the battle of the generations" (Siegfried 2005, 740). By the 1970s, although student protests had for the most part died down, a small number had become more extreme in their demand and actions. Until their arrest in June 1972, Ulrike Meinhof and Andreas Baader led the Red Army Faction and subjected Germany to acts of criminal violence. Their deaths in prison in 1977, ruled as suicide, and two other events of that year—the kidnapping of Daimler-Benz corporation president Hanns Martin Schleyer and the hijacking of a Lufthansa airplane by four Palestinian terrorists with support of the Red Army Faction (RAF)—quieted down the terrorist movement.

The trajectory of opposition, which ranged from youthful rebellion through student protests to acts of terrorism, influenced West German films in great measure. Confrontation with a past that the older generation had obscured, if not denied, and opposition to the structural rigidity of what came to be known as the "system" fueled the creativity of filmmakers that collectively made up New German Cinema. Originally known as Young German Cinema, NGC had its origins in filmmakers' disappointment with the films of the 1950s and early 1960s. The signers of the Oberhausen Manifesto in 1962, which inaugurated the movement, included Alexander Kluge, Edgar Reitz, and Peter Schamoni. Others who later became associated with the group included R. W. Fassbinder, Werner Herzog, Margarethe von Trotta, Helma Sanders-Brahms, Volker Schlöndorff, Ula Stöckel, and Wim Wenders. Their films were diverse and reflected creative independence rather than programmatic dogmatism. Many of the early films revealed the elliptical narrative style and choppy editing of the French New Wave (*nouvelle vague*). And like their French colleagues, they viewed films as works of art, important in their own right, rather than as commodities, whose purpose was to sell tickets for the film industry. The immediate result of the Oberhausen Manifesto was underwhelming. To be sure, a few critically demanding films were released. *Das Brot der frühen Jahre* (*The Bread of Those Early Years*, Herbert Vesely, 1962), based on Nobel Laureate Heinrich Böll's eponymous novel, critically examined Germany's past. The film won six German film industry awards, including Best Feature Film and Best Director, and is often considered the start of the new wave. In the previous year (1961), no film or director had garnered sufficient support to be honored with the award. In 1962, Reitz and colleagues founded a film school in Ulm. The rest of that year's film production, however, continued stressing entertainment and popularity over art and social-political criticism. *Der Schatz im Silbersee* (*The Treasure of the Silver Lake*, Harald Reinl, 1962) was representative of films for the year. Based on a novel by Karl May, the film broke attendance records and initiated a new genre, the Winnetou films, which offered an ahistorical look at America's frontier West. Other film titles following the release of the Manifesto also suggest how little effect it had at first. In addition to the Winnetou series, there were a number of inane film comedies with mildly suggestive titles, such as *Wenn man baden geht auf Teneriffa* (*When Swimming on the Isle of Teneriffa*, Helmuth M. Backhaus, 1964) and *Maibritt, das Mädchen von den Inseln* (*Maibritt, the Girl from the Islands*, Bostian Hadnik, 1964), and also a succession of thrillers, such as *Der Würger von Schloß Blackmoor* (*The Strangler of Blackmoor Castle*, Harald Reinl, 1963), *Der Henker von London* (*The Mad Executioners*, Edwin Zbonek, 1963), and *Das Ungeheuer von London-City* (*The Monster from London City*, Edwin Zbonek, 1964).

It was clear to the new generation of German filmmakers that they would need a system of financial support before their movement could have an effect on the quality of German film. Eventually, the German cultural ministry came to their aid, creating the *Kuratorium Junger Deutscher Film e.V.* (Young German Film Board) to offer financial incentives to filmmakers. Administered by the federal government until 1968 and thereafter by the individual *Bundesländer* or federal states, the trustees on the film board awarded interest-free loans, which were to be paid back from earnings, thus replenishing the fund for further stipends. The films were often

esoteric to a degree that prevented them from having even modest public appeal. At the federal level, the cultural ministry addressed this problem with the *Filmförderungsanstalt* (federal film board), which increased the amount of the subsidies but tied grants to ticket sales. That is, future projects depended on the financial rather than merely critical success of previous ones. Filmmakers also received support from television networks looking for movies to broadcast, and from the Federal Ministry of the Interior, which gave monetary awards for excellence to filmmakers. The amount of subsidy depended on the category in which the award was granted. Some variation of these subsidy programs continues to exist, with the stipends for the film awards ranging from €10,000 to €500,000.

The system of subsidies, which helped fund New German Cinema and gave German film international presence, was not without problems. As with any grants systems, applicants had to conform to the requirements of the board approving the grant. If one examines the films from the 1960s and 1970s, one will find an abundance of movies based on classical works of literature, a source that film studios have recognized as financially good risks since they increase the size of the potential audience. Yet the film adaptations of New German Cinema were often experimental and hardly meant to cater to a wide audience. For example, Hans Jürgen Pohland adapted Günter Grass's novella *Katz und Maus* from a postwar point of view. In his film *Katz und Maus* (*Cat and Mouse*, 1967), an adult male in contemporary dress interacts with the friends of his childhood, dressed in the clothes of the period. The result is a distanced, often puzzling narrative of adolescence during the Third Reich, but one which clearly shows the effect of the past on the present. In *Fontane Effi Briest* (*Effi Briest*, 1974), Fassbinder introduces scenes by reading directly from the novel, displaying the corresponding book page on screen as he then cuts to the visual action. The effect is to distance viewers from any and all involvement in an otherwise sentimental story. The awards system also overlooks films and can discourage directors from applying. *Chronik der Anna Magdalena Bach* (*The Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach*, Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet, 1968) received no funding because of its experimental nature. Yet today it remains a high point of minimalist cinema, which had influenced the early works of Fassbinder. The producers of a radically political film such as *Deutschland im Herbst* (*Germany in Autumn*, 1978) never applied for money because they suspected the nature of their topic, terrorism in Germany, would preclude receiving a government subsidy. Such films fared better with television and the awards system. Even esoteric or experimental films received broadcast, although not always in prime time, and regardless of its radical theme, *Deutschland im Herbst* eventually won an Award in Gold from the German film industry.

In addition to subsidies and monetary awards, NGC filmmakers received aid from two other important sources. The *Filmverlag der Autoren* and the *Kommunales Kino* (community cinema). In 1971 a group of filmmakers, including Wim Wenders, Hark Böhm, Hans W. Geissendörfer, and Peter Lilienthal, founded the *Filmverlag* to produce films that did not have enough commercial appeal for the major studios but would nonetheless find acceptance from an alternative film audience. Because of financial difficulties in producing films, the *Filmverlag* switched its strategy from simply producing to aggressively marketing its films both

domestically and internationally. Their activity led to a raised profile for German film abroad. R. W. Fassbinder, Werner Herzog, Wim Wenders, and Volker Schlöndorff became recognized as the creators of a new German film voice. The *Filmverlag*, whose role was thus to distribute films, was complemented by the *Kommunales Kino*, a conglomeration of community art-film houses that ensured public performance of films that could not get into the major cinemas. The first such communal cinema opened in Frankfurt in 1971 to create a venue for specialized or art films. Soon thereafter they were established in most cities, with a core of cineastes who wanted an alternative to Hollywood and major German studio releases. At the time, most cinema screens were dominated by commercial films, and the only alternative to television broadcast was the *Kommunales Kino*.

As mentioned earlier, the filmmakers of New German Cinema were a diverse group. Their films cannot be categorized other than to say that they display the imprint of their creator. This is certainly true for the major names of the period. Fassbinder's style is recognizable to the extent that it has given rise to the adjective "fassbinderian," described as "aesthetics . . . based on display and on specularization" (Morag 2009, 136). Moreover, the majority of his films are set in a lower middle-class milieu. His characters are prone to emotional confusion, especially in matters of love. Moreover, titles of his films suggest that love is impossible: *Die bitteren Tränen der Petra von Kant* (*The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant*, 1972), *Ich will nur, dass ihr mich liebt* (*I Only Want You to Love Me*, 1976), *Warnung vor einer heiligen Nutte* (*Beware of a Holy Whore*, 1971) and *Liebe ist Kälter als der Tod* (*Love Is Colder Than Death*, 1969). In none of his forty-four films do characters find love. In contrast, Werner Herzog is less interested in love than in testing the breaking point of his characters. To that end he places them in physical environments that are hostile, although often beautiful. In *Aguirre: Der Zorn Gottes* (*Aguirre: The Wrath of God*, 1972), his characters succumb to the heat, jungle, and Amazon Indians as they search for El Dorado. In *Jeder für sich und Gott gegen alle* (*The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser*, 1976) a young man dreams on his deathbed of walking up a steep hill as the music track plays "Canon in D" by Johann Pachelbel. In *Woyzeck* (1979), Herzog uses slow motion and classical music as a soldier stabs his unfaithful wife among the reeds at river's edge. These are but three exemplary examples of Herzog's total body of work that focus on the awesome beauty and horror in the universe. They reflect the statement in the opening credits of *Kaspar Hauser*: "Do you not then hear this horrible scream all around you that people usually call silence?"

Wim Wenders, in contrast to both Fassbinder and Herzog, focuses on fusing the personal and universal. His stories tend to ramble, but in the end they find resolution. His camera likewise seems to stray away from the characters but always finds its way back to the primary focus. Most characteristic of his films, however, is their self-reflectivity. His films highlight the many ways that we try to capture or spy on the world around us through visual or audio means. The main character of *Der amerikanische Freund* (*The American Friend*, 1977), for example, is filmed by CCTV cameras as he walks through a station. His friend and adversary, Tom Ripley, spies on him and takes Polaroid photos of himself. The film *Im Lauf der Zeit* (*Kings of the Road*, 1976) follows two men, one of them a repair technician for film projectors, as they visit old movie houses along the border between East Germany and West

Germany. *Himmel über Berlin* (*Wings of Desire*, 1987) narrates a story of angels in the then-divided city of Berlin, recording in notebooks significant facts of the people they observe. The film stars Peter Falk as himself, with references to his Columbo persona, popular among Germans. German film star Curt Bois, who fled Germany in 1933, plays a storyteller. In *Paris, Texas* (1984), a man estranged from his wife finally communicates with her through the glass at a peep show.

Volker Schlöndorff, the fourth major director of the period, differs from the others in his choice of material. Almost all of his films are adaptations of either classic or bestselling novels. His most successful film, *Die Blechtrommel* (*The Tin Drum*, 1979), based on Grass's novel of that name, won an Academy Award for Best Picture in a Foreign Language. He also directed *Die verlorene Ehre der Katharina Blum* (*The Lost Honor of Katharina Blum*, 1975), codirected with Margarethe von Trotta and based on Heinrich Böll's story of the violation of civil rights by the police and the invasion of privacy by tabloid journalism. The strong reception of the film from young people and leftist intellectuals and also from a more general audience helped it achieve commercial success, suggesting that NGC films could cross over into a wider audience. Two years later, Fassbinder's *Die Ehe der Maria Braun* (*The Marriage of Maria Braun*, 1979) again showed that a film could be artful, thought provoking, critical, and popular.

Many films, however, did not reach beyond the art house, even when they won awards. *Hitler: Ein Film aus Deutschland* (*Our Hitler*, Hans-Jürgen Syberberg, 1977), for example, baffled many viewers and angered some social critics with its crypto-fascist images. Nonetheless, the film, which was staged as a seven-hour Wagnerian puppet opera, was well received by international viewers who at the time were discovering Herzog, Fassbinder, and Schlöndorff, among others, and proclaiming the rebirth of a second golden age for German film. A radical omnibus film from the left, *Deutschland im Herbst* (*Germany in Autumn*, 1978), angered the establishment because of its sympathetic treatment of the terrorist phenomenon active in West Germany through the 1970s. Fassbinder's contribution, which opens the film, portrays him as a paranoid drug user, abusing himself in a corner and later berating his mother in an interview. His message was clear: the German left had become powerless in the face of a government crackdown on radical activity. Other films also created scandal and consequently received minimal distribution in Germany and virtually none abroad. *Das Gespenst* (*The Ghost*, Herbert Achternbusch, 1982), alienated any possible audience with a story that depicts Christ coming down from the cross and wandering through contemporary Bavaria with a mother superior. The *Filmförderungsanstalt* (federal film board) felt obliged to withdraw the subsidy it had promised the director.

In 1982 West German film faced a crisis, caused partly by the controversy surrounding the withdrawal of the subsidy from *Das Gespenst*, which signaled that approval bodies would scrutinize projects more carefully, especially for potentially offensive content. The cinema community was further disheartened by Fassbinder's death; although he was not a signatory of the Oberhausen Manifesto, he had become New German Cinema's symbolic leader. Directing over forty films in thirteen years, his name had become linked more than those of any of his colleagues with New German Cinema. His death thus depressed the spirit of German film. Its reputation

as something uniquely German suffered and would not recover its international reputation as an auteur film culture for over a decade.

Of course, studios and independent producers continued making movies. Two films from Bavaria Studios, for example, became domestic and international successes, reflecting a shift in expectations of international audiences for German film. *Das Boot* (*The Boat*, 1981), which had been released the year before Fassbinder's death, and *Die unendliche Geschichte* (*The Neverending Story*, 1984) brought their director Wolfgang Petersen a major Hollywood contract. They were not auteur cinema. On the contrary, they were big-budget productions. A number of directors continued to make auteur or art-house films. These films, however, by von Trotta, Herzog, Helke Sanders, Helma Sanders-Brahms, and others, found limited distribution, even at home. Most had a second life on television and video/DVD, allowing them to recoup costs. Rosa von Praunheim, one of the directors most outside the mainstream, made films primarily for Germany's gay and underground community, with their distribution limited to metropolitan cities, including New York, San Francisco, and London. His films, like the feminist tracts of Ulrike Ottinger or the lesbian films of Monika Treut, remained in the underground, intended for niche audiences. Only rarely did they cross over even into the independent mainstream. That their films are known at all to international audiences is almost entirely due to film festivals and retrospectives that were sponsored by the Goethe Institute and Germany's Ministry of Culture.

Other independent auteur directors include Percy Adlon, whose *Zuckerbaby* (*Sugarbaby*, 1985) and *Out of Rosenheim* (*Bagdad Café*, 1987) avoided the critical history and political tone of New German Cinema, focusing on social and psychological relationships in a light-hearted manner. The films of Doris Dörrie examined relationships as well. *Männer* (*Men*, 1985) became the top German moneymaker of the year and achieved international status for its director. Dörrie's and Adlon's inoffensive, non-confrontational style eventually led to a new paradigm for German cinema: films with social relevance that might lead to light discussion over a drink or coffee after the film, but which eschewed political content that might create controversy. (RCR)

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Die Brücke

(*The Bridge*, Bernhard Wicki, 1959)



Sigi guarding the bridge.

CREDITS

Director Bernhard Wicki
Screenplay Michael Mansfeld, Karl Wilhelm Vivier
Director of Photography Gerd von Bonin
Editor Carl-Otto Bartning
Music Hans-Martin Majewski
Production Design Heinrich Graf Bruehl, Peter Scharff
Producer Hermann Schwerin
Length 103 minutes; B/W

Principal Cast

Karl Michael Balzer (Karl Horber), Folker Bohnet (Hans Scholten), Fritz Wepper (Albrecht Mutz), Frank Glaubrecht (Jürgen Borchert), Michael Hinz (Walter Forst), Guenther Hoffmann (Sigi Bernhard), Volker Lechtenbrink (Klaus Hager), Guenter Pfitzmann (Cpl Heilmann), Wolfgang Stumpf (Stern, the teacher), Cordula Trantow (Franziska), Edith Schulze-Westrum (Frau Bernhard).

THE STORY

Die Brücke is the story of seven teenage boys who are drafted into the German army in a futile effort to stop the Allies' invasion. All but one die.

The setting is Germany in late April of 1945. Friends and schoolmates, a group of teenage boys from a small town are impatiently waiting to be drafted. Fiercely patriotic, they believe that to fight for their fatherland is the ultimate honor. When the boys are finally called to duty, they are elated, but their teacher secretly appeals to the company sergeant to spare them from the war. The company sergeant gets permission to have the boys watch a strategically useless bridge, which is going to be blown up anyway. Not aware of this, the boys take their orders very seriously. They refuse to leave their posts even when fleeing German troops retreat across the bridge. As dawn breaks, American tanks suddenly appear and try to cross the bridge. The boys fight bravely, and the Americans finally retreat, but only one of the young men survives. When German soldiers arrive to blow up the bridge, the boys realize that their friends' deaths were senseless and open fire on their countrymen.

BACKGROUND

Die Brücke is one of the most successful German war movies. It is the recipient of the Golden Globe and was nominated for Best Foreign Film at the Academy Awards. The movie is based on a book by Manfred Dorfmeister writing under the pseudonym Manfred Gregor. Dorfmeister was drafted into the *Volksturm* in April of 1945. Like the seven schoolboys in the movie, Dorfmeister had to defend a tiny bridge across the river Loisach near his hometown of Bad Tölz in Bavaria, where three of his friends were killed by the advancing Americans. After retreating (or running away) from the Americans, Dorfmeister was drafted again into defending the Isar bridge in his home town Bad Tölz. After two more of his friends were killed there, Dorfmeister realized the futility of the enterprise and deserted his post to meet his father. Dorfmeister later went back to the bridge and found all of his fellow soldiers dead. An older German woman was spitting at the bodies while walking past.

Wicki did not like Dorfmeister's way of telling his story and decided to make considerable changes to the plot. In Dorfmeister's story we are told that by defending the bridge, the Nazi soldiers would have saved the lives of many German soldiers. Wicki decided to change the story into a challenge to their education. Because the friends used to play on and around the bridge, he decided to change the movie into an antiwar movie to defend their childhood playground.

Die Brücke picks up on the events following the June 6 invasion of France by the Allies across the English Channel. At that time, the Soviet Army was advancing along the entire 2,500-mile front. They stood poised on the eastern frontiers of prewar Germany by the end of the year, and at the same time the British and American troops stood ready to attack across the western borders. On the German home front, the rules were also changed. On July 20, 1944, Klaus von Stauffenberg attempted a coup against the Nazi government. Since Hitler managed to escape the

attempt on his life, this came at the price of increased pressure on the civilian population to fight to the end. On April 30, as Soviet troops were streaming into the city and the Western Allies pushed into Germany from their staging positions in the West, Hitler committed suicide in Berlin. The war was coming to a rapid end. *Die Brücke* recreates these final days with its location on one of the thousands of bridges where some of the last battles took place. The best-known bridge crossing of the American army took place near Remagen on the Rhein, which allowed for a speedy transfer of troops into central Germany. Finally, early in the morning of May 7, 1945, a German delegation came to U.S. general Dwight D. Eisenhower's headquarters in Reims, France, and at 2:41 a.m. signed the surrender documents. A second surrender was signed in the Berlin suburb of Karlshorst on May 8, 1945, thus officially ending history's bloodiest war.

EVALUATION

Die Brücke, a film about World War II, is frequently shown to students in German schools. Its popularity derives from its shocking war story where all but one of the teenage boys die within a few short hours. It is one of the few German films to include battlefield engagements of American and German soldiers. The gruesome images of death in this movie intentionally expose the inhumanity of war and move viewers to fundamental questions about the validity of war. Wicki detested cartoon-like war movies where fast cuts avoid drawing the viewer into truthful action. Those films, Wicki stated, tend to emphasize the heroic elements and therefore serve as war propaganda. He wants to show war as something boring and tedious, where waiting for action is the main activity, but also as something that can turn into an agonizing death in seconds.

The film builds suspense through its dramatic structure. It is divided into two almost equal parts. The first, introductory part shows the lives of the schoolboys before they enter military service. One of the movie's few flaws stems from the fact that, despite the hour-long introductory glance at their "civilian" lives that is meant to introduce their individuality, these seven boys—Jürgen, Walter, Karl, Klaus, Sigi, Hans, and Albert—seem rather similar. This introduction does, however, reveal the boys' childlike mindsets. They are just typical, likeable kids who are more interested in pranks and girls than in the reality of war. War to them has an aura of glory, which is in contrast to the reality and harshness of life that the adults see. The boys still live in a romantic world that idealizes war.

We discover Jürgen's aristocratic background—his father was killed in battle, and with his mother's approval the son wants to continue his father's legacy of joining the army as an officer. She even hands Jürgen his father's pistol after he is drafted into military service. Then there is Walter, the son of the town's local Nazi boss or *Kreisleiter*, who sends his wife away so he can be with his mistress, something his son suspects and later finds out to be true. There is also Karl, whose father owns the local barbershop and beauty parlor. Karl discovers that the girl he loves is his father's mistress. One could probably argue from these two examples of fathers being engaged in extramarital sex that the sons are driven away from a

society falling apart. However, the other five boys do not experience anything like it. Klaus has an innocent and platonic love with his girlfriend Franziska, who is overjoyed when he gives her his watch as a farewell present but is crushed when he asks for his present back from her after realizing that it would be of more use to him in the army than to her. Sigi's mother, played by the popular Edith Schulze-Westrum, is overly protective of her son, the first one to be killed in battle. After receiving their enlistment papers, the boys' English teacher Stern helps them receive orders to guard an insignificant bridge in their town, which has no military importance and should thus keep them safe from harm.

After this rather lengthy exposition to introduce the boys, but also to build suspense, we witness the unfolding of the horrors of war in stages. The induction of the boys into the military begins with their training in the local barracks. The corporal, who is in charge of the teens, feels responsible for their welfare. He thus understandably wants to prevent their death and accompanies them to the bridge, much to their disappointment, as they see others take off to more "glorious" battles such as they were dreaming about in their Nazi-inspired education. The Nazis who built up their nationalism were also responsible for its downfall, since unknown to them the Nazis had already decided to blow up the bridge in order to stop the U.S. advance. *Die Brücke* thus replicates the Nazis' mad strategy on this small theater-like location.

The film emulates a classical tragedy not only in its dramatic structure but in the fact that all the protagonists who attempt to interfere on account of the boys achieve the opposite of their intentions and fail tragically. Thus, the teacher who wants to prevent them from seeing any action lands them on a contested bridge; the civilian who asks them to surrender is killed by a bazooka; and the American soldier who does not want to fight "kindergarten" kids causes their most violent reaction as he must have touched upon their hidden fears of not being taken seriously.

The film is presented in a linear manner without any of the flashback scenes the book had provided. The continuous linearity, especially in the second part of the movie, aids greatly in building up suspense. Long before any tanks are seen, we hear the horror of their advance as a continuous sound that creates a frightening experience similar to the sonar probes in the war movie *Das Boot*. By limiting the scope of his theater of war to a contained space, Wicki creates scenes of realism that capture the feeling of entrapment in battle and the inevitability of the tragic outcome.

The film's power comes from Wicki's emphasis on point-of-view shots. Most scenes are filmed from the perspective of the boys, with the camera dug into the ground and filming at the level from which they see the action. The film offers no wide-angle shots that would give the viewer a perspective bigger than what the boys have. Only in the final scene, when the battle is over, does Wicki take in the entire scene of battle, allowing the futility of the effort to become painfully clear when Albert staggers home and collapses on the doorsteps. And to further underline the futility of the boys' efforts in the last days of the war, the film closes with a comment by the director: "The events in this story happened in 1945. Two days later the war in Europe ended."

Part of the appeal of the story comes from the symbolic complexity of the bridge, which functions on a number of levels. It is a bridge across a river, and yet it is also a bridge from known territory into the unknown. Moreover, it not only links but also divides the boys' hometown from the enemy. The bridge also exposes people's fear as well as highlighting their sense of adventure. Wicki's *The Bridge* further refers to the bridge between youth and adulthood, something the teenagers tragically would never experience. The story itself follows a perfectly old-fashioned storyline that nevertheless shows an inability to give meaning to the absurdity and brutality of modern-day war after the classic notion of a noble war had disappeared earlier in the twentieth century.

Wicki was not alone in presenting the bridge as a key symbol—other examples are *The Bridge over the River Kwai*, *The Last Bridge*, *The Bridge at Remagen*, or *A Bridge too Far*. *Die Brücke* is clearly influenced by Luis Milestone's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930). Just as in that film, emphasis is on the destruction of youth at a time when it should be at its most vital. Based on the novel by Erich Maria Remarque about a teenage German soldier in World War I who experiences death after entering the army directly out of high school, the film captured the horrors of war as depicted in the book. Both book and film were eventually banned by the Nazis for the pacifist message. In turn, *Die Brücke* also influenced movies. The dark tone of *Das Boot* and the claustrophobic nature of the climactic scene in *Saving Private Ryan* remind one of *Die Brücke*. (RZ)

QUESTIONS

1. Decide in how many segments (or acts) the story is divided. What is the function of the segments?
2. It is hard to differentiate between the boys, even after having watched the first forty-two minutes where they are introduced in the context of their families and friends. Make a list of important information for each boy while watching the first part. List their family and living conditions and one or two important events that we are shown: Karl Horber, Hans Scholten, Albrecht Mutz, Jürgen Borchert, Walter Forst, Sigi Bernhard, Klaus Hager. List the relationship the boys have with women.
3. Give a detailed analysis of the classroom scene. Describe the characters and show in detail how the camera movement in the classroom outlines the characters and gives a preview of their role in the action to come.
4. Bernhard Wicki's film has been rated for viewers over twelve years of age in Germany, in the United States PG13. Do you agree with this rating?
5. What constitutes the central conflict, the loss of adult supervision with Heilmann's death or the revenge after Sigi's death? Is it a social or a private conflict?

6. Describe the lives of three of the boys and compare them with their brief military career.
7. How does Spielberg's movie *Saving Private Ryan* use the bridge as a symbol?
8. *Das Boot* uses ideas from the movie about how sound enhances the story line. Find some examples.
9. Why does the movie work better in black and white than in color?
10. Describe how the bridge could be seen as a symbol.
11. What are the contrary positions the two teachers Stern and Fröhlich represent?

RELATED FILMS

Kinder, Mütter und ein General (*Children, Mother, and a General*, László Benedek, 1955) is an early war film.

Das Boot (*The Boat*, Wolfgang Petersen, 1981) follows a German submarine in the North Atlantic in World War II. The movie is discussed elsewhere in the book.

Im Westen nichts Neues (*All Quiet on the Western Front*, Lewis Milestone, 1930) is an American war film based on Erich Maria Remarque's novel of the same name.

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Aguirre: Der Zorn Gottes

(Aguirre: The Wrath of God, Werner Herzog, 1972)



Aguirre proclaiming he will found a new dynasty with the monkeys who have infested his raft.

CREDITS

Director Werner Herzog
Screenplay Werner Herzog
Director of Photography Thomas Mauch
Music Popol Vuh
Producer Werner Herzog
Production Companies Hessischer Rundfunk; Werner Herzog Filmproduktion
Length 93 minutes; Color

Principal Cast

Klaus Kinski (Don Lope de Aguirre), Daniel Ades (Perucho), Peter Berling (Don Fernando de Guzman), Ruy Guerra (Don Pedro de Ursua), Del Negro (Brother Gaspar de Carvajal), Alejandro Repullés (Gonzalo Pizarro), Cecilia Rivera (Flores), Helena Rojo (Inez).

THE STORY

In 1561 Gonzalo Pizarro and his party of conquistadors arrive in Peru in search of El Dorado, the legendary city of gold. Descending the Andes Mountains, the group gets into difficulties when some of their food and military equipment falls into the river below. Believing it best not to travel with the entire group before knowing what lies ahead, Pizarro sends out an advance party of forty men (two women), including Don Lope de Aguirre and his daughter, Don Pedro de Ursua and his wife, Don Fernando de Guzman (the highest ranking of the nobles on the journey), Brother Gaspar de Carvajal (whose journal is the source of the story), and Peruvian Indians. The party has one week to find a way to El Dorado or to return to the main group, should this prove impossible.

Before long, the party gets into difficulties because of the impenetrability of the jungle, the unforgiving rush of the waters, and the hidden dangers of the Indians on land. One of the rafts is caught in a whirlpool and is unable to escape. Aguirre, Ursua's second in command, disagrees with the leader that the men should be rescued and secretly arranges that the men on the raft be killed. As the difficulties of travel increase, Ursua wants to return to Pizarro and the main party. Aguirre, the more charismatic of the two men, wants to continue. Slowly, through intrigue, murder, and persuasion, he wins the men over to his side as the party continues downriver, ever deeper into the jungle. During the increasingly perilous journey, Aguirre arranges Ursua's murder, names Guzman king of the area the Spaniards are traveling through, and reveals his increasing state of madness. As the numbers dwindle, both because of internal killings as well as death at the hands of the Indians, Aguirre becomes more and more insane until he is the only one left on the raft as the film ends.

BACKGROUND

Although he makes many of his movies today in English, at the beginning of the movement known as New German Cinema, Werner Herzog was as significant to the reputation that German film enjoyed as were R. W. Fassbinder, Wim Wenders, and Volker Schlöndorff. Indeed, the striking beauty of his visual imagery and the often-extreme nature of his characters created some of the most memorable films of the 70s and 80s.

Werner Herzog tells stories about eccentric individuals facing extreme situations. His films can be understood as psychological case studies of these individuals as they cope with or are destroyed by forces outside their control, or they can be understood as critiques of the sociopolitical climate that exploits individuals until they crack. Often choosing his protagonists from legend and literature, Herzog shows them beset with an environment which because of their eccentricities they are unable to master. In *Jeder für sich und Gott gegen alle* (*The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser*, 1974), for example, his protagonist, Kaspar Hauser, has lived the first eighteen years of his life in a cellar, fed through a hole in the wall. One day he is freed and must begin acquiring those cultural tools of life that have been denied or withheld from

him until now and which allow individuals to function within society: language, music, writing, and an understanding of social customs and human relationships. In *Nosferatu*, Herzog pays homage to F. W. Murnau's film, where the vampire is a hideous monster longing to die but condemned to live alone forever. And as Murnau's film comments through its story and visuals on the state of Germany after World War I, in similar fashion Herzog's film equates Germany after World War II with the soullessness of his monster. In *Stroszek*, Herzog looks at a mentally diminished young German who, with his girlfriend, emigrates from Germany to America, only to be engulfed in a consumer society that destroys him. Although the film takes place in America, the film is condemning the economic exploitation taking place in most of the West.

Klaus Kinski, a noted German actor with an edgy persona from the 1950s, plays an especially important role in Herzog's output, reprising again and again the role of outsider. In *Aguirre* he plays a megalomaniac whose physical deformity reflects the increasingly deteriorating state of his mind and soul. He also plays a psychopathic loner, whose eccentric nature leads him to murder in *Woyzeck* and *Nosferatu*. But whereas *Woyzeck* kills his lover in a jealous rage, and *Nosferatu* kills because of his vampiric nature, *Aguirre* kills (or instructs others to kill) for power. His lust for power also differentiates him from another Kinski/Herzog collaboration in the South American jungle, *Fitzcarraldo*. The title character *Fitzcarraldo* is also a megalomaniac, but he channels his insanity into bringing opera to the jungle. *Fitzcarraldo* too, however, exploits the indigenous culture to the point of death.

Playing *Aguirre*, *Woyzeck*, and *Nosferatu* contributed to Kinski's already established type as murderer, outlaw, and monster. But if he was typecast before the series of films he made with Herzog, his association with the director of extreme outcasts created a legend. For the reputed fights that the director and actor had while making films together, some of them at gunpoint, filled the tabloids. As homage to his relationship with Kinski, he wrote and directed a biography / autobiography of his relationship with the actor, *Mein liebster Feind (My Best Fiend, 1999)*.

EVALUATION

Aguirre: Der Zorn Gottes derives its impact from the tension created between madness and exploitation. Visuals, music, setting, and characterizations all serve to emphasize the fragility of a humanity which is at the mercy of social order, nature, and political power. *Aguirre's* madness, for example, reflects the state of the expedition throughout the movie. Although *Aguirre* appears normal when first introduced in the film, his mental well-being deteriorates as the expedition goes down the Amazon. In addition, his mental deterioration reflects his physical deterioration. That is, the deeper into the Amazon jungle the raft takes *Aguirre* and his party, the more insane he becomes; and the more insane he becomes, the more noticeable are his stoop and slope to the right. Moreover, his physical and mental metamorphosis mirrors the strength of his belief in himself as conqueror and savior of the New World. He sees himself as creating first an empire in the New World and finally, with his daughter, a new dynasty to rule over El Dorado. Like Kurtz in Joseph

Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, the jungle has driven him mad; and he proclaims a new dynasty while first holding his dead daughter in his arms and then a monkey.

As a tale of madness, *Aguirre: Der Zorn Gottes* explores the effect that the extreme situation of the jungle, combined with desires for wealth and power, has on various characters in the movie. As he is the title character, the main focus is of course Aguirre. At the start of the trip down the Amazon, he still has the wits to proclaim that from that starting point their trip will be downhill. By the end, he has become so consumed by his madness that he cannot recognize that his daughter is dead and the expedition defeated. Other characters also succumb to madness. Pizarro's right-hand man reflects the mental deterioration enveloping the trip as he repeatedly mumbles "la, la, la," a chant-like mantra generally indicating ineffectuality or even madness. The monk Gaspar, whose main focus should be teaching God's word, is obsessed with the gold of El Dorado. Herzog also uses the characters' madness to add humor to the film. As they are pierced by arrows, characters make jokes about long arrows coming into fashion or of arrows not being real.

Brother Gaspar de Carvajal, although seemingly a minor character in the story, has a major role in the film's text. Carvajal is not only the source through which we learn the story of the fate of the expedition, he is the voice of Western Europe in South America, representing the ostensible reason Spain has come to the New World. He espouses the official Spanish program that the conquistadors have come to convert the indigenous peoples to Christianity. Carvajal's actions, however, expose the hypocrisy of the church's role in the expedition. He admits to Flores, Ursua's wife, who has asked him to intervene on her husband's behalf, that the church has always been on the side of the strong, not necessarily the deserving. Moreover, he is more willing to shoot the Indians for not immediately converting to Christianity than he is in attempting to teach them God's word.

Other characters likewise reflect and mirror themes of madness and exploitation, regardless of how minor their role might be. Aguirre's chief opponent is Don Pedro de Ursua, a decent leader whose main concern is the safety of his men. He fails to understand how dangerous Aguirre is to him. Aguirre exploits his naïveté to carry out his treason. Ursua's wife, Flores, and Aguirre's daughter, Inez, represent the incursion of western civilization into the New World. Seated in sedan chairs and dressed in Spanish finery as they are carried down the mountain as the film opens, both seem distinctly out of place in the jungle. At the same time, their purity suggests the purity of the New World that is being defiled by Aguirre and the conquistadors. Don Fernando de Guzman, the highest-ranking nobleman on the expedition, is an arrogant, corpulent, intellectual lightweight. Aguirre easily manipulates him by playing to his ego and eliminates him when his actions endanger the plans for mutiny. The Indians with speaking roles mouth platitudes about the native culture that they are losing, and Aguirre's henchman represents the strongman's deranged sidekick, willing to do all of his boss's messy work.

The setting for *Aguirre: Der Zorn Gottes* reinforces the film's emphasis on madness and not being in control of one's situation. Herzog sets his film in the Peruvian Andes and Amazon jungle, revealing an environment that is both beautiful and frightening. Cinematographer Thomas Mauch captures the mystery of the fog-shrouded mountains but also the dangers in the steep grade of the decline. He

likewise reveals the lushness of the jungles enclosing the river on either side, suggesting that there is no avenue of escape. The Andes and Amazon play a significant role in the film's ultimate meaning. Herzog believes that he has seen things others have not and that it is his mission to show others his visions through his films. In *Aguirre: Der Zorn Gottes* he films the Amazon jungle as an impenetrable wall of lush green that swallows up the blues, reds, and yellows of the conquistadors. The thick growth of trees and bushes provides the Indians with refuge and cover to the same degree that it proves an insurmountable obstacle to the Spaniards. The river meanwhile rushes forward or meanders, trapping the Spaniards in its fast waters or holding them prisoner in its languid pools, all the while exposing them to the Indians as targets to be killed with poison darts. The sounds of the jungle likewise enter into the setting as threat. The conquistadors often don't know if the sounds they hear are the sounds of birds or of natives announcing the approach of the Spaniards to other tribes. Despite the danger posed by the jungle and river for the Spaniards, the environment provides a reminder of the magnificent beauty of the New World. From the mist-shrouded mountaintop where the film begins to the quiet river where it ends, the film shows off the Amazon River and its basin as much as it champions any of its characters.

Visuals continuously reflect the tale of madness and exploitation being told by the narrative voice and dialogue. Music and sound effects in turn underscore the insanity and loss of control. As the film opens, the camera shoots from a distance as the conquistadors come down a fog-enshrouded mountain. They are like gods descending from above, a visual homage to the opening sequence of Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph des Willens* (*Triumph of the Will*), which shows Hitler descending through clouds as he arrives in Nuremberg. The party serpentine down the mountain, the circular motion suggesting the ordeal ahead and also its futility. That the circular imagery is mirrored throughout the film by objects and environment reinforces the sense that the expedition will fail. This feeling is underscored by the film's non-diegetic background music (the off-screen music that is not a part of the world depicted on screen), mostly a minimalist electronic score that repeats its motives as the visuals repeat the circular motion. The diegetic music, provided by Peruvian pipes, mirrors the circularity of the sound of the off-screen music.

The visual and musical imagery is dominated by circular and downward movement. Once descended from the mountains, the party gets into rafts, which float swiftly downstream in the rushing currents of the Amazon. One of their boats is lost to a whirlpool. Others are swamped by the rising waters. But as the Amazon Basin is reached, the river slows and the large raft the conquistadors have built drifts aimlessly. Whether in the early scenes on the rushing river or in later ones on the sluggish waters, the boat is caught between the dense foliage of the trees on shore. Moreover, the sounds of birds and natives and the suggestion of hidden Indians on shore add to the feeling that the Spaniards are trapped in the Amazon jungle. As the movie ends, the camera pulls up and away, showing Aguirre holding a monkey and standing in the middle of a raft going in circles. Even without his monologue, one understands that he is mad and that the expedition has failed.

The history of Pizarro's party of conquistadors offered Herzog the story, environment, and eccentric characters he preferred when exploring his theme of



Aguirre holds his daughter's dead body in his arms as he proclaims he will start a dynasty with her in the New World. The arrow that killed her can be seen in the lower middle of the frame.

madness. But the film is more than a story of insanity. By basing his story loosely on Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, he turns the tale of a madman into a statement on the exploitation of the weak by the powerful. In short, *Aguirre: Der Zorn Gottes* becomes a film about colonialism.

As a loose adaptation of Conrad's work, *Aguirre: Der Zorn Gottes* catalogs a list of transgressions by colonial powers against the inhabitants of the New World. These include enslavement, conversion, and even killing. Herzog uses members of actual tribes to play the roles of Indians kidnapped from their homes to serve the Spaniards on the expedition. In one extended sequence, he has an Indian prince, who has been kidnapped from his home, lament how he is forced to serve where once he was served. In another episode, the party forces a black slave to undress and run ahead of them through the jungle, believing his blackness will frighten the Indians. Finally, in another sequence, the party invites two natives on board their raft but then shoots them when the pair does not immediately accept the word of God.

Trappings of colonization appear from the beginning of the film. The Europeans stride down the mountain dressed in their Spanish glory. The women, carried

in sedan chairs, are immaculate in beautiful European dress. The men wear armor and carry weapons more suited to fighting in Europe than here in the jungle. But their superiority nonetheless is apparent. Aguirre's crazed monologues also allude to colonization. He stresses the fact that more Europeans will come after them even if they do not find El Dorado and that they will succeed in conquering the continent. But as the film continues, the sedan chairs become useless, the canons fall down the mountain and are destroyed, the horse they have brought is pushed off their raft, the women shed the heavy outer layers of their cloaks, and the veneer of European mores vanishes. Aguirre's descent into madness likewise suggests that the Old World conquerors may not be successful after all. In the end, it will be the native culture that subsumes the European, and colonization will be defeated. (RCR)

QUESTIONS

1. Describe the characterization of the indigenous inhabitants of the New World.
2. Locate as many circular images in the film as you can.
3. Locate and describe the humorous elements of the film. Why do you think Herzog has included these?
4. Identify those elements of the film that characterize Spanish colonization as negative.
5. Describe the progression of Aguirre's madness, focusing on his physical appearance and his actions.

RELATED FILMS

Stroszek (1977). An alcoholic man leaves prison and has trouble readjusting to life in Berlin. He and his girlfriend immigrate to Wisconsin in search of the American dream. The story follows Herzog's formula of pitting his characters against insurmountable odds and seeing how they react. The film ends with a bizarre sequence of multiple images of circularity, a favorite thematic symbol of the director.

Woyzeck (1979). Based on Georg Büchner's nineteenth-century play of the same name, the story tells of a soldier who is psychologically abused by his captain, serves as a guinea pig for a doctor, and cheated on by his wife. He eventually breaks down under the stress and murders his wife in one of the director's more aesthetically staged scenes.

Nosferatu (1979). Klaus Kinski plays the vampire in Herzog's homage to F. W. Murnau's 1922 classic film of the same name.

Fitzcarraldo (1982). Based on a true story, the film dramatizes the attempts of one man to bring opera to the Amazon jungle by moving a boat over a mountain from one river to another. As in all of his films, Herzog filmed on location and without special effects, thus submitting his actors to dangerous situations.

Mein liebster Feind: Klaus Kinski (My Best Fiend), 1999). Klaus Kinski and Werner Herzog made six films together. This documentary chronicles their turbulent relationship, in which the director once drew a gun on the actor and threatened to shoot him.

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Angst essen Seele auf

(*Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, 1974)



Emmi and Ali dance to the "Black Gypsy" in the pub where they first meet.

CREDITS

Director Rainer Werner Fassbinder
Screenplay Rainer Werner Fassbinder
Director of Photography Jürgen Jürges
Music Rainer Werner Fassbinder
Production Company Tango Films
Length 93 minutes; Color

Principal Cast

Brigitte Mira (Emmi), El Hedi ben Salem (Ali), Barbara Valentin (Barbara), Irm Hermann (Krista), Elma Karlowa (Mrs. Kargus), Gusti Kreissl (Paula), Lilo Pempfeit (Mrs. Münchmeyer), Hark Bohm (Doctor), Rainer Werner Fassbinder (Eugen), Marquard Bohm (Gruber).

THE STORY

Emmi, a cleaning lady in her mid-fifties, walks into a bar frequented by immigrant workers and meets Ali, a Moroccan in his late thirties. They begin an affair, which leads to marriage and to Emmi's abandonment by family, neighbors, and coworkers. The high point in their relationship to each other is contrasted with the low point in their relationship to others. Finally, unable to cope with the hateful behavior of others, they go on holiday, hoping people at home will get over their initial objections to the relationship. When they return, family, neighbors, and coworkers have indeed decided to renew their relationship with Emmi and to accept her choice of husband. Their decision is based more on their need for Emmi's help than on any change in attitudes toward immigrants. Just as before the holiday her closeness to Ali was contrasted with her distance from others, so now her reestablishment of friendly relations with others is contrasted with the disintegration of her relationship with Ali. At the moment when she and Ali seem to have reconciled their differences, he collapses from an ulcerated stomach attack and the film closes as Emmi promises to nurse him back to health.

BACKGROUND

Fassbinder's films play on multiple historical levels. They not only recreate the period in which they are set and the time in which they are being created, but they also reflect Germany's history, in particular its Nazi past. To be fully understood, they must be seen within a framework that includes the radical German politics contemporary to the filming of the movie, the reaction or overreaction of the German government and its citizens to protest, a conservative media conglomerate headed by Axel Springer that encourages overreaction to events, and the changing profile of the German ethnic population.

Germany's changing ethnic profile can be illustrated with some statistics. The country's present population of almost eighty-one million includes seven million non-ethnic Germans (8.5 percent), of which two million are Turkish. Many of the non-ethnic Germans immigrated to Germany between 1955 and 1973, the years when an official policy of recruiting guest workers to fill an employment gap was in effect. More have come since 1973, encouraged by relatives of the immigrants already in Germany. In its early years, the program attracted workers from Italy, Greece, and Yugoslavia. But in 1961, the majority of workers were coming from Turkey and other Muslim countries, including Morocco. Today the immigrant population from Eastern Europe is increasing. In 1973, the period in which *Angst essen Seele auf* takes place, there were over three million foreign workers in the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany), which was about 5 percent of the population, then estimated at about sixty million. In *Angst essen Seele auf*, Fassbinder focuses primarily on discrimination against Moroccans, but he also includes a scene in which an immigrant from Herzegovina, then a region in Yugoslavia, is excluded from the German majority. In *Katzelmacher*, one of Fassbinder's first films, the object of German racial hatred was a Greek worker.

Although racial prejudice creates the film's dynamic tension, it does so in tandem with Fassbinder's preoccupation with history and radical politics. Beginning in 1968, West Germany experienced student and radical protests that had escalated by 1977 to terrorist violence. In the early years of protest, students demonstrated for university reform, against American involvement in Vietnam, and against the conservative policies of the Springer Publishing House. Such protests, however, form merely the background of a more deeply located anti-establishment and anti-government mood that was represented by the radical and eventually terrorist activities of the Baader-Meinhof group, later to become the Red Army Faction. Popular slogans in those years, such as "he who sleeps twice with the same person belongs to the establishment" (*wer zweimal mit derselben [demselben] pennt, gehört schon zum Establishment*) and "all power to the Soviet" (*Alle Macht den Räten*), belie the dangerous undercurrents flowing through German youth culture. The government's immediate reaction was ambivalent. On the one hand, it restricted personal freedoms in the name of protecting the republican form of government that Germany had enjoyed since the end of World War II. On the other hand, the government moderated its measures because of memories of World War II and also because of the vocal and surprisingly large support radical politics had among Germans, between 10 and 15 percent. Such moderating tendencies are most evident in police handling of the attack on the Israeli Olympic team by Palestinian terrorists. In *Angst essen Seele auf*, they turn up in Fassbinder's ironic characterization of the Munich police.

Seldom has the setting of a film been as important as it is in Fassbinder's choice of Munich for *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*. On the surface, it would seem that the film could have been set in any German city with a large immigrant worker population; and for many viewers the choice of Munich might have little obvious impact, as the city is difficult to recognize in the movie. And yet, no other city would have suggested the weight of Germany's history and the impact of that history on the present as much as Munich, except of course Berlin. But the choice of Berlin would have taken the film into a geopolitical direction, looking outward, since there was still a divided Germany in 1973. Fassbinder, even though concerned with historical events that had worldwide impact, preferred to focus his films inward. In *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*, he uses Munich, the city of Hitler's beerhall putsch in 1923 and of the Palestinian attack on the 1972 Olympics, to focus on immigrant workers in contemporary West Germany. Bavarian conservatism makes the city ideal for portraying the constant struggle between past and present, at least in the minds and films of the New German Cinema, of which Fassbinder came to be the body, intellect, and soul.

EVALUATION

As with many of Fassbinder's films, *Angst essen Seele auf* is a perfect blend of cinematic form and thematic content. Indeed, the film's text and characterizations come as much from Fassbinder's use of camera, *mise-en-scène*, and historical references as they do from dialogue and situation. Moreover, framing, movement, and

staging tell us who the characters are, how they feel, and what motivates them. Given the simplicity of the story told in the screenplay, it is surprising how complex a narrative Fassbinder has crafted.

In the opening sequence Emmi, a widow in her mid-fifties, enters a bar frequented by immigrant workers, setting up the film's premise of the outsider. Although she is German and should be in a position of power, the camera captures her discomfort in this environment. Emmi is separated from the guest workers in the bar in a shot that exaggerates the distance between the individual and the group. The camera lingers longer than is customary for an establishing shot, focusing in turn on Emmi at a table and then the immigrant workers standing statically at the bar. The duration emphasizes her misgivings at having entered the bar and their mistrust of the outsider.

In an inspired twist of subversive irony, Fassbinder has made the German the outsider and the immigrants the majority. He prevents reading his irony as a conservative's complaint of being a stranger in one's own land by making Emmi an outsider among Germans as well. She hardly ever sees her children. She was a member of the Nazi party and yet is free of prejudice, as evidenced by her earlier marriage to a Pole. Moreover, she came into the bar because the strange music attracted her, evidence of an accepting and inclusive outlook. Like Ali, the true foreigner in the film, she is one of the most positive characters Fassbinder has ever created. Whatever weakness she reveals when she temporarily rejects Ali's Moroccan culture is redeemed by her understanding of his infidelity and her determination to support him through his illness.

Emmi's status as outsider extends to the German community as well, at least for the first half of the movie. In a dialogue sequence between Emmi and her coworkers about the habits of foreign workers, Fassbinder uses a series of edits that create a spatial isolation for Emmi that in reality does not exist. In actuality, and contradicting the space created by the edits, she is sitting near her colleagues. In fact a different camera angle could have emphasized their proximity. Similarly, when Emmi and Ali are in a restaurant and again later at an open-air café, camera placement shows the two of them isolated from the Germans who are occupying the same area, within speaking distance. Additionally, once Emmi is reintegrated into the majority (German) group, the camera comments unfavorably on her willingness to see foreign culture merely as an exotic object, or worse, to exclude it altogether. Thus in a reprise of the scene in which Emmi eats lunch at work, the camera now shows a young woman from Herzegovina behind the slats of a staircase, separated from the majority Germans. In a sense, even as she integrates into the German community, Emmi remains an outsider, for by this time viewer sympathies are with Ali. Emmi, who voices an objection to couscous, a traditional Mideastern dish, with the comment "this is Germany," here contradicts her earlier tolerance of things that are different.

When Emmi voices her objection to couscous, she flirts with succumbing to the prejudices of her children, neighbors, and coworkers. Played mostly by Fassbinder's ensemble troupe, these characters represent the clichés of the lower middle class. For example, Emmi's daughter and son-in-law (Irm Hermann and Fassbinder himself) are constantly quarreling, intentionally hurting one another with verbal



Ali seeks couscous and comfort from Barbara the bar owner after he and Emmi quarrel.

barbs. The son-in-law further represents the German worker who feels displaced by the influx of immigrant workers. He resents their ethic of hard work, which gets them promoted into supervisory positions ahead of Germans. The grocer, played by Walter Sedlmayr, embodies stereotypical prejudicial reluctance to believe foreigners can communicate in German. Indeed, all of Emmi's family, friends, and neighbors are bigoted; but they are also pragmatic enough to accept Ali when their self-interest requires that they do so. The only Germans in Emmi's sphere who display no prejudice against foreigners are the police and Emmi's landlord, an ironic twist for Fassbinder, whose movies generally reserve harsh criticism for authority and the wealthy.

As important as Emmi and her cohorts are to the film's criticism of racial prejudice, Fassbinder's true focus is Ali (El Hedi ben Salem), whose physical presence dominates the movie. Camera, music, and staging merge the political and personal texts of the film. Fassbinder thus creates an homage to El Hedi ben Salem's body. The other becomes an object to be exploited for its usefulness and displayed for its beauty. Ali combines traits that are both stereotypical and that counter the stereotype of the German guest worker: he endures poor housing, poor health, and discrimination; he displays an animal magnetism, muscular body, heavy accent, poor grammar, and existential outlook; and he exposes the irrationality of Germans' prejudices about the personal hygiene, sexual appetite, and motivation of the guest workers. Finally, Ali's personal philosophy of shrugging off offenses against his person, he uses the phrase "kif, kif" to show he is not bothered, works only on the surface. For his ulcerated condition belies the calm demeanor he presents to the world.

Ali is one of the most positive characters Fassbinder ever created, owing in part perhaps because the actor playing the part was his lover at the time. Moreover, he based the character loosely on the main characters in Douglas Sirk's *All That Heaven Allows*, one of Fassbinder's favorite movies. Like Ron Kirby, the main male character, Ali is philosophical, attentive, and respectful of others. Ali is also like Carrie Scott, the main female character, in that he is passive and unsure of his worth. These traits endear Ali to the viewer, an infrequent reaction to a Fassbinder character.

From the opening sequence and continuing throughout the film, Ali dominates the screen. In the bar at the beginning of the movie, Frank Lehar's "*Der schwarze Zigeuner*" ("The Black Gypsy") plays on the jukebox. No doubt the song is meant as an ironic comment on the movie's theme, which is about stereotyping the other. Yet the lyrics of the song turn Ali into the other by equating him with the exotic black Gypsy. At various moments in the film, the camera captures him in the shower, gazes at his physique as he makes muscles for Emmi's colleagues, and peeps at him from a distance as he undresses for his affair with the barmaid (Barbara Valentin). Moreover, it captures him in adverse moments also, as for example when he repeatedly slaps his face while gazing in a mirror, when he doubles over on the dance floor from an ulcer attack, and as he lies unconscious in bed as Emmi talks with the doctor.

That the film is indeed about Ali and not just workers' problems in Germany is clear from the way Fassbinder treats Ali's cohorts. Required for purposes of the plot, Ali's circle of friends and workers are for the most part unremarkable, and when they do project themselves into the movie, they do so in a negative rather than positive way. The women in the bar, for example, appear jealous of Emmi's relationship with Ali, which seems an irrational if not bizarre reaction given Emmi's age. Only the bar owner (Barbara Valentin) contributes in a major way to the film's text. But in this case it is Valentin and not the character she plays who makes the contribution. For Barbara Valentin is an icon of the bosomy blonde of the 1950s. Her presence in the movie pays homage to the very movies the New German Cinema was reacting against, but they would also be the movies with which Fassbinder grew up. In addition, by casting a star from the late 50s and 60s, Fassbinder gives the film a bridge from the Nazi period to the present of the film, thus showing an uninterrupted thread running from the Nazi past through the Adenauer years (the 50s and early 60s) to the present of the film. Fassbinder has emphasized this relationship in many of his films, most notably *Händler der vier Jahreszeiten* (*The Merchant of Four Seasons*) and *Die Ehe der Maria Braun* (*The Marriage of Maria Braun*).

The last scene in particular shows the degree to which Fassbinder uses cinematic technique to create the text. In this scene, Ali lies in the last bed of a ward, providing the background to a conversation between Emmi and a doctor about the hopelessness of Ali's condition. Emmi wants to be optimistic. The doctor, however, is telling her that even though Ali may recover, he will continue to suffer from ulcers and be back in the ward within the year. The stress on him of being a guest worker in Germany is too great for that not to be the case. Emmi's refusal to accept the doctor's pessimistic prognosis is placed into question as the doctor leaves and the camera zooms in on a mirror reflection as Emmi goes to Ali's bedside. The reflected

or virtual world they are in may have a happy Hollywood end. The last scene of its model, *All That Heaven Allows*, frames a worried Carrie at the injured Ron's bedside, behind them a large picture window opening onto a blue sky and snow-covered landscape into which a deer wanders. In *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*, when the camera cuts from the virtual image to the actual one, we see Emmi at Ali's bedside, behind them a small closed window out of which one sees the gray German sky, suggesting there is little reason for hope. To underscore the pessimism, the sweet sadness connoted by a melodic leitmotif that accompanies more intimate moments of the film reminds us of the motto with which the film began, "Happiness is not always fun." (RCR)

QUESTIONS

1. Fassbinder made his movie to address the prejudice many Germans had against guest workers at the time the film was made. Keeping this in mind, analyze the opening five minutes of the film (up to the time Ali and Emmi begin dancing), discussing in particular the prejudices being addressed in this scene.
2. What examples of prejudice are apparent in the film?
3. The movie is divided into two parts—before the marriage and after. Describe how relationships between the characters (between Emmi and Ali, but also between these two and the others) change from the first part to the second.
4. Analyze the *mise-en-scène* (the way Fassbinder places objects and characters in the frame) in the restaurant, when Ali and Emmi are having their wedding meal.
5. Identify the instances where Fassbinder turns individuals into objects of someone's stare. Why do you think he does this?
6. Do you find the end of the film optimistic or pessimistic? Be able to defend your answer with evidence from the last scene and also from the rest of the film.

RELATED FILMS

Katzelmacher (Fassbinder, 1969). The story's theme of ethnic prejudice centers on a group of twenty-somethings, bored with their lives, who take out their frustrations on an immigrant worker from Greece. It is a prime example of Fassbinder's minimalist style.

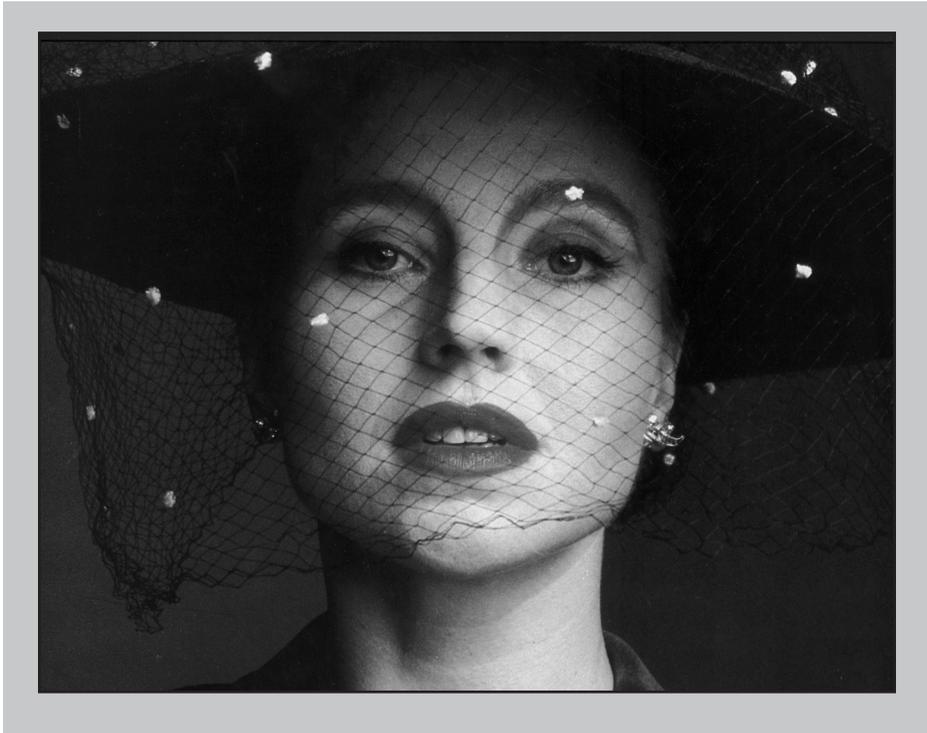
- Whity* (Fassbinder, 1971). The film is set in the American West late in the nineteenth century. It showcases three of Fassbinder's hallmark themes—homosexuality, racial prejudice, and dysfunctional family relationships.
- Germany in Autumn* (Fassbinder, among others, 1977). Fassbinder directed the opening sequence in this film about radicalism in Germany in the 1970s. His contribution is a raw portrayal of his own paranoia after the death of members of the Baader-Meinhof group.
- Händler der vier Jahreszeiten* (*The Merchant of Four Seasons*, Fassbinder, 1972). In addition to Fassbinder's usual themes of dysfunctionality in families and adultery, the film tells the story of a man who drinks and eats himself to death.
- Die Ehe der Maria Braun* (*The Marriage of Maria Braun*, Fassbinder, 1979). The film is Fassbinder's most successful film, breaking from the art-house and festival circuit into mainstream distribution. It is both a love story and a harsh criticism of German society during the 50s, the time of the so-called economic miracle.
- All That Heaven Allows* (Douglas Sirk, 1955). Fassbinder based his story of *Angst essen Seele auf* on Douglas Sirk's film. The original is set in New England and focuses on class difference as well as romance.
- Far from Heaven* (Todd Haynes, 2002). Todd Haynes retells the December–May romance, adding the element of homosexuality.

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Die Ehe der Maria Braun

*(The Marriage of Maria Braun,
Rainer Werner Fassbinder, 1979)*



CREDITS

Director Rainer Werner Fassbinder
Screenplay Peter Märthesheimer, Pea Fröhlich
Music Peer Raben
Cinematography Michael Ballhaus
Production Company Albatross Filmproduktion
Runtime 120 minutes; Color

Principal Cast

Hanna Schygulla (Maria Braun), Klaus Löwitsch (Hermann Braun), Ivan Desny (Karl Oswald), Gisela Uhlen (Mother), Elisabeth Trissenaar (Betti Klenze), Gottfried John (Willi Klenze), Hark Bohm (Senkenberg), Greg Eagles (Bill as George Byrd), Claus Holm (Doctor), Günter Lamprecht (Hans Wetzel), Anton Schiersner (Grandpa Berger), Sonja Neudorfer (Red Cross nurse), Volker Spengler (Train conductor), Isolde Barth (Vevi), Bruce Low (American at conference).

THE STORY

In a registry office that has just been hit by a bomb, Hermann (Klaus Löwitsch) and Maria (Hanna Schygulla) Braun are married during World War II. A friend returning from the war brings the news that Hermann is dead. Then Maria becomes the lover of an American soldier, Bill, whom she met in a GI bar where she works. When Hermann unexpectedly returns home from a POW camp, Maria kills Bill with a bottle. Hermann confesses to the crime and is sent to jail. During a train ride Maria meets the manufacturer Oswald (Ivan Desny), who offers her a job as “personal assistant.” She becomes indispensable to his textile firm because of her knowledge of English, her sense of business, and her physical attraction.

Oswald falls in love with Maria. Although Maria returns his affection, she refuses to become dependent since she lives only for the day when Hermann will be released from prison. When the moment of his release comes, he disappears without a trace (he went to Canada for a few years), but then he reappears suddenly after Oswald’s death. At the reading of Oswald’s will, Maria discovers that Hermann had made an agreement with Oswald to leave Maria alone as long as Oswald was alive. Because of this arrangement, Oswald had willed his fortune to the couple—half to Maria and half to Hermann. On July 4, 1954, while the reporter Herbert Zimmermann describes the final moments of a football game between West Germany and Hungary in Bern, the house explodes. Maria had not properly turned off a gas jet. The film leaves open whether it was deliberate or by accident and ends with a series of photos of past West German chancellors once the credits have rolled.

BACKGROUND

Rainer Werner Fassbinder was born in 1945 and died in 1982. He was probably the most significant director of New German Cinema. In just thirteen years, between 1969 and 1982, he made forty-four films about social issues, including movies about hatred of foreigners (*Katzelmacher* [1969] and *Angst essen Seele auf* [*Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*, 1973]), the realities of the economic miracle (*Händler der vier Jahreszeiten* [*The Merchant of Four Seasons*, 1972]), four movies about women in the 1950s (*Die bitteren Tränen der Petra von Kant* [*The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant*, 1972], *Lili Marleen* [1981], *Lola* [1981], *Die Ehe der Maria Braun* [*The Marriage of Maria Braun*, 1979]), and movies about gays in society (*Faustrecht der Freiheit* [*Fox and His Friends*, 1978], and *Querelle* [1982]), among others.

Fassbinder was a child of the second generation after Germany’s collapse in 1945, the generation that tried to rebuild Germany after it had lost its place in the world. While the 50s had been relatively peaceful and apolitical in German political life, with the majority of citizens concentrating on reconstruction and producing the much acclaimed *Wirtschaftswunder* (economic miracle), their sons and daughters, tired of the older generation’s reluctance to confront Germany’s past, began to criticize their parents. The younger generation’s criticism became more vocal in the

1960s with the introduction of the *Notstandsgesetze*, “emergency laws” that reminded many of the absolute power handed over to the government at the end of the Weimar Republic.

Subsequently the country, West Germany and prominently West Berlin, exploded in violence and witnessed thousands of demonstrations. The birth of West Germany’s homegrown terrorist organization RAF (Red Army Faction or Baader-Meinhof Group, named after Andreas Baader and Ulrike Meinhof) became the most prominent part of these protests. The protests swept most university campuses and high schools, and once the intellectuals had taken over, they became the expression of an entire generation.

Fassbinder’s career began in 1967 at the height of the student rebellion. He became a major spokesperson who hung on longer than most to the ideals of the “68 Generation.” Fassbinder’s films reflect one of the most pronounced expressions of the 70s. And to this day, Fassbinder’s films are considered among the most valid social documents produced by New German Cinema, with his plays still among some of the most performed of any postwar German dramatist. Originally considered too Western and too bourgeois for the German Democratic Republic (GDR), Fassbinder’s *Die Ehe der Maria Braun* was the only Fassbinder movie ever shown in the GDR, where the Communists eventually accepted Fassbinder’s criticism of West German society as reflecting their own.

Fassbinder’s protest is only partly intellectual and triggered by the inadequacy of West Germany’s rejection of the remnants of Nazi mentality. Fassbinder’s protest was more emotional than political; it was more artistic than documentarian. In a documentary about the responses to the events in the fall of 1977, he produced a short film about his own life that included a segment where he accused his mother of being a Nazi. Fassbinder saw himself as part of the political struggle, not above it, as so many intellectuals did at that time. In an interview, he conceded that his work was about “building utopias.” He admitted that if it came to the point where his fears were greater than his “longing for creating something beautiful,” he would quit working and living as well.

Fassbinder took very seriously Hannah Arendt’s accusation that World War II had incapacitated the Germans emotionally. In order to keep the memory of history alive, he wanted to make movies that engaged the viewer to the point of feeling the urge to become politically active. Obviously, this concept is pure Brecht, who had argued that theater, rather than being mainly entertainment, should unsettle the spectator. Brecht’s dramatic concept greatly influenced the New German Cinema of the 1960s, just as it had influenced French New Wave movies earlier. Americans not familiar with this dramatic concept should refer to the play *Cradle Will Rock*, which is about New York City’s cultural revolution in the 1930s. The movie was also released as a Hollywood film in 1999.

For Fassbinder, this dramatic concept is based on his own unhappiness with the political system under which he was living. Unlike the United States, where the private market forces of capitalism are used to drive the economy, West Germany had tried to combine capitalism with Socialism since its founding in 1949. The intellectual father of West German economic theory, Ludwig Erhard, whose book

Wohlstand für alle (*Welfare for Everybody*) became the republic's bible, promoted capitalism to generate social equality. The result of Erhard's policy was the prolonged economic growth called the *Wirtschaftswunder* (economic miracle). From 1950 to 1957, industrial production doubled, and the gross national product grew at a rate of 9 to 10 percent per year. This growth provided the engine for economic growth in most of Western Europe.

Because of this tremendous successful economic growth, the position of liberal and left-leaning intellectuals was clearly diminished; labor unions supported Erhard's policy and voluntarily reduced strikes by agreeing to the policy of *Mitbestimmung* (codetermination) at the workplace with mandatory representation of workers in the board meetings of corporations. Helping the economy was also the U.S.-initiated Marshall Plan. Germany was beginning to regain international respect and was able to shed its horrible reputation. As a result Germany played a key role in creating NATO and the European Economic Community (EEC or EWG in German), the forerunner of the European Union (EU).

Fassbinder disagreed with the entire direction his country was taking, as did most of the intellectuals of his time, who displayed a profound antipathy toward the German system, largely because of its real and perceived ties to the old Nazis. "I live in a state whose structure I reject," Fassbinder confessed. This rejection of his country became the trademark of the entire post-World War II generation, which was only softened by an idealization of Willy Brandt. Brandt, West Germany's first Social Democratic chancellor, had emigrated to Norway during World War II, something that put him above any criticism by the left, which we notice in the film's ending. And it was Willy Brandt who, when he finally became chancellor in 1969, began a new phase of looking back at the conservative founding years the republic had gone through in the 1950s.

EVALUATION

The movie allows for several readings. The first reading would be that Maria's obsession with her marriage is a thinly disguised allegory of postwar Germany's relationship to its past. This interpretation is more prominent among U.S. critics, who often see the movie as a criticism of West German politics. As one critic wrote, "Maria Braun tells the story of postwar Germany: success at a price—a loss of emotions, a coldness now considered to be characteristic of Germans. . . . His characters are casualties of the economic rationalism that pervades our thinking: . . . we spiritually prostitute ourselves in the pursuit of a private materialism" (Noonan, 44).

Of course, given the rapid economic recovery of Germany depicted in this film, it is not surprising to find critics emphasizing the person of Maria Braun as a metaphor that equates German economic success with loss of soul. And once this equation is made, it is easy to conclude that the film's apocalyptic end uncovers the fatal flaw in this concept of "too much too fast." In this interpretation, the destructive explosion becomes a warning to viewers that they ought to reexamine their own priorities in life.



Maria and Hermann in their new house.

A second reading of the movie shows the film as the personal story of a successful business woman who is engaged in a role reversal. She is a woman who is in charge of her own life, who becomes “male” in her pursuit of her career goals, and who considers those interests superior to those of being a loving partner or of being the standard “feminine” role model. This is a feminist reading of the movie where Maria Braun, who follows masculine rules, is portrayed as a symbol of her times and as a woman who takes the initiative in her relationship with men. For feminists, Maria Braun is the icon of an independent woman who has become liberated after the war, both sexually and politically. It is this reading that current viewers will probably relate to more as it provides a new perspective for an otherwise stereotypical scenario, the successful post-World War II businessman.

In this vein, we find numerous feminist readings that have been explored elsewhere, such as in the movie *Deutschland bleiche Mutter* (*Germany, Pale Mother*, 1980) by Helma Sanders-Brahms. The personification of Germany as a female character has a long tradition in Germany’s subversive intellectual history. Unlike Russia, where the country is identified with a female figure (the Russian “motherland”), Germany has always favored the strong masculine figure, which is embodied in the reference to the *Vaterland* (fatherland). Changing this image to a female figure produced a subversive interpretation of national history, as in Brecht’s plays, most notably in *Mutter Courage*. Fassbinder’s female protagonist embodies the message in *Die Ehe der Maria Braun*: if females ran the country, it would be better; but in the end we would end up in disaster just the same. People don’t make history—it is the social and economic conditions under which they operate. With this message, Fassbinder’s movie offers a decidedly Marxist angle.

Maria's unpredictable behavior determines the structure of the movie. She apparently wants to forget the past when she throws Hermann's picture under the train wheels. However, Hermann comes back repeatedly to gain power over her, not physically but mentally, the same way that Nazi memories keep recurring and haunting the life of Germans. Maria's marriage becomes a metaphor for Germany's past. Upon Hermann's second return, his indifference to her during their reunion, which should be like a honeymoon, is so disturbing that she decides to kill herself and Hermann.

With Fassbinder's Brechtian technique, we are constantly reminded that Maria is not a person in the traditional sense. To achieve this, Fassbinder uses devices such as stilted movements or affected speech for the characters to point out their phony emotions, their false choices, and the artificiality of the society they were creating with their "social capitalism." The movie's story line is also melodramatic and artificial and allows for reflecting history. With its melodrama, *Die Ehe der Maria Braun* undercuts the convention of a love story since the marriage does not end the movie but starts it.

To emphasize the Brechtian element, Fassbinder changed the ending in two ways: the original script showed Maria driving Hermann and herself off a cliff with the exploding car as the final sound. His script shows the indebtedness to classic Hollywood that Fassbinder wanted to represent in one of his movies. But while the movie pays tribute to classic Hollywood melodrama with its colors, sounds, and emotions, Fassbinder's Brechtian twist deconstructs this narrative model. His ending is both more ambiguous and more melodramatic than Hollywood, and it shows Maria's despair over her fate. Essentially Hermann had agreed to sell Maria to Oswald in his contract, and when she realizes that she was never in control of her own destiny, she kills herself and Hermann.

The film also linked the world of 1954, the time of the economic miracle, to the time of the Third Reich. The explosion reminds viewers of the opening of the film, when a poster of Hitler was shown amid exploding bombs. The year 1954 is also linked with the future through a series of portraits of the German chancellors Adenauer (1949–63), Erhard (1963–66), Kiesinger (1966–69) and Schmidt (1974–).

This ambiguous ending also seems testimony to Fassbinder's own admission that if there were no hope to permanently changing Germany's political system, he would give up trying. The movie, produced three years before his death, could therefore be seen as an anticipation of the fatal outcome of his own life. As with Maria's death, there has been speculation about whether Fassbinder's own end was an accident or not.

Fassbinder shot this film in a highly visual manner. Objects are used as instruments to focus the viewer's attention, with close-ups of keys, cigarettes, or pictures. In many scenes, people are lined up from front to back, starting with an object to set the scene, such as the clicking keys in the prison scene. This line-up indicates an artificial order in the scene, although it is always stilted and makes the viewer feel uncomfortable. These Fassbinder tableaux, as they have been called, are an important part of his alienating device.

Fassbinder experiments with sound throughout the film, making it an important element of the story being told. There is often a radio blaring in the foreground

while the characters speak in muted tones in the background. The authentic news reports on the radio are central for the development of the plot, as in the scene toward the beginning where Maria is waiting for her husband's return while the radio voice can be heard reciting an endless list of missing persons. The final scene uses Herbert Zimmermann's famous radio report of the German 1954 World Cup victory as a background to Maria's self-destructive antics. Equally important is Fassbinder's use of sound effects—such as machinery and jackhammers, which simulate the sound of machine guns—that permeate the film as an ever-present background noise. These background sounds remind us of the rebuilding going on throughout Germany during the economic miracle of the 50s.

Since the sound is not very clear and the radio broadcasts and industrial noises often drown out the dialogues, the subtitles on versions meant for non-German speaking audiences are essential. But the radio announcements remain mostly without subtitles, leaving non-German viewers confused as to the significance of the layered sound track. Since Fassbinder had not intended to subtitle the film for purposes of comprehending the plot, viewers in Germany might be equally confused. German speakers can understand the radio announcements but often do not hear the dialogue. Thus, the multi-leveled narrative remains a mystery to most viewers. While the visual text is universally understood, the aural level leads to an incomplete interpretation. This dependency on the visual often results in a flawed interpretation as the sound layer is undermined by the visual level.

The music soundtrack contains the hits of the 40s and 50s, mixing Nazi songs with German reconstruction songs. The "Horst Wessel Lied," a Nazi Party song, alludes to the Nazi past, as does the Sarah Leander 1930s classic "Don't cry for love alone" ("*Nur nicht aus Liebe weinen*"). Glenn Miller's "Moonlight Serenade" and his popular hit "In the Mood" illustrate the American military occupation culture, whereas the German 1950s pop classics "La Paloma," "Capri Fischer," and Catharina Valente's "All of Paris Is Dreaming of Love" ("*Ganz Paris träumt von der Liebe*") are signs of the new German economic miracle that point to vacation travel to European destinations. Vivaldi music is used for expensive restaurant scenes toward the end of the movie. (RZ)

QUESTIONS

1. Explain Hermann Braun's motivation for going to jail in Maria's place.
2. Explore the movie's Hollywood elements. Which Hollywood movie could it be compared with?
3. Show scenes where the camera focuses on objects.
4. Give examples of Fassbinder's sound technique. Do the movie characters respond to the sound, or do they ignore it? What does the sound element do in the particular scenes?

5. What is the significance of the radio reporting Germany's World Cup victory in the final scene? How does the radio report comment on the final tragic scene?
6. Deconstruct the final scene and make a dialogue, sound, and camera position protocol.

RELATED FILMS

Die bitteren Tränen der Petra von Kant (*The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant*, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, 1972) is based on Fassbinder's play of the same name.

Lili Marleen (*Lili Marleen*, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, 1981) is a movie about the famous war song with the same title. It stars Hanna Schygulla.

Lola (Rainer Werner Fassbinder, 1981) is the third movie in Fassbinder's *Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (BRD) Trilogy, the first being *Die Ehe der Maria Braun* and the second *Veronika Voss*.

Deutschland bleiche Mutter (*Germany, Pale Mother*, Helma Sanders-Brahms, 1980) is a war movie about a woman during World War II. The movie is discussed elsewhere in the book.

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Deutschland bleiche Mutter

(Germany, *Pale Mother*, Helma Sanders-Brahms, 1980)



Hans says goodbye to his bride Lene before being sent to the warfront.

CREDITS

Director Helma Sanders-Brahms
Screenplay Helma Sanders-Brahms
Director of Photography Jürgen Jürges
Music..... Jürgen Knieper
Producers..... Volker Canaris, Walter Höllerer,
Helma Sanders-Brahms
Production Companies..... Helma Sanders-Brahms Filmproduktion,
Literarisches Colloquium, Westdeutscher Rundfunk
Locations Berlin, Germany; Saint-Malo, Ille-et-Vilaine, France;
Length 123 minutes; Color

Principal Cast

Eva Mattes (Lene); Ernst Jacobi (Hans); Elisabeth Stepanek (Hanne); Anna Sanders, Sonja Lauer, Miriam Lauer (Anna).

THE STORY

Deutschland bleiche Mutter begins with the image of a Nazi banner and the voice of the film's narrator, a German woman, telling the story of her parents (Hans and Lene), which she states "is a conventional love story, except that it happened in that time and that place." Hans and Lene first see each other along the bank of a river where she is fending off a group of Nazis accosting her. Impressed by her feisty nature, Hans begins to court Lene. She is attracted to him because he is not political, unlike his friend Ulrich, who is an ardent Nazi. Shortly after they marry, Hans is drafted and sent to the front, upsetting Lene because Ulrich gets to stay on the home front. During a leave, Hans and Lene conceive a child. Hans returns to the front, and Lene struggles to keep herself and the baby safe. For a while they move away from Berlin, living with relatives. Eventually though they head back to Berlin after the war ends. Lene is raped, which she dismisses as the right of the victors. When Hans returns, neither Lene nor he is able to resume the marriage. Lene develops partial facial paralysis. The story ends with Hans leaving and Lene locking herself into a bathroom as Anna stands outside the door crying. The narrator tells us, "It was a long time before Lene opened the door. Sometimes I think she's still behind it. And I'm still standing outside and she'll never come out to me. And I had to grow up all alone."

BACKGROUND

Germany, Pale Mother is one of two films by Helma Sanders-Brahms that explore the life of her parents during World War II. The film is semi-autobiographical in nature and fictionalizes primarily her mother's experiences. The second film, *Hermann mein Vater* (*My Father Hermann*, 1987) is a television documentary about her father, in particular his experiences in the war. Although *Deutschland bleiche Mutter* was internationally acclaimed, it was poorly received in Germany. Birgit Roschy reports, "Reactions to the world premiere of *Germany, Pale Mother* at the Berlinale festival in 1980 were so merciless that it was withheld from theatrical release by the German distributors" (Roschy 2014). Renate Möhrmann writes that "critics leave the auditorium in droves at the premiere of Helma Sanders-Brahms's *Deutschland bleiche Mutter* . . . at the 30th International Film Festival" (Möhrmann 2014). Yet the film played in cinemas for two weeks in New York, sixteen in London, eighteen in Tokyo, and seventy-two in Paris (Roschy 2014). This was a period when the international film community was recognizing New German Cinema as fresh and creative, but not all films were being well received at home. As with all of her films, *Deutschland bleiche Mutter* challenges viewers' received notions and prejudices of history, historical institutions, and social relationships. As with most films, they are a reflection of the major social and political issues of the day. They are generally very critical, perhaps even strident, which may be a reason behind their early lack of acceptance in Germany. Or it may be that the director herself was at times overly confrontational. Sanders-Brahms remarked about her approach to history that "to

me, my country is first and foremost my mother and father, everything else is historians' twaddle. Historians always act as though they can interpret history objectively. That is simply a lie" (Roschy 2014).

Sanders-Brahms's films deal with the working classes, the marginalized, and women's issues. *Shirins Hochzeit* (*Shirin's Wedding*, 1976), for example, tells the tragic story of one of the many guest workers in Germany. *Heinrich* (*Heinrich*, 1977) tells of the life and suicide of Heinrich von Kleist, a nineteenth-century German writer whose novellas and dramas were a favorite source of New German Cinema directors because of their sensitive, rebellious heroes. The latter film won the top federal film prize of the time, a prestigious *Goldene Schale* (Golden Bowl), for best film of 1977. Yet according to Roschy (2014) it too was panned. Other films exploring feminist politics are *Flügel und Fesseln* (*The Future of Emily*, 1984), which examines the life of a successful actress whose parents disapprove of her decision to raise her child without the father, who however remains in the actress's life. *Apfelbäume* (*Apple Trees*, 1992) explores the life of a couple immediately before and after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, relating how they are imprisoned because of machinations of the Stasi, East Germany's secret police, and how the problems caused before the fall of the Berlin Wall cannot be reconciled once it is gone.

Deutschland bleiche Mutter stars Eva Mattes. Although not as well known outside of Germany as other contemporary German actors, Eva Mattes is one of the most prominent and important figures of New German Cinema, having made films for most of the New Wave's directors in parts that departed significantly from traditional women's roles. In her debut film, Michael Verhoeven's controversial *O.K.* (*O.K.*, 1970), Mattes won an Award in Gold from the *Filmförderungsanstalt* (federal film board) as Most Promising Young Actress for her portrayal of Pan Thi Mao, a young peasant girl raped by a band of soldiers. She also won awards for her portrayal of strong-willed adolescents in *Mathias Kneissl* (*Mathias Kneissl*, Reinhard Hauff, 1971), and *Wildwechsel* (*Jailbait*, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, 1973). She appeared in several other Fassbinder films, including *Die bitteren Tränen der Petra von Kant* (*The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant*, 1972), in which she plays the daughter of a lesbian mother, and *In einem Jahr mit dreizehn Monden* (*In a Year with Thirteen Moons*, 1978), in which she is the child of a transsexual father. One of her most unusual roles was in *Ein Mann wie Eva* (*A Man Like Eva*, Radu Gabrea, 1984), in which she plays a Fassbinder-like director in an anti-homage to the director after his death of a drug overdose. For Werner Herzog, one of New German Cinema's major directors, she played a prostitute in *Stroszek* (*Stroszek*, 1977) who immigrates to the United States with her boyfriend to get a fresh start, only to succumb to glib bankers and easy credit. In Herzog's *Woyzeck* (*Woyzeck*, 1979), she stars as an unfaithful wife murdered by her jealous and schizophrenic husband, Woyzeck, played by legendary actor Klaus Kinski. Finally, Mattes has appeared in some of Germany's best-known post-New Wave films. In *Celeste* (*Celeste*, Percy Adlon, 1981), she plays Marcel Proust's homemaker during the time he was writing *À la recherche du temps perdu* (*Remembrance of Things Past* 1913–22). She continues to have a successful career on German television in the long-running *Tatort* crime series and in the TV mini-series *Lena Lorenz*.

EVALUATION

The narrator of *Deutschland bleiche Mutter* describes her story as “a conventional love story, except that it happened in that time and that place.” Even if the romance is conventional, the film is not; for the story of Lene and Hans is told without sentimentality and from an anti-voyeuristic point of view. That is, unlike conventional love stories, viewers neither identify with the couple nor do they take pleasure in eavesdropping on their lives. The film is also unconventional in the sense that history plays as large a role as the romance. The opening shot of a Nazi banner signals that historical references will be more than backdrop; they at times will dominate the screen and swallow up the characters. The image of the banner is a reflection in a river as two men (Hans and a friend) row past a young woman (Lene) sitting on a riverbank. She has been harassed by young Nazis and sits now in a pose resembling that of a wounded Germania (an allusion to the allegorical figure that represented the German nation in the nineteenth century), a position that recalls the title of the film and the Bertolt Brecht poem from which the title comes. In the next scene, the two men from the boat are standing at a globe when Hans covers up Germany with his thumb while the other comments that “we will conquer the world – victory or destruction.” Again the screen is filled with a huge Nazi banner, and the narrator begins the love story. In the lives of the lovers, Nazism is so ubiquitous that it becomes transparent to them, even as they acknowledge its existence. For example, Lene’s comment that she only wants to marry a nonparty member may seem to signify that she is opposed to Nazi ideology. In reality, however, she looks through the dangers of Nazism and remains unconcerned with its significance for her welfare. She focuses only on her immediate wants. Viewers, however, cannot look through the Nazi symbols. They are foregrounded to such a degree that they cannot overlook the danger into which the characters place themselves when they fail to recognize the threat of National Socialism.

Deutschland bleiche Mutter does not depict a normal world that is only temporarily dysfunctional, as do many of the other films taking place in Nazi Germany. In this film, Sanders-Brahms instead creates a world whose major dislocations in the political sphere are destroying the happiness that is found in the private sphere. That is, the uppercase “History” of Nazism, the Third Reich, Hitler, the war, and the Holocaust is intertwined with the lowercase “history” of Lene and her husband, Lene’s sister, and their friends. The characters do not stand above their milieu, experiencing events as outsiders. Rather, they are affected by everything that happens. They do not lie to themselves that things are not that bad or that they might change. They simply accept them. They live their lives as if this is the new normalcy. Sanders-Brahms forces viewers to witness from a distance the characters’ involvement in events and their acceptance of them. She never lets the viewers get inside the characters’ minds to feel what they are feeling or to walk in their shoes. The characters are like “exhibit A” at a trial; their (non) actions are evidence of “normal” behavior during aberrant times.

Sanders-Brahms distances viewers with an almost minimalist camera style. The camera frustrates normal viewer curiosity by refusing to probe: it tracks forward only once, offers no zooms, and seldom tracks backward. Rather than move



Lene carries her daughter Anna as they travel near the end of the war.

forward and pry into the characters' lives and thereby satisfy the audience's urge to know them better, the camera remains fixed; characters move or do not move in relation to it. At other times the camera moves from side to side with the characters, and for scenes that depict forward movement, she cuts in rather than track slowly or zoom. Frequently, the camera lingers longer than is necessary to establish the shot and longer than is necessary to advance the narrative.

Sanders-Brahms's style is decidedly non-confrontational. It is patient, non-inquisitive, and unobtrusive. The only forward-tracking shot, which is noticeable for being the exception to the rule, is an aerial shot showing a city destroyed by bombs. The plane (camera) sweeps forward over the landscape, in a filmic metaphor of how war has raped Germany, expressing visually and thematically the masculine nature of war and destruction.

There is no easy point of entry for viewers into Sanders-Brahms's film. Emotional involvement is thwarted by camera distance, lack of movement, and even characters' reactions to occurrences. At times this works well. For example, in a sequence in which Lene is raped by conquering soldiers, the camera pans away immediately before the assault and focuses on the face of her daughter, who does

not comprehend what is happening. The camera, as directed by Sanders-Brahms, refuses to exploit the situation. It denies viewers the usual voyeuristic experience of sexual violence. It shows first the daughter's face and then focuses on Lene after the attack as she tells her daughter that rape is the prerogative of the victor. At other times, however, the non-probing camera overly frustrates viewers from experiencing what the characters experience. Its lack of movement may force viewer attention on the destructive nature of war, whether this be in images of the bomb-torn landscape or the scarred souls of the country's inhabitants; but this immobile camera also thwarts any emotional involvement in the lives of the characters. Even the close-ups of Lene and Hans do not create identification with them, for the characters are too unemotional for classic identification to take place. Viewers may contemplate them intellectually, but they are never allowed inside their world of feelings.

And yet in spite of this coldness, *Deutschland bleiche Mutter* is rich in historical allusions that lead to a full understanding of what the characters endured during World War II. Its narrative includes a variety of themes that highlight aspects of life under the Nazis—from coming of age during the Third Reich, to the warfront, to inner immigration, to the persecution of the Jews, and to fellow travelers. Moreover, the topics covered in the last third of the film include the major postwar problems. The facial paralysis Lene suffers at the end of the movie becomes a symbol for Germany's postwar malaise. Lene is a cipher for a divided nation: the veil that covers her face symbolizes, of course, the physically divided Germany. But in addition it symbolizes a people at odds with each other and with themselves as they try to understand defeat and try to come to terms with questions of responsibility and guilt. (RCR)

QUESTIONS

1. Describe the role of music in *Deutschland bleiche Mutter*. Is it diegetic (belonging to the world of the movie) or non-diegetic (outside the world of the movie)?
2. Look up Bertolt Brecht's poem "*Deutschland bleiche Mutter*" and describe its appropriateness as a title for the film. The German version and an English translation can be found at <http://permanentred.blogspot.co.uk/2009/11/o-germany-pale-mother-by-bertolt-brecht.html>.
3. What role does Hans's hazing by his comrades play in the themes and story of the film?
4. Describe your reaction to the final scene of the film in which Anna cries outside the bathroom door. What role does it play in the story?
5. Why do dental surgery and facial paralysis seem an appropriate symbol for Lene's emotional trauma after the war?

6. Describe in detail any sequence of two or three minutes, focusing in particular on camera movement, distance, and angle.
7. What does the film tell us about German life at home and on the front during the Third Reich?

RELATED FILMS

Mein Herz – Niemandem! (*My Heart Is Mine Alone*, Sanders-Brahms, 1997). The film tells the story of the Jewish writer Else Lasker-Schüler, one of few women writers in the expressionist movement. Lasker-Schüler is played by Lena Stolze, who had starred in two films of Nazi resisters, Sophie Scholl (*The White Rose* and *Last Five Days*, both 1982) and *The Nasty Girl* (1990).

Die Ehe der Maria Braun (*The Marriage of Maria Braun*, R. W. Fassbinder, 1979). Like *Germany, Pale Mother*, this film also tells the story of a woman married as World War II breaks out. It follows her life through the war and in particular through its aftermath. The film is treated elsewhere in this text.

Das schreckliche Mädchen (*The Nasty Girl*, Michael Verhoeven, 1990). Set decades after the war, a young woman investigates what the people in her village did during the Third Reich. It essentially tries to find out the answer to the question “What did you do during the war?”

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Die Blechtrommel

(*The Tin Drum*, Volker Schlöndorff, 1979)



Oskar joins a group of little people to entertain German troops on the front during World War II.

CREDITS

Director.....Volker Schlöndorff
ScreenplayJean-Claude Carrière, Günter Grass,
Volker Schlöndorff, and Franz Seitz
Director of Photography Igor Luther
Music.....Maurice Jarre
Producers.....Anatole Dauman, Franz Seitz, Volker Schlöndorff
Production Companies..... Argos Films, Artémis Productions, Bioskop Film,
Film Polski, Franz Seitz Filmproduktion,
GGB-14, Hallelujah Films, Jadran Film
Length..... 142 minutes; Color

Principal Cast

Mario Adorf (Alfred Matzerath), Angela Winkler (Agnes Matzerath), David Bennent (Oskar Matzerath), Katharina Thalbach (Maria Matzerath), Daniel Olbrychski (Jan Bronski), Tina Engel (young Anna Koljaiczek), Berta Drews (old Anna Koljaiczek), Heinz Bennent (Greff), Werner Rehm (Scheffler), Fritz Hakl (Bebra), Charles Aznavour (Sigismund Markus), Mariella Oliveri (Roswitha).

THE STORY

Oskar Matzerath, a young man who stops growing at the age of three, narrates the story of his life, beginning twenty years before his birth at the moment his mother was conceived by a Kashubian (an ethnic minority within Poland) peasant woman—and an escaped political prisoner. In picaresque style, Oskar takes us through the highlights of his life from birth to adulthood, years that span the period from the early years of the Nazi Party (1924) to the Nazis' defeat in 1945. At the age of three, Oskar receives a tin drum at his birthday party. Witnessing the difficulties and hypocrisy of adults in their relationships to each other, Oscar throws his drum down the cellar stairs of his home and tumbles after it. This willful act of injury stops his growth. Thereafter he takes solace in his tin drum, which never leaves his hands. When others try to take it away, his screams are so terrible they shatter glass.

As a young child, Oskar is an outsider, teased by the other children. He is forced to eat a witch's brew they concoct, but he also has moments of glory, as when he interrupts a Nazi rally in his hometown by playing his drum. At the age of twelve, Oskar meets Bebra. Like Oskar, Bebra had decided to stop growing as a child, but unlike Oskar, he actively takes part in political life. Oskar at first prefers to sit on the sidelines, but later he joins Bebra as an entertainer for the Nazis. Highly successful for his gift of being able to shatter glass, Oskar falls in love with one of the performers, and even though there is a war going on, he lives a few idyllic months as a performer for the troops. Oskar's lover is killed as the war ends, and he returns home.

As Soviet troops march into his town and discover the family hiding in a cellar, Oskar gives his father a Nazi pin, which the elder Matzerath chokes on while trying to swallow. He is subsequently shot by a Soviet soldier who mistakes the choking as belligerence. At his father's funeral, Oskar, after having lost most of his family, decides to start growing again.

Within this story of a boy's coming of age, we are introduced to a bizarre cast of characters representing the German middle class under Nazism, as seen through the eyes of a child, Oskar. Through Oskar's eyes we also witness the important events of the Third Reich, from the Night of Broken Glass (the evening when German gangs smashed the windows of Jewish-owned shops and burned synagogues) through the start of World War II and finally to Germany's defeat by the Allies.

BACKGROUND

It is hardly surprising that the years 1914–55 (the years of Günter Grass's novel *Die Blechtrommel* [*The Tin Drum*]) are the subject of hundreds of German feature films which use the Third Reich as a lens to examine mid-century German history. From 1914 to 1955, Germany underwent a succession of cataclysmic events, including the First and Second World Wars, a first try at a democratic government (the volatile Weimar Republic), a tragic dictatorship (the Third Reich), a division of the country (West and East Germany), being the geographical and psychological focal point of

the Cold War, and an unprecedented economic revival (the economic miracle of West Germany). As one of the most expansive of these films, *Die Blechtrommel* (1979) covers the years 1924 to 1945 (unlike the novel, the film stops with the end of war) from the viewpoint of the lower middle class. It gives us a panoramic view of history, showing how events affect everyday life during a period of extraordinary turmoil—constantly changing governments, clashes between extremist political parties, unemployment, shifting political allegiances, annexations, restriction of freedoms, war, and the tragedy of the Holocaust.

Die Blechtrommel plays in that period between the wars, which saw Germany grow in power, lusting after the lands it felt were illegally taken from it after World War I. It is set in Danzig, once a part of Germany but at the time of the film an independent state under the supervision of the League of Nations, and since World War II, the city of Gdansk, Poland. As a city that historically had been a part of Germany, Poland, and also an independent state, Danzig housed Germans, Poles, and Kashubians (a distinct Slavic tribe). The city thus serves to accentuate the growing restlessness of the German middle class to be considered a part of German history. Given the intermarriage between Germans, Poles, and Kashubians in the city, the setting also exposes the absurdity of Nazi racial policies, as the Kashubians were too Polish for the Germans, and not Polish enough for the Poles. Yet as the film ends where it began, in a Kashubian potato field, the setting also reminds viewers that conquerors come and go, while the land and the indigenous people remain.

Günter Grass's novel *Die Blechtrommel* became a cause célèbre when it was published in 1959. Grass's novel was not the first to try to come to terms with the past, but it was the most outrageous and daring, even irreligious and disrespectful according to some. Beyond bizarre and startling sexual imagery—eels crawling in and out of every orifice in a dead horse's head is one such example—Grass included enough parody of the Catholic Church to ensure complaints of sacrilegious behavior. Grass became the enfant terrible of German letters. Despite or maybe because of the notoriety, the book became an international bestseller.

In contrast with the novel, the release of Schlöndorff's film in 1979 elicited no public outcry. One reason for this is that the era of the Third Reich was now twenty-five years in the past, allowing for a more distanced relationship to the historical material being lampooned. Another reason the film created no political backlash is that its irreverent treatment of the past was no longer unique. Italian film directors such as Federico Fellini and Lina Wertmüller had broken ground with their films about the role of the common man in the rise of Italian fascism. The use of carnival-like spectacle with a bizarre cast of characters to show the people as willingly manipulated participants in the events of the day was no longer shocking, and neither was the relationship between sexual perversion and fascist power. Indeed, the film won a number of German film awards, an Oscar for Best Foreign Film, and a Golden Palm at Cannes, where it tied with Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*. By 1979, the political and moral climate had changed significantly to allow audiences to enjoy seeing the past parodied.

And yet, *Die Blechtrommel* did experience some minor difficulties in the United States. Even though the film had been available for viewing for almost

twenty years in the United States without any controversy, in 1997 a case was brought against Blockbuster Video in Oklahoma City for distributing *Die Blechtrommel*, which the suit alleged violated child obscenity laws that made it illegal to even suggest sexual activity between an adult and a minor. At issue were three scenes in the film, totaling two minutes and fifty-five seconds. Two of the scenes suggest, without actually showing, that Oskar and Maria, playing sixteen-year-old adolescents, engage in sex. The third scene suggests that Oskar is present as his father is having sex with Maria. The main problem of the scenes is that the actor playing Oskar was only eleven and the actress playing Maria was twenty-four at the time of the shooting. Thus the suit maintained that the film violated Oklahoma's child obscenity laws. Initially, the police confiscated Block Buster Video's tapes as well as raided a few private homes that had rented the tape. On appeal, the state's attorney general lost the case, and the movie was ruled not in violation of the obscenity statute.

EVALUATION

Volker Schlöndorff's *Die Blechtrommel*, which won an Academy Award for Best Foreign Film of 1979, offers viewers a Rabelaisian worldview of the Third Reich. A carnival atmosphere prevails throughout the film, which turns the usual presentation of the horrors of the Third Reich on its head, forcing viewers to laugh at the tragic and thereby gain insight into the origins of that tragedy, namely, the populace's willingness and even eagerness to participate in the spectacle. Schlöndorff allows us to see characters outside and inside the spectacle by adopting the double perspective of Grass's novel, which sometimes shows the world through Oskar's eyes and at other times shows Oskar as participant. This doubling of perspective allows viewers to participate in Oskar's exploits and yet to remain distanced from them and thus able to judge them. Moreover, the paradox of seeing Oskar in the middle of events as well as on the outside looking at those events is mirrored in the actions of characters, as they are both on the outside of events and being acted upon and participating in them and acting.

Schlöndorff's triumph in *Die Blechtrommel* was capturing the grotesque nature of Günter Grass's characters. For years conventional wisdom held that Grass's novel could not be made into a movie, primarily because of the character of Oskar, a child who stops growing physically (but not emotionally nor sexually) at the age of three.

Interpreted by many readers to be a dwarf, an interpretation Grass rejected, Oskar represented a challenge of casting to any director, who had to find an actor who could play a man in a boy's body. For the entire story, Oskar resembles a three-year-old in physical stature whose mind must grow from that of a three-year-old through adolescence to adulthood. Schlöndorff found the solution to this dilemma in actor David Bennent, a twelve-year-old in a diminutive body.

As should be clear from the introduction to the film's characters, *Die Blechtrommel* revolves around Oskar. As the film opens, we hear Oskar's voice relating his story, beginning before his conception. In the double perspective that will



Oskar has climbed a tower and is screaming to interrupt the tryst between his mother and Uncle Jan in the hotel across the street. His scream will shatter glass throughout the area, signaling the start of the Night of Broken Glass.

continue throughout the movie, we see Joseph Koljaiczek, his grandfather, through the eyes of his grandmother, Anna, but then we also see Anna and Joseph together from a neutral or directorial viewpoint. In addition we see the sequence through the eyes of the yet unborn Oskar, giving him participatory status (it is his story), as well as authorial status (Oskar is narrating the story). Since he has not yet been born, he cannot really see the event. Schlöndorff thus makes suspect from the beginning Oskar's first-person narration. And yet, since we see the scenes also through a neutral lens, we are willing to believe the tale.

Die Blechtrommel presents Oskar's life in a series of vignettes that often close with a memorable tableau. A number of these sequences early in the movie revolve around Oskar's ability to break glass with his screams, which he does whenever his drumming is threatened. For example, at school, after a lengthy set up during which the camera cuts back and forth between Oskar and the teacher, Oskar begins screaming when the teacher grabs his drum. The camera then focuses on the teacher from Oskar's perspective as her glasses shatter and blood spatters on her face. A similar scene occurs in the doctor's office, but here the final shot shows the broken glass jars holding medical specimens, focusing on a fetus. In another of these episodes, the camera shows us Oskar climbing to the top of a tower to get closer to a window, behind which his mother is having an affair with Jan Bronski. The camera shows the entire scene—tower, Oskar, windows of hotel—then focuses on the hotel from Oskar's perspective as he screams and shatters the window glass. These vignettes, just a few of many similar scenes in the movie that become tableaux,

parody German institutions and human foibles. More important, they show how the participants are both perpetrators and victims. Through their actions, they cause the glass to break; and when it shatters, they suffer the consequences.

There is disagreement on whether the movie is a criticism of fascism or an artistic description of it. Oskar represents both the witness of and participant in the rise of Nazism. As witness, his childlike status allows the distorted logic of the Third Reich to seem like the aberrations of a child's mind. Thus his father can be both a reluctant and enthusiastic participant in Party events. In Oskar's eyes, his mother can be attracted to the irrational, sensitive Jan Bronski and the sensible, loutish Matzerath. More important, Oskar's father could be either of these two men. Oskar's status as child also allows him to feel responsible for events that occur, in particular the deaths of his father, his mother, and Jan, his uncle. His status as a man in a child's body allows for showing the complicity of the German artist class in supporting Hitler and the Nazis.

Schlöndorff adapted the absurdity of Grass's other characters equally well. Alfred Matzerath, Oskar's father, played by noted actor Mario Adorf, represents the German middle class who goes along to get along. Although he exhibits no strong inclination to join the Nazi Party, he eventually does so, presumably at the prodding of his wife. Matzerath is the petty bourgeois who wants most to be left alone, a state that historical circumstances will not allow, and who then makes a disastrous choice to join in. Seen through Oskar's eyes, he is a bumbling cuckold who later becomes Oskar's rival for the young housemaid Maria.

Jan Bronski, Oskar's uncle (who might be Oskar's actual father), offers a contrast to the Matzeraths' middle-class German values of hard work and political patriotism. He represents the Kashubians who want to stay out of the fight for Danzig. Neither German nor fully Polish, he is forced by circumstances to fight for the Polish cause, thereby bringing about the death he had hoped to prevent by remaining neutral.

Agnes Matzerath, Oskar's mother, played by Angela Winkler, offers the relief for understanding the two men. She exists mostly as a cliché—the woman torn between wanting a sensitive man for her bed (Jan Bronski) and a strong man for financial support (Alfred Matzerath). Blaming her husband Alfred for Oskar's physical size, she eventually succumbs to feelings of guilt for being unable to choose between her lover Jan and her husband. That guilt reaches its high point in a sequence of sexual gratification and food consumption. After refusing to eat eels that her husband has prepared, she is sexually gratified by Bronski as Oskar watches; she then returns to the kitchen and greedily consumes her husband's eels. Shortly thereafter she dies. Schlöndorff's adaptation of this sequence from the book again reveals his expertise in capturing on film the supposedly unfilmable.

Oskar's parents and uncle reflect the dual perspective of the film as described earlier. For we see them as Oskar sees them, at the same time that we see Oskar as they do. This is true of other characters in the film as well. Anna Koljaiczek, Oskar's grandmother, is Oskar's protector and refuge. She is also the only true survivor of the war. While others in Danzig are forced to flee the coming Russians, she remains tied to the land. The opening and closing tableaux of Anna in the fields roasting

potatoes at an open fire suggest the eternal truth of history that events and leaders come and go, but the people suffer and remain in place.

Oskar's neighborhood is populated by grotesque stereotypes, at least as we see them through Oskar's eyes, representing various aspects of the German petty bourgeois under the Third Reich. One neighbor, for example, plays the Communist hymn, the *Internationale*, leaning out his bedroom window. But later, as the Nazis gain power, he switches allegiances and songs. The greengrocer, played by Heinz Bennent (David Bennent's father), rhapsodizes about the organic principles of the potato, bizarrely imitating the Nazi's blood and soil philosophy. The Jewish shopkeeper Sigismund Markus, played by Charles Aznavour, a well-known French *chansonier* of Armenian descent, refuses to believe the Nazis are dangerous; and once he recognizes that he should leave, it is too late to escape. His German first name and last-minute baptism cannot help him. But through the eyes of these three, we also recognize the child in Oskar.

Seen through a child's eyes, the characters and events are exaggerated, sometimes bigger than life, and they seem more a reflection through a funhouse mirror than a glimpse through a window. Schlöndorff makes effective use of the child's perspective to parody Nazi iconography in the film. He integrates Nazi emblems, speeches, and personalities into Oskar's perception at the same time that he offers them for the viewers' contemplation. Of the many references to Nazi ideology within the film, two in particular underscore Oskar's role as participant and bystander. In the first of these, Oskar has accompanied his father, who has finally decided to join the Nazi party, to a rally in front of the Polish post office. Oskar sneaks under the stands in front of the parade ground, and the camera shows Oskar as he hides under the bleachers while also showing the scene of the parade grounds as seen from under the stands where he is hiding. When the officials arrive and march toward the podium, a band plays the opening of a march in 4/4 rhythm. Under the stands, Oskar is drumming away at random in 3/4 rhythm. We see him drumming, and then from his perspective we see the feet of the band members and marchers slipping into a 3/4 rhythm until all are dancing to the "Blue Danube Waltz." On the one hand, Schlöndorff may be referencing the annexation of Austria, as the scene takes place around the time Austria was annexed into Germany (early 1938), and many viewers would associate the melody with Austria, not Germany. On the other hand, he may be showing how easily people can be manipulated (made to march to a different drummer). In either case, one has to ask if it would really have been that easy to thwart the Nazi propaganda apparatus.

In the second and more frightening sequence, Oskar tells a fairy tale in which Santa Claus turns into the *gasman*. At the mention of the word *gasman*, fires fill most of the screen area. The fairy-tale style then continues as Oskar narrates that "once upon a time there was a toy merchant named Sigismund Markus. Once upon a time there was a drummer named Oskar." Eventually the screen reveals the dead body of Sigismund Markus, who has committed suicide on the day after the Night of Broken Glass. This scene, like many in the film, plays on multiple levels. On the one hand, the reference is literal, as the Nazi apparatus did indeed turn into a machine of destruction, killing millions in concentration camps, many through asphyxiation by gas. On the other hand, the reference is also to the positive mood that reigned in

the early years of the Third Reich, when for much of the German population (non-Jews and non-Communists) Hitler and the Nazis brought the country out of economic depression only to destroy the country with a disastrous war.

In addition to camera perspective and historical iconography, Schlöndorff shows culpability through characterization. Nowhere is this clearer than in the figures of Bebra and his circus cohorts, all of them as small in stature as Oskar, who meets Bebra early in the Third Reich, a time at which Oskar proclaims he is only an onlooker. Bebra warns him, "We must not be onlookers, but run the show so others don't run us. And the others will come." When Bebra's prophecy proves correct and the Nazis achieve power, Oskar joins their group to entertain the troops, thereby working for the Nazi ministry of propaganda. Schlöndorff, true to Grass's book, here parodies the artists who worked for the ministry of propaganda, proclaiming after the war that they did so only to be able to work or to have at least some control over what happened to them and others. Using little people to represent artists is of course a self-explaining metaphor of powerlessness. But at the same time, it also reflects the lack of moral conviction in the artists as fellow travelers. It also suggests that one could have refused.

Die Blechtrommel is an expansive epic that examines the question of the moral responsibility of ordinary people in historical events. It looks at the role that ordinary citizens played in the rise of Nazism, their culpability in keeping the Nazis in power, and the choices that could and perhaps should have been made to prevent tragedy. The film, following the novel, conflates physical stature, emotional selfishness, and intellectual immaturity to point an accusatory finger at everyone for what occurred under Hitler and the Nazis. The film's stance toward its subjects, however, is ambivalent. On the one hand, it shows the church, the artists, and most importantly the ordinary citizens as victims of circumstances. On the other hand, it suggests these groups abdicated their responsibility for making moral choices and allowed the Nazis to come to power and carry out their murderous agenda. (RCR)

QUESTIONS

1. Describe in detail any extensive sequence of shots that make up one of the film's many vignettes. Be sure to include camera perspective, camera movement, musical accompaniment, number of shots, placement of characters and objects within the shots, and overall content of the sequence.
2. Although we are asked at times to identify with Oskar, at other times it is clear he is simply not a likable character. How does Schlöndorff get us to identify with the figure, and how does he distance us from him? Give as many specific examples as you can.
3. Discuss the sequence with Bebra, Oskar, and Roswita from the aspect of political opportunism.

4. Identify and place into context the film's many references to the historical milestones of the Third Reich.

RELATED FILMS

The following films all focus on the theme of opportunism during the Third Reich.

Black Book (Paul Verhoeven, 2006). Dutch director Verhoeven follows the adventures of a woman who lives between two worlds, working for the Dutch resistance and yet also collaborating with the Nazis.

Mephisto (Istvan Szabo, 1981). Based on the Klaus Mann novel of the same name, the film follows the career of an actor who had the chance to leave Germany during the Nazi period but chose to stay to advance his career. The movie is loosely based on the career of Gustav Gründgens, who successfully sued to keep the novel from being published in Germany.

Hanussen (Istvan Szabo, 1988). The middle of Szabo's trilogy of films, *Hanussen* tells the story of a fortuneteller who rises to fame by predicting Hitler will come to power. Based on an historical figure.

Lili Marleen (R. W. Fassbinder, 1981). Fassbinder deconstructs Lale Andersen's assertion that she was not an opportunist but simply sang a hit song.

Die Mitläufer (Eberhard Itzenplitz and Erwin Leiser, 1985). This documentary examines the role of Germans who said they were not Nazis but did nothing to prevent the atrocities committed during the Third Reich.

The following films, like *The Tin Drum*, use humor to look at a very serious subject.

Katz und Maus (*Cat and Mouse*, Hans Jürgen Pohland, 1967). The movie is based on another of the works of Günter Grass, *Katz und Maus* (*Cat and Mouse*), a novella in which the character of a dwarf who plays a tin drum also appears.

Europa Europa (Agnieszka Holland, 1990). Known in Germany by the title *Hitlerjunge Salomon*, Holland's film follows the escapades of a young Jewish man who passes for Aryan German during the Third Reich. The film created quite a controversy when the German film industry refused to nominate it for the foreign film category of the Academy Awards on the grounds that it was not truly a German film.

Jacob, der Lügner (*Jacob the Liar*, Frank Beyer, 1975). An East German film that narrates the story of a man in a concentration camp who keeps up the spirits of his fellow inmates by reporting made-up information he claims to have heard on his hidden (nonexistent) radio.

Jacob the Liar (Peter Kassovitz, 1999). Robin Williams starred in this remake of the East German classic cited above.

Mein Führer (*My Führer*, Dani Levy, 2007). This fictional, psychological comedy about Adolf Hitler and a Jewish prisoner who helped him become a great orator created some controversy because of its subject matter.

Wir Wunderkinder (*Aren't We Wonderful*, Kurt Hoffmann, 1958). Hoffmann, who began his career under the Nazis, created one of the first humorous portraits of Germans

during the Third Reich. Even though successful with the public, the film is criticized for trivializing a serious subject.

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Die bleierne Zeit

(Marianne and Juliane, U.S., The German Sisters, UK, Margarethe von Trotta, 1981)



Marianne (Barbara Sukowa) pounds her fist on the table as she berates her sister Juliane (Jutta Lampe) for her non-militancy. Eventually Juliane will come to understand her sister's point of view.

CREDITS

Director Margarethe von Trotta
Screenplay Margarethe von Trotta
Director of Photography Franz Rath
Music..... Nicolas Economou
Producer Eberhard Junkersdorf
Production Companies..... Bioskop, Sender Freies Berlin
Length 106 minutes; Color

Principal Cast

Jutta Lampe (Juliane), Barbara Sukowa (Marianne), Rüdiger Vogler (Wolfgang), Doris Schade (the mother), Franz Rudnick (the father), V er enice Rudolph (Sabine), Luc Bondy (Werner).

THE STORY

Die bleierne Zeit (*Marianne and Juliane*, 1981) opens with Juliane Klein in her study in the late 70s, its bookcases filled with binders labeled with each year from 1968 through 1980. Presumably, these binders contain media accounts and documents about the West German terrorism wave, the role her sister Marianne played in terrorism, and the aftereffects of 1977, the year in which three terrorists, including her sister Marianne, died during the same night in an urban prison—deaths interpreted by the government as suicides but by many others as coldblooded murders perpetrated by the state. Pensively pacing back and forth in her study, Juliane does not seem to have her own definitive version of the recent events. When she opens one of the binders, the flashbacks characterizing most of the film begin.

Unlike Juliane, who champions societal change by working within the West German system, her sister Marianne performs acts of terrorism—shown by the film as arson, bank robberies, and bombings—to jolt German society into effecting sorely needed humanitarian changes. The film shows two episodes with Marianne during the time she hides in the underground—one episode involves a clandestine meeting with Juliane in the garden of a sculpture museum, and another involves Marianne, accompanied by two males from her terrorist group, causing havoc and emotional turbulence when she turns up in the middle of the night in the apartment of Juliane and Wolfgang, Juliane’s partner for ten years.

Not long after her visit to Juliane’s apartment, Marianne is arrested and placed into isolation in a countryside prison. She is later transferred to an urban prison. Juliane regularly visits Marianne in both facilities. These sequences are shown as flashbacks and represent Juliane’s attempts to understand Marianne and, by extension, herself as well.

Juliane’s obsession with Marianne, who is arguably her alter ego, escalates after Marianne’s death. Soon she has no goal left in life other than to prove that Marianne could not possibly have committed suicide. Sacrificing her relationship with Wolfgang, she moves out of their apartment; she abandons her work at the women’s journal. But when she finally has the proof she needs, no one is interested in publishing her findings, for terrorism and the puzzling prison deaths of the terrorists are no longer relevant news items.

BACKGROUND

The film’s title is borrowed from the Friedrich Hölderlin (1770–1843) poem *Der Gang aufs Land. An Landauer*. The phrase “*die bleierne Zeit*” translates as “leaden times.” As with the phrase in Hölderlin’s poem, the title of Margarethe von Trotta’s film refers to two different time periods; it draws parallels between the “leaden” present and the restrictive, “leaden” times of a period in the past. In the film, the present refers to the 1970s and the past to the 1950s in the Federal Republic of Germany. Summed up best by West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer’s official 1957 campaign slogan, “No Experiments,” the 50s came to designate a dull, stagnant period, an era of retreat into the authoritarian structures of the German

past that affected politics, education, business, and family life. Measures to denazify the German population had been largely halted. In the Cold War atmosphere of the 50s leading to German rearmament and to West German membership in NATO, silence about the Nazi years prevailed in family life, as well as in schools and universities.

By the time of the student revolts in the late 60s, the silence regarding the Nazi period and the attendant lack of mourning for the victims of the Third Reich had become oppressive. While students in West Germany, as many students worldwide, protested the U.S. involvement in Vietnam, giving rise to a strong peace movement, they also railed against the authoritarian stratification of German life. They believed that the Nazi period still influenced public and private discourse and prevented Germans from applying lessons of the past to the present and the future. Without a confrontation with the past, many felt there could be no formation of a plausible German national identity.

Despite their strong protests against German institutions, a large number of activists eventually opted to change the system from within. In their “march through institutions,” they advocated reform through a politics of “small steps.” Impatient with slow progress, others turned to more radical behavior—for example, to the terrorism concluding the last years of the West German 60s and dominant during several years in the 70s. The most feared terrorist organization became the RAF (*Rote Armee Fraktion* or Red Army Faction). Beginning with bank robberies, bombings, and kidnappings, the RAF tried to provoke authoritarian reactions from the government and its police, thinking that repressive responses from the state would outrage the majority of Germans and cause them to dismantle their stifling, authoritarian institutions. The organs of the state did respond repressively, eliminating many civil liberties and embarking on a search to find all who sympathized with the terrorists as well as the terrorists themselves. But there was no widespread revolt against the tactics of the state. Instead, as polls indicated, many approved of the governmental steps taken to ensure the security of the population, giving rise to the conviction that the 70s too were confining, reactionary, “leaden” times.

The RAF was also known as the Baader-Meinhof Group (“gang” was the term used by rightists). Because the leftist journalist Ulrike Meinhof was involved in freeing the terrorist Andreas Baader from prison in May 1970, she became most associated with Baader, although in reality her friend Gudrun Ensslin (Baader’s girlfriend)—if anyone—functioned as the group’s female leader. Baader, Ensslin, and Meinhof (along with two other terrorists) were captured in 1972. Meinhof supposedly committed suicide in 1976. According to the official government version, Baader, Ensslin, and a third terrorist committed suicide on October 18, 1977, in Stuttgart’s Stammheim prison, in response to government commandos seizing a Lufthansa plane in Mogadishu, Somalia. The plane had been hijacked by RAF terrorists in order to force the release of the terrorists imprisoned in Stammheim. Up to today, the suicide explanation remains in doubt, with skeptics believing that the state had killed the terrorists, a view that *Marianne and Juliane* endorses. In the fall of 1977, businessman Hanns-Martin Schleyer was also kidnapped and subsequently murdered. The three events—plane hijacking, suicides, and Schleyer’s kidnapping—precipitated rancorous debates between the left and right. One of the

most effective filmic responses was New German Cinema's *Deutschland im Herbst* (*Germany in Autumn*, 1978), an attempt to come to terms with rising terrorism in Germany and the curtailment of political freedoms that it engendered.

Trotta has repeatedly emphasized that she did not intend to produce a documentary about terrorism or about the lives of the sisters Gudrun and Sigrid Ensslin. Because insufficient time had passed—at the beginning of the 80s—since the terrorist acts and the Stammheim deaths, Trotta was convinced that an objective, factual film of this controversial chapter in postwar German history was impossible. Thus, she produced a fictional film that merely drew on the relationship of the two sisters.

Unfortunately, Trotta's fear of still being judged according to documentary criteria—according to the veracity of each filmic episode—was justified. When the film appeared in German movie theaters in 1981—only four years after the Stammheim deaths—the terrorism topic was still relatively present in public memory. Many objected to what was not included in the film. Others wished a clear stance on terrorism from the filmmaker or an unambiguously critical position on the limitations placed on women in the political arena. Trotta, on the other hand, continued to stress the fictional nature of the film and its underlying concerns: questions of remembrance and forgetting, of adequate mourning for the victims of the past, of directions taken in life and their repercussions on those who chose opposite directions, of the past in the formation of memory, and of memory in the formation of national identity. Accordingly, Trotta neither provides nor wishes to provide an objective depiction of reality but includes many experiences of her generation. She explores how the times are reflected in individuals—in their emotions, thoughts, and behavior—and how the personal reflects the political, as well as how the personal is the political. These concerns are present in most of her films, including *Das Versprechen* (*The Promise*, 1995) and *Rosa Luxemburg* (1986).

EVALUATION

Despite the name sequence in the American translation of the title, Juliane and not Marianne is the main character of the film. Appearing in almost every sequence of the film, Juliane reacts—mainly emotionally—to everything that occurs, much in keeping with Trotta's preference for showing the significance of events through their subjective repercussions on those experiencing rather than causing them. In the course of the film, flashbacks reveal how Juliane increasingly assumes the rigorous, non-compromising nature of the adult Marianne, suggesting that Marianne represents her own repressed self, in part the solitary non-conformist she was as a teenager.

Though the time frame of the film is the beginning of the 80s (its establishing and final shots occur then), the flashbacks constituting most of the film focus on the 70s, but within these there are flashbacks to the 50s and also to immediate postwar Germany. In the first flashback—an unspecified time at the beginning of the 70s, Marianne's husband Werner brings their child Jan to Juliane, requesting that she assume responsibility for him. But Juliane refuses to change her life for



Juliane's distance from her sister's radical politics is underscored by the barrier between the two sisters.

either Marianne's or Jan's sake, stressing the importance of her work and her time-consuming commitment to it. Why did Marianne have to abandon family life, asks Juliane, at exactly the point where she (Juliane) was beginning to settle comfortably into something approximating a bourgeois kind of life? Her presumption that Marianne was acting this way merely to spite her introduces the sibling rivalry and resentment that will surface in other flashbacks throughout the course of the movie.

Marianne's deprecatory attitude toward Juliane's work and lifestyle compounds Juliane's resentment. Sarcastically, Marianne says that thoughts—Juliane's arsenal in her essays and lectures—do not alter anything, implying that only her kind of revolutionary deeds succeed in changing the world. During the second flashback, Marianne's nocturnal visit to her apartment, Juliane watches with helpless anger as her sister disparages her clothes, disgustedly throwing some of them on the floor. When Marianne, before departing with her terrorist companions, sarcastically tells Juliane to go on sleeping, Juliane senses that Marianne is contemptuously referring to the way she lives her life. Though there were two flashbacks up to this point in the film that suggest a common bond between Juliane and Marianne, they do not dispel the impression that Juliane seethes with a resentment toward Marianne that leaves no room for either understanding or affection.

In the sequence immediately following the nighttime disruption, Juliane tries to visit Marianne in prison. As she looks at the prison walls from her waiting room, she recalls a similar wall in front of her family's house and the childhood race she had with Marianne from the wall to the house entrance, a race neither of them won. Another flashback in the wake of this one also accentuates the sisters' similarity: in unison, both slow down their walk through the family house as they approach the

Grünewald painting of the crucifixion in the hallway. Quite likely more favorably disposed to Marianne owing to these memories of experiences uniting them, Juliane is particularly jolted when Marianne refuses to see her in the prison's waiting room. At this point, she starts the questioning that is to characterize her throughout many of the remaining filmic episodes.

To change Marianne's mind about seeing her, Juliane writes her a letter that recalls their childhood and teenage times together. Later Marianne comments that Juliane neglected to mention only the nightshirts they had always buttoned for each other, regardless of how ill-disposed the one was toward the other. By highlighting the nightshirts at least four times, the film stresses this childhood bond of sisterly love as the one that irrevocably unites them (certainly it is the only concrete memory from their mutual past that Marianne recalls with pleasure). After mailing the letter that had prompted Juliane to remember many aspects of their mutual past, the film presents the third and fourth flashbacks from the 70s into a remote past, the fourth consisting of four episodes from the 50s.

Occurring in 1955, at the midpoint of the "leaden" 50s, the flashbacks emphasize Juliane's rebellious teenage attitudes and Marianne's considerate, helping nature—that is, for the first time the fundamental personality differences between the two sisters appear rather than their similarities. And it turns out that Juliane was a far more rebellious teenager than Marianne. In fact, Juliane mocks Marianne's wish to be needed in life, dismissing it as voluntary enslavement. Juliane belligerently defends her habit of going to school in black jeans rather than in the dresses girls were expected to wear. When her father is on the verge of hitting her for irreverent comments, she dares him to lay a hand on her, asking if he can reconcile beating his daughter with his Sunday sermons as the pastor of their church. Later Juliane disparages Marianne's intercession with their father on her behalf. At the dance held at the end of the school year, Juliane wins a wager made with Marianne: Juliane waltzes by herself over the entire dance floor, contemptuous of the consternation she causes all around her.

The flashbacks to 1955 mark a turning point in the film, as it is here that the film reveals Juliane's growing understanding of and identification with Marianne and suggests that she recognizes her own repressed self in Marianne. Juliane is not yet prepared at this point to write the article on Marianne her coworkers on the women's journal wish from her, stubbornly resisting to embrace the credo that the personal is the political.

So that Juliane learns to dilate her personal experiences into the experiences of her generation—that is, to make her personal identity serviceable for the formation of a national identity—Trotta provides her with other sets of flashbacks that clearly link the personal and the national. These flashbacks first touch on the 50s and then on the last war months in 1945. In one way or another, all involve the war and German reactions to it. In 1945, the two sisters are shown as young children victimized by the war, its air raids, and the atmosphere of terror extending even into the air-raid shelters. In a school episode, Juliane tries in vain to induce a class discussion on Paul Celan's *Todesfuge* (*The Death Fugue*, 1948) in place of Rainer Maria Rilke's *Herbsttag* (*Autumn Day*, 1902), the former a poem on the Holocaust, the latter a so-called timeless poem of little relevance for forging a

national identity predicated on confrontation with Germany's recent past. In another episode, Juliane and Marianne watch Alain Resnais' newly released film *Nuit et brouillard* (*Night and Fog*, 1955) on the concentration camps. Both sisters feel ill after watching emaciated victims being piled into mass graves. While these flashbacks identify wartime and postwar memories as generational experiences shared by many Germans, they also unite the personal with national and political aspects of German life.

The episode following the viewing of the Resnais film centers on Marianne recounting to her sister the terrors of imprisonment in an isolated cell, ostensibly drawing parallels between wartime Nazi tortures and the fascist-type state control in the 70s. Once the national turns into the personal for Juliane, as occurs in this episode, she is finally ready to write the article about Marianne for the women's journal. Almost as an afterthought, when she is already writing, another flashback (in a sense the missing link) materializes. In 1968, after viewing a film about Vietnam with Juliane and Wolfgang that shows emaciated victims reminiscent of those in the Resnais film, Juliane recalls Marianne pronouncing that—in the face of such horrors—she will never come to terms with a repressive state apparatus. Though not specified, it is implied that Juliane interprets Marianne's turn to terrorism as the result of the Resnais film (when she could not do anything against a horrific event that had already transpired) and the Vietnam film showing horrors committed in the present and demanding political engagement. Juliane's article on Marianne focuses therefore on the personal and national biographical incidents that shaped Marianne's militancy. For her part, Marianne rejects Juliane's thesis that the personal has led to the political. Marianne emphasizes that by considering people solely as products of their societies, Juliane justifies her inaction and ignores her guilt. Juliane's obsession with Marianne increases after Marianne's transfer to the modern prison, as does Marianne's dependency on Juliane and her visits. At the end of the last prison scene, Juliane's face is briefly superimposed on Marianne's, indicating that Marianne is no longer the Other but now decisively a part of Juliane. Though Marianne's face, a singular face, is obliterated after her death, one could also argue that Marianne's disappearance provokes the disappearance of Juliane as a separate personality. After Marianne's funeral, Juliane's fainting and subsequent illness echo Marianne's death. To Wolfgang's consternation, Marianne's belongings, transferred to his and Juliane's apartment, seem to be taking over the apartment. Juliane's single-mindedness in attempting to prove that Marianne could not possibly have committed suicide—implicitly also an assault on the state—mirrors Marianne's single-mindedness in attacking the state. When she in addition relinquishes her job at the women's journal and leaves Wolfgang, Juliane seems to be imitating Marianne's rejection of her accustomed environment and accustomed mate. Finally, Juliane in a sense becomes just as isolated as Marianne had been.

No one is interested in publishing Juliane's findings when she can prove, after three years of research, that Marianne's death was not the result of suicide. Much as the repressed Nazi past, Germany's terrorist past had become a history to be repressed. Having explored the repressed parts of her own personal and national self through her obsession with Marianne, and having accepted them through imitating Marianne, Juliane is no longer prone to repressing the past. Acting

independently of Marianne, she now willingly does what Marianne did not do: Juliane rejoins society by taking custody of Marianne's son Jan. (MS)

QUESTIONS

1. The film does not satisfactorily explain Marianne's conversion from an obedient, dutiful daughter to an enraged combative militant. On the basis of what the film does show, however, what do you think is the basis for this change?
2. Draw a timeline for the events in the film starting with the film's opening in the 1980s.
3. Trotta clearly intends us to understand Marianne's death as murder at the hands of prison guards and not suicide. What suggests that she did not commit suicide? Is there evidence to the contrary?
4. Trotta includes scenes that work well to further the story but also have meaning beyond what is being told. Analyze the scenes in which the girls button each other's nightshirts and the one in which they stand in front of the Grünewald painting "The Crucifixion." What might these scenes be saying about the girls' relationship to each other and to German history?
5. What role does the father's religious vocation play in the film?

RELATED FILMS

Das zweite Erwachen der Christa Klages (*The Second Awakening of Christa Klages*, Margarethe von Trotta, 1978). One of many films that were part of the rebellious wave of German movies in the 1970s. The film tells about three friends (one woman and two men) who rob a bank to help a daycare center.

Deutschland im Herbst (*Germany in Autumn*, Consortium of directors, 1978). The consortium of German directors, among them R. W. Fassbinder, Volker Schlöndorff, and Margarethe von Trotta, produced the film as a response to Germany's rise in terrorism and the country's increasingly restrictive political policies.

Rosa Luxemburg (1986). Trotta creates an ode to Germany's most famous female revolutionary, active during the First World War.

Die Stille nach dem Schuß (*The Legend of Rita*, 2000). Volker Schlöndorff revisits the turbulent times when the Red Army Faction was still active.

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Das Boot

(*The Boat*, Wolfgang Petersen, 1981)



Johann (Erwin Leder) trying to keep engines running during an attack.

CREDITS

Director Wolfgang Petersen
Screenplay Lothar G. Buchheim, Wolfgang Petersen
Director of Photography Jost Vocado
Music Klaus Doldinger
Producers Michael Bittins, Mark Damon, Ortwin Freyermuth,
John W. Hyde, Edward R. Pressman, Günter Rohrbach
Production Companies Bavaria Film, Radiant Film, Süddeutscher Rundfunk,
Twin Bros. Productions, Westdeutscher Rundfunk
Length 149 minutes (original release);
209 minutes (director's cut); Color

Principal Cast

Jürgen Prochnow (Captain), Herbert Grönemeyer (Correspondent), Klaus Wennemann (Chief Engineer), Hubertus Bengsch (1st Lieutenant), Martin Semmelrogge (2nd Lieutenant), Bernd Tauber (Chief Quartermaster), Erwin Leder (Johann).

THE STORY

Germany's submarine fleet was a feared enemy at the start of World War II, but by 1941, U-boat assignments were becoming more and more dangerous as the Allies improved detection through reconnaissance flights and sonar. The opening credits tell the fate of German submarine crews, announcing that of 40,000 men on submarines, only 10,000 survived the war. Wolfgang Petersen's *Das Boot* (*The Boat*, 1981) tells the story of one of the boats.

Under command of Capt.-Lt. Heinrich Lehmann-Willenbrock, the German submarine sets out with a mix of seasoned and fresh crewmembers. Included among the crew are a reporter for the ministry of propaganda who is to document the boat's exploits, a gung-ho lieutenant, the captain (Willenbrock, who is also known as *Der Alte*), the chief engineer, and Johann, the veteran crew chief. As in most submarine epics, to test the readiness of the crew, the beginning of the voyage includes a mandatory drill, during which the boat dives to depths beyond the limits specified by the vessel's technical specs. Later, when the boat is under actual attack, the film reprises the diving sequence, complete with shots of gauges, the scared looks of the men's faces, and the sound of creaking seams and popping bolts. In addition to diving sequences, the film contains skirmishes with destroyers and a narrow escape through the Straits of Gibraltar. On the whole, though, the story takes second place to characterization of life aboard a submarine, which we see as confined, tedious, tense, and scary.

The film's story follows the convention of most war films, especially those set at sea. After a mandatory drill to test the vessel and a genuine attack to test the mettle of the crew, viewers are given a brief respite from the tension of a battle film before a second, more harrowing attack that endangers the ship and individuals. Finally, there is victory. These sequences are framed as in most war films by a prologue that introduces the characters before setting off and an epilogue that shows them arriving home. It is in the framing (prologue and epilogue) that Petersen includes the little critical commentary that the film contains of war in general and of the Nazis in particular.

The movie is based on the best-selling novel, *Das Boot* (*The Boat*), by German author Lothar G. Buchheim. Petersen follows Buchheim's plot closely, eliminating only the book's brief references to the captain's backstory and that of some of the minor characters.

BACKGROUND

An article in *Spiegel* magazine traces the fascination with the submarine as a German secret weapon to gain military superiority back to World War I. Early in the war, German submarine attacks gained early successes, as for example when the *U-9* sank three British destroyers in thirty minutes. Such success led to the use of submarines in questionable situations, leading to the policies after 1916 that allowed the boats to break a blockade around England by sinking all commercial vessels, even if the ships were from neutral nations. The sinking of one of these neutral ships



Cramped quarters on *U-Boot 96*.

under this policy, the *Lusitania*, led to America's eventually entering the war and perhaps hastened Germany's defeat. According to the *Spiegel* article, the German military's belief in the superior fighting power of its submarine fleet led to over reliance on the U-boats in World War II, which from a National Socialist perspective was an ill-advised strategy. The degree to which the strategy was ill advised can be seen in the mortality rate of the submarines: 9 boats were lost in 1939, and that number escalated to 251 in 1944. May of 1943 was particularly disastrous for the U-boats. Forty-one boats were destroyed, or 25 percent of the fleet, with a loss of 1,785 men. From the forty-one destroyed boats, only one hundred eighty-three men survived.

The Boat reprises a trend of German films of the 1950s, examining the fate of ordinary servicemen during the Third Reich. While most of the films from that earlier era focused on the army, Petersen's film looks at men in the German submarine fleet. Moreover, whereas films such as *Hunde, wollt ihr ewig leben?* (*Dogs, Do You Want to Live Forever?* Frank Wisbar, 1959) and *08/15* (Paul May, 1954/55), to name but two, stress the division between enlisted men and their officers, *The Boat* focuses on the unity of the boat's crew, even within their ideological differences. The crew's enemies are first and foremost the British destroyers hunting them and second the German High Command, whose orders run contrary to the realities of submarine combat.

Nonetheless, *Das Boot* reflects the same values of patriotism, camaraderie, and sacrifice of the earlier films, which has led some critics to dismiss the movie as an apology for Germany's armed forces. To be sure, the film presents war in all its ugliness of death and destruction, but, as critical reviews in America and Germany at the time of the film's initial release point out, it also presents the values of war

as independent of the cause. Rather than engaging the reality of submarine combat critically, the film involves viewers in the fate of men who are dying bravely. It obscures the cause for which they are fighting. One character exhibits superhuman endurance after earlier suffering a crisis of courage that had led to a nervous breakdown. In this respect, Petersen follows the convention of many war films, where acts of courage are often exhibited by characters who earlier had displayed fear when confronted by enemy fire.

Petersen's *Das Boot* remains unique in the history of German film. Not only was the film a success in Germany, but it also attracted large numbers of viewers and fans in England and America, even out-earning Tom Tykwer's phenomenal success twenty years later with *Lola rennt* (*Run Lola Run*, 1998). Moreover, the film was released in a five-hour mini-series version for television in 1985, four years after its theatrical run, again scoring well with viewers and critics in Germany and England. In Germany, the extended television version received a 50 rating, meaning half of the country's television sets were tuned in to *Das Boot*. To commemorate its twenty-fifth anniversary, the film was recut and released as a 216-minute movie, as opposed to the original 149 minutes. Petersen's intent in re-releasing the film at this time was to take advantage of innovations in sound production. The creaking boat, popping bolts, and depth-charge explosions, already impressive in the original cut, become another actor in the reedited version, as each pop or explosion ratchets up the fear factor of the movie.

The film's popularity boosted Petersen's career. Shortly thereafter, he was invited to Hollywood, where he has scored success with films such as *Enemy Mine* (1985), *Air Force One* (1997), *In the Line of Fire* (1993), *Outbreak* (1995), *The Perfect Storm* (2000), *Troy* (2004), and *Poseidon* (2006). *Das Boot* has influenced the reception of other films. For example, there is hardly a review for Joseph Vilsmaier's *Stalingrad* (1993) which does not pay homage to *The Boat* and compare the later film with its predecessor. In addition, the trailers and adverts for the American submarine epic *U-571* (Jonathan Mostow, 2000) trade on the fame of Petersen's film.

EVALUATION

That viewers identify with the men of the submarine is not surprising, as Wolfgang Petersen has structured his film along both classic Hollywood war films and also classical Hollywood disaster epics. As already mentioned, another German director, Joseph Vilsmaier, also had success in *Stalingrad* with the Hollywood formula for war films. It also tells the story of World War II from the perspective of Germans in the Third Reich. *Stalingrad* and *Das Boot* both ask viewers to identify with men fighting for a regime that public opinion considers criminal and even barbaric. But whereas Vilsmaier melds Hollywood with the German war films of the 1950s, Petersen's film is pure Hollywood, concerned first with entertaining the audience with a taut, suspenseful drama, sympathetic characters, and special effects. Only secondarily does the film offer critical commentary on the futility of war, and only for viewers familiar with history does the film serve as a reminder of the Nazi terror. If one removed the prologue and epilogue that frame the sub's adventure in *Das*

Boot, these characters could just as easily be on an American submarine attacking the Japanese in the Pacific.

The opening scene captures the men of two U-boat crews, one just returning and one shipping out the next day, celebrating at a club. Petersen's mise-en-scène and camera work evoke both the idealism and the cynicism of various members of the crew, who vomit, pass out, chase a female singer, and make disparaging but also laudatory remarks about their leadership. On the one hand, one could read the scenes as critical of the war effort, since the men drink themselves into oblivion. On the other hand, the scenes reflect the film cliché of men on leave. As veterans, the men know what is in store for them. Moreover, the opening corresponds to the war-film formula by introducing the (stereo) types familiar to us from other films—a hardened but kind captain, a seasoned veteran, a member of the military press, a young kid with a pregnant girlfriend, and a gung-ho second-in-command. The introductory scenes give a preview of things to come.

As the submarine's voyage gets underway, Petersen both exploits and parodies his genre. He transforms Hollywood clichés of life on a submarine into horrific scenes of tedium, heroism, and death. The boat puts out to sea amid waving from shore and a martial arrangement of the German folk song "*Muss i' denn.*" The captain gives a short motivating speech, and we see the men settling down in the ship. But the motivating speech is nothing more than four words: "Well men, everything OK?" And from the beginning the camera shows the boat to be nothing more than a long tube crammed full with provisions and men. Even one of the toilets has to be used for storage. The cramped quarters that one expects to find on a submarine here are made more claustrophobic through shots down the middle of the boat that block our vision as we try to see through to the end. In similar fashion, a long tracking shot that introduces the various compartments follows the journalist as he moves forward, doubles back, circles around, and dodges people and objects in a tour de force of choreographed motion.

Petersen also uses a conventional war film arc: simulation, first attack, calm after the storm, second more harrowing attack, and victory. Again, however, his camera work, audio track, and plotting raise the film above conventional war movies. Petersen's shots are always close in, even more than is necessary for the cramped quarters of the set, an effect he achieved by filming from within the action rather than from outside of it. Individuals are isolated, their faces emerging from shadows as if subjects of a Caravaggio or Goya portrait, two Spanish artists who specialized in chiaroscuro, a style that emphasized light and shadow. The tempo of the editing builds suspense during the four sequences when the sub submerges. The first is a drill; the second comes when the sub is on the attack; the third occurs when the sub is being attacked; and the final takes place when the sub is trying to resurface. During the scenes of the boat's submerging, the visual track alternates close-up scenes of the crew's faces with shots of the dial of the depth gauge. The audio track for these scenes first has the voice of a crewmember announcing the depth of the boat, which is then followed by sounds of bolts popping. The intensity of the visuals and sounds builds through the first three scenes of submerging until the third ordeal. Here, gloom hits its deepest point as the men admit to each other that they believe the captain knew the mission had to fail. Later in the film, as in a Hollywood movie, a

similar scene is reprised, as depth gauge and the worried look on men's faces alternate rapidly until the screen goes black, followed by a shot of the gauge needle as it rises. Here again, though, even with the apparent happy ending, Petersen challenges the genre and acknowledges historical reality, turning victory into defeat as planes destroy the boat in its safe harbor.

Petersen may follow the war genre, but he also follows the genre of the disaster movie that was popular at the time *The Boat* was being filmed. Films such as *Poseidon Adventure* (Michael Neame, Irwin Allen, 1972), *Airplane* (James Abrahams, David Zucker, 1980) or *Jaws* (Steven Spielberg, 1975) rely on mystery, physical confinement, and disbelief in the possibility of the disaster to create suspense and draw viewers into the impending doom facing the characters.¹ Petersen structures *Das Boot* along similar lines. The ships and planes of the enemy remain, for the most part, an unseen threat. The first time the destroyer attacks, the periscope view shows nothing until the ship is on top of the sub. Likewise the planes that dive toward it are spotted at the last moment, and the disaster that befalls the sub going through the straits occurs after it seems the boat just might pull off its escape. In all these situations, Petersen hides the danger until the last possible minute. And similar to films such as *Jaws*, at such heightened danger he imposes a threatening melodic line in the background. Physical confinement is of course a must on a submarine; but as mentioned earlier, Petersen makes the confinement more claustrophobic than most boat movies. Here, taking a cue from *The Poseidon Adventure*, Petersen does not allow outside shots once the ultimate disaster occurs. And even before the disaster, shots outside the ship only remind viewers of the trapped nature of the men on the sub. Finally, Petersen even employs the strategy of disbelief in the disaster. The boat's mission is doomed from the start. The captain knows this and tries to get two of his men off the submarine before leaving port, but the German High Command denies his request, signaling to viewers that something has to befall the mission.

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of the movie is that it is told from the German crew's point of view. Just how problematic this point of view could be is revealed by a video game based on the film and released in 1990 with the tag line "stalk and destroy Allied warships during winter of 1941 in the midst of World War II." In brief, players are being encouraged to have fun destroying Nazi Germany's enemies. For the intended purchaser, an adolescent in America or England, this meant of course destroying the boats that their ancestors could have been on. To be sure, Petersen's film is not that crass. Moreover, he attempts to mitigate the situation for viewers who may have sympathized and maybe even empathized with the enemy by shocking them through the conflagration that ends the film into a realization of whom the men on the boat represent. His coda or epilogue to the film is not a triumphal return to homeport. Rather, as the U-boat docks and the men disembark, Allied planes attack, killing most of the men and sinking the submarine. In this way, the film references Germany's defeat and cancels out the jubilation at their victory in the Straits of Gibraltar. (RCR)

1. See Douglas Fowler, "Alien, The Thing, and the Principle of Terror." *Studies in Popular Culture* 4 (Spring 1981): 16-23.

QUESTIONS

1. Wolfgang Petersen's *Das Boot* has been called one of the best antiwar films ever and yet has also been criticized for turning a blind eye to the cause for which the German submarine crew was fighting.
 - a. Support the view that the film is antiwar, giving examples from the film.
 - b. Support the critics who say that the film is not critical enough of the historical facts; again cite examples from the film.
2. Petersen's film follows classical film structure, with earlier scenes being reprised later in the film for dramatic or ironic effect. Locate the instances where the following scenes take place and explain how they function within the movie.

The captain tells the crew: "Well men, everything OK?" ("*Na Männer, alles klar?*")

The men listen to "It's a Long Way to Tipperary."
3. Identify the songs used in *The Boat* and describe their function.
4. Compare this film to the story, perspective, and structure of other war films you have seen.

RELATED FILMS

- 08/15* (Paul May, 1954/55). May introduced the formula for German war films in which the focus is on the trouble enlisted men have with their superior officers rather than with the historical enemy.
- Haie und kleine Fische* (*Sharks and Small Fish*, Frank Wisbar, 1957). Wisbar's film is an early submarine epic extolling the bravery of the men in Germany's navy. It ends with a popular folk melody, suggesting everything will be fine.
- Stalingrad* (Joseph Vilsmaier, 1993). This war epic is often compared favorably to Petersen's *The Boat*.
- Hunde, wollt ihr ewig leben?* (*Dogs, Do You Want to Live Forever?* Frank Wisbar, 1959). An early movie about World War II on which Vilsmaier based *Stalingrad*.
- Die Brücke* (*The Bridge*, Bernhard Wicki, 1959). Like Petersen, Wicki crafted a film with a strong pacifist message about the horrors of war.
- U-571* (Jonathan Mostow, 2000). Mostow's film trades on the popularity of *The Boat*. It upset British critics that the screenplay changed the successful mission that the film is based on from being a British operation to being an American one.

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Der Himmel über Berlin

(Wings of Desire, Wim Wenders, 1987)



CREDITS

DirectorWim Wenders
ScreenplayWim Wenders and Peter Handke
CinematographyHenri Alekan
EditorPeter Przygodda
MusicJürgen Knieper
Production Design Heidi Lüdi. Road Movies Filmproduktion/
Berlin and Argos Films/Paris
Length128 min; B/W (partly), Color

Principal Cast

Daniel (Bruno Ganz), Marion (Solveig Dommartin), Cassiel (Otto Sander), Homer (Curt Bois), Peter Falk (Peter Falk).

THE STORY

The theme of *Der Himmel über Berlin* is established in the opening sequences as the camera glides through the sky above Berlin, picking up scenes of life beneath with conversations and thoughts. It is 1986 and the city is still divided by the Wall. The camera adopts the view of angel Damiel (Bruno Ganz), whose eye opens the film. Damiel is introduced wearing a black trench coat atop Berlin's *Gedächtniskirche*. His wings are the only indicators of his existence as an angel, while the rest of his outfit contradicts our image of angels. Damiel is invisible to adults but visible to children. We continue to follow Damiel as the camera wanders through the city, moves through apartments, and enters Berlin's central library, where more angels are introduced.

During their first meeting, Damiel and his companion-angel Cassiel (Otto Sanders) exchange observations, which testify to their ability to survey and record, and also their inability to shape the events in the human world: Cassiel fails in an attempt to save a young man from committing suicide. Other scenes show individuals suffering physically or emotionally as the angels observe, unable to intervene. Their helplessness is a source for Damiel's motivation to seek fulfillment as a human being. When he meets Marion (Solveig Dommartin), a circus trapeze artist with angel wings affixed to her costume, his desire to join the world of mortals becomes overwhelming. The face-to-face encounter between Damiel and Marion climaxes in Marion's long monologue as an appeal for the necessity of human relationships and, above all, love.

BACKGROUND

Wim Wenders is one of the most prominent German directors. Born August 14, 1945, in Düsseldorf, he studied philosophy and medicine and moved to Paris to study. After enrolling in the Graduate School of Film and Television in Munich, Wenders began his professional career as a filmmaker in 1971 and quickly became a leading figure of New German Cinema. Francis Ford Coppola invited him to the United States in 1978. Wenders spent four years living and working in the United States, where he filmed *Der amerikanische Freund* (*The American Friend*, 1977) and *Der Stand der Dinge* (*The State of Things*, 1982). In 1982 Wenders moved back to Germany. Other films of Wenders include *Paris, Texas* (1984), *Bis ans Ende der Welt* (*Until the End of the World*, 1991) and *Buena Vista Social Club* (1998). Wenders's road movies tell the story of a journey or search.

The setting of *Der Himmel über Berlin* is decisive to the meaning of the film. For Wenders, Berlin was the cultural and historical heart of Germany, a city that still bears the wounds of World War II and its consequences. He felt that "Berlin is divided like our world, like our time, like men and women, young and old, rich and poor, like all our experience. . . . My story isn't about Berlin because it's set there, but because it couldn't be set anywhere else. . . . The sky is . . . the only thing that unites these two cities, apart from their past of course" (Wenders, "An Attempted Description of an Indescribable Film").

During World War II, Berlin was the most heavily bombed city in Germany; it endured air raids nearly every day. After the end of the war, the city was divided into four sectors, one for each of the allied forces. Three of these sectors formed West Berlin; the fourth became the Soviet sector and remained separate during the Cold War. West Berlin was referred to as the Island Berlin because it was surrounded by Communist East Germany and was accessible only by air, land, and sea corridors. On the evening of August 13, 1961, East Germany began the “Wall of China” operation. This operation called for the closing of all borders. At 1:00 a.m., sixty-three of the eighty-one check points were closed. By dawn, roads connecting the two cities were dug up and barbed-wire barricades set up. Soon the first wall was built; it was rebuilt four times over the next twenty-eight years. The final Berlin Wall, built around 1979, consisted of concrete slabs with steel rods. With the construction of the Wall, West Berlin lost more than three hundred thousand commuters from East Berlin. Potsdamer Platz, once a bustling square in the middle of Berlin, became no-man’s land. On November 9th, 1989, after the East German government was overthrown, the Wall was torn down. German reunification began the following year. Since then, Berlin has quickly become the modern capital of united Germany.

EVALUATION

Wim Wenders works outside of Hollywood’s commercial bastion, and as such he takes great liberty in the crafting of his films. He is known for inventing the story as he goes along, a practice that has often brought him to the brink of despair but has proven effective. Wenders believes that no text can approximate the feeling you get while you’re making a film, the feeling for the style, the look, the idiom of a film. The only available text at the outset of *Der Himmel über Berlin* were several dialogues that Austrian writer Peter Handke had written upon Wenders’ request. Handke had worked with Wenders on a previous film, *Die Angst des Tormanns beim Elfmeter* (*The Goalie’s Anxiety at the Penalty Kick*, 1972), based on Handke’s book with the same title, and *Falsche Bewegung* (*False Movement*, 1975), but he declined to write the script for *Der Himmel über Berlin*. Wenders did not consider this to be a problem and started filming. Wenders describes Handke’s dialogues as “lighthouses” he had to maneuver around. Most of the scenes were drafted either the night before the shooting or were devised during the actual shoot.

The absence of a conventional story and the film’s loose structure led critics such as Alexander Graf to describe the film as a fragmentary collection of impressions that is linked only by the figure of Damiel. Although Damiel is the central figure in the film, he is not its protagonist. Wenders wanted to have three characters in the film, each experiencing the world differently. The trio of Damiel, Marion, and Cassiel should be seen as a unity who with their opposing characteristics represent the complexity of the human mind. Through their eyes, Wenders wants the viewer to understand the relationship between opposites, such as angel/human, man/woman, loneliness/partnership, and how they complement rather than contrast with one another. Wenders and Handke regard these opposites as a platform from which the full spectrum of life develops.



Marion on the trapeze in *Circus Alekan*.

Wings of Desire is a movie about the forces of history that Walter Benjamin had first introduced in his discussion about “angels of history.” Benjamin’s discussion stems from a painting he owned by Paul Klee, *Angelus Novus*. Wenders showed Benjamin’s explanation in one of the books in the library scene. Klee’s *Angelus Novus* pictures an angel who is about to move away from something he is contemplating, which Benjamin interprets as turning toward the past.

Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress (Benjamin 1968, 257–57).

Thus, *Wings of Desire* becomes an aesthetic exploration of Benjamin’s philosophical concept that separates it from any other movie within the New German Cinema movement. Most noticeable is Henri Alekan’s use of a free-floating camera that emulates the angels on their flight path and forces the viewer into the observer angels’ points of view. The second and perhaps more noticeable technique is the alternation between black and white and color footage to indicate the difference between the world of the angels and “reality.”

Daniel plays a key role, since he takes the viewer on a journey through both worlds and transcends the opposites. He distances himself from the world of the angels and moves toward the world of mortals, Marion’s world, a trapeze artist

with whom he has fallen in love. Damiel is a character without a history of his own. He is an observer. In his conversation with Cassiel, Damiel expresses a desire to “feel a weight grow in him to end the infinity and to tie him to earth.” Damiel longs to unite with the human world and become a participant who connects with humans and has his own history. His journey is the ultimate transformation from an immortal to a mortal, a sort of “anti-transition,” in that transcendence has traditionally meant passing from the mortal to the immortal world. In becoming human, Damiel does the opposite, yet for him it is the ultimate transcendence. It is this “anti-transition” that brings together the opposing elements in Damiel and unites him with his human counterpart Marion.

After his transformation, Damiel’s desires and fascinations with the mortal world are validated, and his suspicions about the benefits of becoming a participant are true. Until this point, he had been the observer of many people’s thoughts and lives, a great diversity of people who had in common only their solitude and their existential or spiritual questions, and perhaps their dreams of the “world behind the world,” the spiritual world. These people are a mirror for Damiel, showing him what he is by making him aware of what he is not. What they have are real senses and experiences, something Damiel lacks, while he has wings and eternal life, something that real people dream of. People, however, can directly change their lives and the world around them; Damiel cannot. What sets them most apart from Damiel is that the answer to their questions is exploratory rather than absolute. In contrast to Damiel, there are no black-and-white answers in their world. That is, experience rather than distanced observation shapes human beings.

Marion is the perfect balance for Damiel, except that she is fixed to the trapeze rather than suspended in the sky. She is a human angel, which explains Damiel’s fascination. As part of a traveling circus, she has no roots. Also as part of the circus, her life is filled with sensual experiences, something Damiel is missing. Yet she longs for what he hopes to shed—the permanence of the spiritual world.

The closing of Circus Alekan makes Marion wonder about her future. The feeling of emptiness scares her. In an inner monologue, she reflects on her childhood’s desire for solitude. But now the loneliness makes her unhappy. Instead of wanting to be alone, she now finds herself longing and searching for something real that she can call her own. She longs for transcendent experience, although she is deeply grounded in this world. Marion and Damiel both hope to find the missing side of existence they cannot access but to which they feel a deep connection. Their search, however, is one and the same.

Despite his yearnings, Damiel has doubts about whether becoming human is right. His angel companion, Cassiel, does not make this an easy choice for him. Cassiel is more observant of the darker side of human nature than Damiel. Cassiel follows Homer (Curt Bois) around, a storyteller in search of listeners. Homer is the representative and bearer of collective memory, the spirit of history, the spirit of Berlin. In his reflections on devastation and death as the consequences of World War II, he opens up the window to the past for Cassiel. Cassiel is then reminded of recurring human tendencies to harm one another, to destroy, and to kill. Humans have a conscience; they suffer and witness horrors that are impossible to forget. Homer embodies this conscience. He hopes to restore peace through his stories, but

ironically, his age will not allow it, and he has lost his listeners. In this light, Cassiel's skepticism is justified, and so is his influence on Damiel's decision.

It is Peter Falk (playing himself), an angel turned human, who lends validity to Damiel's desire to join the world of mortals. Falk is actually the only human who senses Damiel's presence, aside from children. Falk is grounded; in a humble, down-to-earth location (a snack stand), he talks to Damiel about the simple joys of being human: how good it feels to drink coffee, smoke cigarettes, and rub one's hands together when it is cold. Most important, however, Falk mentions the importance of having friends and being able to look people in the eyes. He wishes that Damiel could be his friend and then shakes his imaginary hand.

Peter Falk introduces Hollywood into the movie, as Wenders had just returned from Hollywood. Falk opens the film, saying "If Grandma was here, she'd say: 'Spazieren . . . Go spazieren!'" referring to an imaginary grandmother who tells her grandson to explore the city on foot. By assuming the character of a Jewish emigré descendant, Falk's character serves as an outside observer. Later in the film, after Falk has witnessed the ruins of Berlin, he again refers to his grandmother in a voice-over inner monologue: "I wish you were here, Grandma!" supposedly to share his impressions of Berlin's devastating historical transformations.

After he makes the "leap into humanity," Damiel sets out to search for Marion, who he aptly finds at a concert where anonymity and group feeling blend into a strange synergy. The music at the concert also has a fateful element to it. Nick Cave screams his ethereal, eerie, and hypnotizing blues in "From Here to Eternity" (1984) as they meet. Damiel feels that his fate is that of the song when he finally meets Marion. In the final scene at the bar, Marion delivers a long, cryptic monologue about the unification of opposites: "There is no greater story than ours, of man and woman. It will be a story of giants, invisible, transferable, a story of new ancestors. Look, my eyes! They are the image of necessity, of the future of everyone." It is fitting that Marion, who longs for the spiritual, gives such an esoteric commentary.

The monologue is revealed visually in the next scene where Damiel reflects on his choice to become human while Marion is spinning in a circle on a suspended rope that Damiel is holding. They are now an entity, and this is symbolized by Marion's circular motion and their dependence on each other for this acrobatic maneuver. To complete the picture, Cassiel is shown sitting on the stairs in the background in his role as an eternal observer. This shot represents the only blend of the two earthly angels in color while Cassiel's figure is inserted in black and white, a visually arresting combination of the two worlds. Damiel now knows what no angel knows, the beauty of the mortal and the immortal—opposites that give meaning to one another. (RZ)

QUESTIONS

1. Describe the relationship between the two angels. Refer to the contrast between their personalities and desires.

2. Describe the different ways in which the storyteller bridges the German past with the present of divided Berlin.
3. The “*Als das Kind*” poem frames the movie, and because it does so it can be taken to have central meaning. Please explore this meaning.
4. Look at Klee’s painting *Angelus Novus* and explain it in your own words, then compare it with Benjamin’s interpretation.
5. Find a map of Berlin and locate important scenes. Why did Wenders choose these locations?

RELATED FILMS

Bis ans Ende der Welt (*Until the End of the World*, Wim Wenders, 1991) is considered Wenders’ ultimate road movie.

In weiter Ferne, so nah (*Faraway So Close*, Wim Wenders, 1993) is the sequel to *Der Himmel über Berlin*.

Goodbye Lenin! (Wolfgang Becker, 2003) is the best-known post-Wall movie about Berlin. The movie is discussed elsewhere in the book.

Das Leben ist eine Baustelle (*Life Is All You Get*, Wolfgang Becker, 1997) is a comedy about Berlin in the 1990s.

Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt (*Berlin: Symphony of a Great City*, Walter Ruttmann, 1927) is a silent movie with a musical score that documents Berlin in the 1920s.

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VII. GERMAN FILM AFTER 1989

After the Berlin Wall came down on November 9, 1989, it would be another year before Germany was finally unified on October 3, 1990. However, achieving unification turned out to be a more difficult task than German chancellor Kohl had anticipated when he made his euphoric statement in 1990 that within a few years there would be “flowering landscapes” in former East Germany. Since the German Democratic Republic (GDR) had been a Socialist country with limited private ownership, the first task then was to quickly privatize state-owned businesses, which included the East German film production company DEFA (Deutsche Film AG/German Film Company). Consequently, Socialist filmmaking was largely eliminated, as movies became just another commodity in Germany’s new global economy.

It would take almost ten years before the necessary economic changes were accomplished and East and West Germany were ready for a global market in movie production. During the 90s, Germany also faced increasing social unrest that was related to unification, with a series of anti-immigrant racist incidents. Fire bombings in Solingen, Rostock, Hoyerswerda, and Mölln traumatized the nation and led to intense national soul-searching for the reasons behind such violent incidents. Subsequently, the country saw an increased need to address its Nazi past within the context of the newly created Germany.

In the first ten years after unification, political events were not reflected much in movies, and if so only in comedy films. It would take until the early 2000s before political issues began to be discussed. Instead, the German film industry continued with low-budget productions similar to those of the 1980s, which was largely due to the fact that funding had been cut. During that time, American movies continued to dominate the German market, with blockbusters such as *The Lion King*, *Pretty Woman*, and *Titanic* leading the list. The highest grossing German-made movie in the 1990s was the Western-spoof comedy *Der Schuh des Manitu* (*Manitou’s Shoe*, 2001). The 1990s saw a decade of German comedy movies, a relatively new feature in German film production. Prior to the 1990s, the German film industry had produced only a few noteworthy comedies, such as the *Die Feuerzangenbowle* (*The Punch Bowl*, 1944), *Der Hauptmann von Köpenick* (*The Captain from Köpenick*, 1956), and Doris Dörrie’s gender comedy *Männer* (*Men*, 1985).

The laconic German comedian Loriot’s movie *Pappa ante Portas* (1991) leads the list of important “new comedies,” following his earlier and very successful *Ödipussi* (1988), which was about German men’s obsession with their mothers. *Pappa ante Portas* refers to the country’s reality of workers newly laid off owing to reunification; the movie pokes fun at the fact that the unemployed and retired had trouble adjusting to their situation. Both movies were based on Loriot’s caricatures of status-conscious Germans and their awkwardness in unfamiliar situations. Other nonsense comedies were the highest grossing *Der Schuh des Manitu* (*The Shoe of Manitu*, 2001), a spoof on the books of the nineteenth-century German author Karl

May about the American West. Michael “Bully” Herbig directed *Der Schuh des Manitu* and the subsequent equally nonsensical hit *(T)Raumschiff Surprise: Periode 1* (2004). The actor Til Schweiger was part of these comedies, and he also produced and acted in some of his own comedies, such as the relationship comedy *Keinohrhasen* (*Rabbit with no Ears*, 2007), which sold over six million tickets.

Another early comedy hit was *Schtonk!* (1992), directed by Helmut Dietl, who poked fun at the German inability to deal with the Nazi past. *Schtonk!*—which gets its title from the nonsense word Charlie Chaplin had introduced in his *The Great Dictator*—satirizes events surrounding the publication in 1983 in *Stern* magazine of Hitler’s diaries, which later turned out to be fake. Dietl’s *Rossini: Oder die mörderische Frage wer schläft mit wem* (*Rossini*, 1997) is a clever parable of post-Wall German society. The title translates as *Rossini: Or the Murderous Question of Who Slept with Whom*, and satirizes about Munich’s *schickeria* (trendy) culture.

Sönke Wortmann’s *Der bewegte Mann* (*Maybe . . . Maybe Not*, 1994), a comedy about gay identity, was based on a popular comic strip and starred the actor Til Schweiger. *Das Leben ist eine Baustelle* (*Life Is All You Get*, 1997) was the first movie directed by Wolfgang Becker, who would later produce the ultimate nostalgic comedy about life in the GDR with his *Good Bye Lenin!* Also by the 1990s, food movies had become a very popular feature in filmmaking. Germany contributed its share with *Bella Martha* (*Mostly Martha*, Sandra Nettelbeck, 2001), a movie about a German waitress, played by Martina Gedeck, who learns cooking skills and the art of living from an Italian chef. The 2009 Hollywood remake of the movie, retitled *No Reservations*, featured Catherine Zeta-Jones. The German-Turkish filmmaker Fatih Akin contributed another food movie with *Soul Kitchen* (2009), which is based on his own restaurant experiences in a multi-ethnic community.

Comedies were not the only genre that flourished in Germany’s reenergized movie market. Since international audiences at that time were mostly interested in German movies with a political or historical subject matter, some of these early drama productions were often overlooked. Volker Schlöndorff’s *Homo Faber* (*Voyager*, 1991), based on the Swiss author Max Frisch’s 1957 classic novel with the same title, is about a successful engineer who falls in love with his own daughter. The movie, produced in English, featured Sam Sheppard and the young French actress Julie Delpy, who at that time was becoming famous for her work with Richard Linklater (*Before Sunrise*). *Homo Faber* was criticized in the United States for its heavy-handed construction of an implausible Oedipal scenario. In fact, by reworking Frisch’s novel into a movie, the book lost most of the Greek-inspired themes and seemed bland.

Other drama movies offered coming-of-age stories, such as the successful *Crazy* (Hans-Christian Schmid, 2000), based on the novelist Benjamin Lebert’s experiences at his boarding school. The tragi-comedy *Wer früher stirbt ist länger tot* (*Grave Decisions*, 2006) tells the story of a boy who feels responsible for his mother’s death and tries multiple ways to reach immortality to prevent ending up in hell. *Vincent will Meer* (*Vincent Wants to Sea*, 2010) is about the protagonist’s Tourette syndrome and a road trip he takes with his mother’s ashes. The American remake of the movie has the title *The Road Within*. One of the few successful female directors in Germany is Doris Dörrie, who after losing her husband to cancer incorporated her

experiences in the moving drama *Kirschblüten: Hanami* (*Cherry Blossoms*, 2008). The movie tells the story of a terminally ill man who travels to Japan after the sudden death of his wife.

Even when the New German Cinema had lost its appeal after the 1980s, serious art movies were still produced in Germany by newly emerging art-house directors, among them Joseph Vilsmaier. His *Schlafes Bruder* (*Brother of Sleep*, 1995) was nominated for the Golden Globes and for the Academy Award Best Foreign Movie award in 1995. *Schlafes Bruder* is a movie in the German romantic tradition with a story that straddles the border between reality and dream. Tom Tykwer directed the movie *Das Parfum: Die Geschichte eines Mörders* (*Perfume*, 2006), which also touches on dreamlike surreal experiences. The 1990s were also the debut of one of Germany's great female directors, Caroline Link, whose aptitude for sound editing is evident in her first movie *Jenseits der Stille* (*Beyond Silence*, 1996), the story of a deaf family whose daughter Lara becomes an exceptional clarinet player.

Tom Tykwer became the German wunderkind of the 1990s with the surprise success of his existential film *Lola rennt* (*Run Lola Run*, 1998), which highlighted Berlin's new role in unified Germany. *Lola rennt* was one of the most innovative post-Wall movies. With its alternative endings, it allowed viewers to imagine the many exciting possibilities the new millennium had in store. Some of Tykwer's other movies include *Winterschläfer* (*Winter Sleepers*, 1997), *Der Krieger und die Kaiserin* (*The Princess and the Warrior*, 2000), and *Heaven* (2002), which was the first part of a trilogy Tykwer was developing with the Polish filmmaker Krzysztof Kieślowski; *Hell* and *Purgatory* are the other two parts. However, Kieślowski died before the project could be finished. Tykwer's biggest production to date is *Cloud Atlas* (2012), a collaborative project with Andrew and Lana Wachowski of *The Matrix*. *Cloud Atlas*—with its intense time-travel adventure story and lavish CGI effects—was one of the most ambitious movies ever made according to Roger Ebert. With a production budget of over one hundred million dollars, it turned out to be the most expensive German movie of the post-Wall period.

Partly because of Tykwer's influence, German moviemaking changed from the cerebral somberness of the New German Cinema to a cinema with a high degree of technical sophistication. Tykwer made less goal-oriented, but more philosophical and playful movies than the filmmakers of the 1968 generation had created. This new playfulness was important for a country that by now was beginning to attempt a genuine discussion of unification. What began with absurd and playful road comedies following reunification—among them Peter Timm's *Go Trabi Go* (1991) with its slapstick humor, Detlev Buck's terse *Wir können auch anders* (*No More Mr. Nice Guy*, 1993), Thomas Jahn's *Knockin' on Heaven's Door* (1997), Michael Schorr's *Schultze Gets the Blues* (2003), and Marcus Goller's *Friendship* (2010)—was followed by the more authentic *Vergiss Amerika* (*Forget America*, 2000) by Vanessa Jopp, which suggests a genuine attempt for young East Germans to forge their own future.

Hannes Stöhr's *Berlin Is in Germany* (2001), about a prisoner who returns to his hometown Berlin years after the Wall comes down, is one of the first serious movies about German unification. Leander Haußmann's *Sonnenallee* (*Sun Alley*, 1999) became the first movie to address East German nostalgia or "Ostalgie" and the need to understand the longing for the good old times in the East despite its

rigid social system. *Sonnenallee's* popularity was soon topped by Wolfgang Becker's *Good Bye Lenin!* (2003), considered one of the most important German unification movies. Although conceived of as a comedy, *Good Bye Lenin!* has a serious subtext by showing how the dream of a better world under Socialism was shared by many in the East. Leander Haußmann's *Herr Lehmann (Berlin Blues)*, (2003) presented the corresponding view from the West, where German unification was viewed with suspicion. After earlier reluctance and political finagling, Westerners had adjusted to living alongside another German state and were shaken in their comfortable life by the East German call for unification. *Herr Lehmann* gives a humorous account of the phlegmatic West Berliners' reaction to the momentous event. However, the most important movie about East Germany was without doubt Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's *Das Leben der Anderen (The Lives of Others)*, (2006), which won the Oscar for Best Foreign Film in 2007. The movie presents an intense image of the inner workings of the Stasi, East Germany's state security, and its practices of spying on its own citizens.

Christian Petzold, one of the founding fathers of the Berlin School, produced with *Barbara* (2012) another movie about life in East Germany that exposes Stasi activities. The term *Berlin School* was first introduced by German critics who were happy about a new film movement finally evolving after the inane comedies of the 90s. These new movies had first been discovered by French critics, who called them the *Nouvelle Vague Allemande*; they also became quickly popular among film academics in the United States, while criticized in Germany as "brittle," "slow," or "lacking in narrative impetus" (Clarke, 135). Petzold's cerebral *Yella* (2007) and especially his *Jerichow* (2008), which were filmed on location in the former GDR, established his reputation as a difficult but also sensitive filmmaker who focuses on post-unification problems. The East German filmmaker Andreas Dresen has become a household name with his creative approach that was influenced by Lars von Trier's "Dogme 95" movement. Dresen's *Halbe Treppe (Grill Point)*, (2002) introduced his analytical interest in sexual relationships. Dresen's movies are all set in East Germany, but with their inherent application to any troubled relationship, they transcend their location and appeal to the current generation. Dresen's most acclaimed movie to date is *Sommer vorm Balkon (Summer in Berlin)*, (2005), which features two aging women's futile search for a life in economically depressed post-Wende East Berlin. *Wolke Neun (Cloud 9)*, (2008) breaches the topic that was long taboo in filmmaking, geriatric sex.

Perhaps the most important topic that German film began focusing on more and more after unification was an exploration of the country's Nazi history. Movies dealing with Nazi themes had been one of the largest export successes of West German film before 1989, in particular to the United States, with movies such as the 1978 Oscar-winning *Die Blechtrommel (The Tin Drum)*, and the 1981 film *Das Boot*. The 1990s continued this successful trend, beginning with the comedy *Hitlerjunge Salomon (Europa Europa)*, (1990) by the Polish director Agnieszka Holland. A controversy centered on Germany's reluctance to nominate this film for an Oscar because its director was Polish. But the real reason was the country's unease about nominating a comedy about the Holocaust, revealing Germany's continued angst about the proper artistic representation of the Holocaust.

As Berlin's eastern and western parts were unified by massive reconstruction, the city's World War II sights were gradually rediscovered by history-minded Berliners. More and more museums and monuments opened, among them the Jewish Museum, the House of the Wannsee Conference, the Topography of Terror, and, after a debate that lasted over ten years, the Holocaust Memorial in 2004. The construction of these memorial sites helped Germans understand their World War II history. As large numbers of World War II memoirs were being published, the movie industry followed suit. The movie *Comedian Harmonists* (1997) by Joseph Vilsmair tells the story of a Jewish barbershop group during the Nazi period. Max Färberböck's *Aimée und Jaguar* (1999) presented a new twist on representing the Nazis by showing two young women, one Jewish and one the wife of a Nazi officer, as lovers. Another very successful movie was Caroline Link's *Nirgendwo in Afrika* (*Nowhere in Africa*, 2001), which was about Jewish survival in Africa. The movie won the 2003 Oscar for Best Foreign Film. Margarethe von Trotta, an icon of the New German Cinema, contributed her acclaimed *Rosenstraße* (2003) about a successful demonstration against Jewish deportations, followed by Volker Schlöndorff's *Der neunte Tag* (*The Ninth Day*, 2004) about a Catholic priest who is imprisoned in Dachau but released for nine days in order to convince his bishop to cooperate with the Nazis. *Alles auf Zucker!* (*Go for Zucker!* 2004) a German satirical film about Hitler by Dani Levy, was another first. Dennis Gansel directed a successful movie about a Nazi ideology training school with *Napola: Elite für den Führer* (*Before the Fall*, 2004).

By far the best German movie about the Nazi period was Marc Rothemund's *Sophie Scholl: Die letzten Tage* (*Sophie Scholl: The Final Days*, 2005), which received an Oscar nomination. The movie is based entirely on the interrogation records of Sophie Scholl's 1943 investigation and trial. Another German "victim" movie was *Die Fälscher* (*The Counterfeiters*, 2007), which won an Oscar in 2008 for Best Foreign Film. The film explores the SS plan to produce counterfeit British and American currency in concentration camps to help win the war. Florian Gallenberger's film *John Rabe* (2009), about the Nanjing business community during the Japanese invasion of China in 1938, shows the story of the Nazi businessman John Rabe, who saved hundreds of thousands of Chinese from death by the Japanese occupation force. The movie *Nordwand* (*North Face*, 2008) stands out in this list as setting an adventure movie in the historical context of the Nazi period. It is based on the 1936 failed attempt to climb the Eiger north face. The movie tries to connect the failure to climb the Eiger to the overall failure of the Nazi system.

Oliver Hirschbiegel's *Der Untergang* (*Downfall*, 2004), produced by Bernd Eichinger, was one of the most popular German movies ever, with more than ninety million tickets sold worldwide; it is still the best-known German movie about the Nazi period. While critics in the United States described *Downfall* as one of the best war films ever made, Germans showed a less favorable attitude, with *Der Spiegel* calling *Downfall* "ridiculous, superficial . . . and banal," mostly because Germans were portrayed as victims of the Nazis and not as culprits, as had been customary. The TV mini-series *Unsere Mütter, unsere Väter* (*Generation War*, 2013) followed in the footsteps of *Der Untergang* to continue Germany's by-now-infamous new heritage

movies that should help in managing its past (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*). It tells the story of the wartime experiences of five twenty-year-old friends. Like the original 1978 NBC series *Holocaust*, the impact of this TV series was overwhelming, not only in Germany, where each episode garnered around seven million viewers, but also worldwide, where it was aired in over eighty countries. And as with *Der Untergang* and the earlier *Holocaust*, criticism from the left was devastating, while the public was fascinated, giving the series a “tomato meter” reading of over 90 percent. Vilsmaier’s *Stalingrad* (2013), an interpretation of the battle of Stalingrad, also put the war experience on screen.

Another political topic Germans were dealing with in the first decade of the new millennium was the terrorism of the country’s own Red Army Faction (RAF). The Red Army Faction had committed random acts of terrorism since the heydays of the student revolts of 1967, but the group had turned more radical by the late 1970s. The *Deutscher Herbst* (German Autumn) in 1977 was its most outrageous act of violence. As a result, terrorism movies abounded as early as the 70s, with the 1979 movie *Deutschland im Herbst* (*Germany in Autumn*), which featured contributions from a number of well-known West German filmmakers, including Rainer Werner Fassbinder. Since the RAF did not disband until 1998, most terrorism movies were made in the 1990s and early in the first decade of the 2000s. Recent German terrorism movies include Christian Petzold’s *Die innere Sicherheit* (*The State I Am in*, 2000) and Volker Schlöndorff’s *Die Stille nach dem Schuss* (*The Legend of Rita*, 2000), which both deal with very similar topics of showing the personal side of terrorism from the viewpoint of the families involved. As Schlöndorff is one of the surviving filmmakers of the New German Cinema, *Die Stille nach dem Schuss* contains signature elements of the movement, a well-defined story, and an experimental New German Cinema feeling. Andres Veiel’s documentary about the assassination of the Deutsche Bank CEO, *Black Box BRD* (2001), presents a new type of movie with its blend of documentary and feature elements. But it was the visionary producer Bernd Eichinger again who surpassed all of these efforts with his *Der Baader Meinhof Komplex* (*The Baader Meinhof Complex*, 2008), directed by Uli Edel, which became another blockbuster by retelling the history of the Red Army Faction. Hans Weingartner’s *Die fetten Jahre sind vorbei* (*The Educators*, 2004) should be added to terrorism movies since it presents a nostalgic look back at the lost hopes of the RAF generation.

Turkish immigration to Germany after 1960 liberalized the country more than any other social change in the last sixty years. As Turks became German citizens, they began to write and make movies about their new country. One of the first movies to tackle this issue was Hark Bohm’s *Yasemin* (1988), but it was not until the talented Fatih Akin had started making movies that the Turkish films began to attract national attention. His movie *Kurz und schmerzlos* (*Short Sharp Shock*, 1998), Akin’s feature debut, showed the identity crises faced by German youth from various ethnic backgrounds. Akin also contributed one of the zaniest road movies of this period with his *Im Juli* (*In July*, 2000), about a wild trip from Hamburg to Istanbul. His *Gegen die Wand* (*Head-On*, 2004) won the 2004 Golden Bear award. The movie reveals the plight of Turkish immigrants, especially women, who are culturally restricted by Muslim society. *Gegen die Wand*’s protagonist Sibel (played by Sibel

Kekilli) successfully breaks out and experiments with a Western lifestyle. Akin's *Auf der anderen Seite* (*The Edge of Heaven*, 2007) gives a more positive and also more ambitious perspective on how Turks and Germans might succeed in living side by side in Germany and in Turkey. Less positive is Feo Aladağ's *Die Fremde* (*When We Leave*, 2010), where the female protagonist, again played by Sibel Kekilli, is traumatized by her social restrictions. One very successful Turkish integration film is Yasemin Şamdereli's *Almanya: Willkommen in Deutschland* (*Almanya: Welcome to Germany*, 2011). The comedy *Fack ju Göhte* (*Suck Me Shakespeer*, 2013) by Bora Dagtekin shows another side in this Turkish-German comedy by featuring the new language that is used by migrant students. Bora Dagtekin is mainly known for his TV series and the 2012 movie *Türkisch für Anfänger*.

With Germany's major political changes, it is no surprise that movies about political events are a major part of current film. Among these are movies about social experiments, such as Oliver Hirschbiegel's *Das Experiment* (*The Experiment*, 2001) and Dennis Gansel's *Die Welle* (*The Wave*, 2008), both of which attempt to educate the public about its latent fascist potential. Other movies are more mainstream, such as Sönke Wortmann's *Das Wunder von Bern* (*The Miracle of Bern*, 2003), about the 1954 soccer World Cup that revived Germany's national pride after World War II. Like *Downfall* and *The Baader Meinhof Complex*, *Das Wunder von Bern* was criticized for suppressing negative aspects in national behavior in order to spruce up the country's image. That is not the case in two recent movies. Michael Haneke pictures an oppressive society responsible for racism in *Das weiße Band: Eine deutsche Kindergeschichte* (*The White Ribbon: A German Children Story*, 2009), which won the 2010 Oscar, and Margarethe von Trotta's *Hannah Arendt* (2012), which offers an intense biopic about the philosopher who coined the term "banality of evil" during Adolf Eichmann's trial in Jerusalem.

Jan-Ole Gerster's *Oh Boy* (*A Coffee in Berlin*, 2012), his film academy project, shall stand at the end of this brief excursion as a *Generation Berlin* tragicomedy filmed in black and white. The film stars Tom Schilling as a college dropout who explores his options. It brilliantly captures the atmosphere of a vastly changed Berlin and Germany. As audiences have increased with the scope and genres of movies offered, German filmmaking is currently in a good position to compete in the global market. As *Oh Boy* captured critical attention at the 2013 Berlin International Film Festival, so did Sebastian Schipper's *Victoria* in 2015. The movie was filmed in one take of 140 minutes. German film seems once again to have come back as an important player on the international scene. (RZ)

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Stilles Land

(*Silent Country*, Andreas Dresen, 1992)



Claudia comforts Kai after his run-in in a tavern.

CREDITS

Director Andreas Dresen
Screenplay Laila Stieler and Andreas Dresen
Director of Photography Andreas Höfer
Music Tobias Morgenstern
Producer Wolfgang Pfeiffer
Production Companies Filmgalerie 451 and Schnitt Verlag
Length 98 minutes; Color

Principal Cast

Thorsten Merten (Kai Finke), Jeannette Arndt (Claudia), Kurt Böwe (Theater Manager Walz), Petra Kelling (Uschi), Horst Westphal (Horst), Wolf-Dieter Lingk (Party Secretary), Asad Schwarz (Theo), Hans Jochen Röhrig (pastor).

THE STORY

Stilles Land (*Silent Country*, 1992) depicts the *Wende*—the fall 1989 collapse of Communism that led to the dissolution of the German Democratic Republic

(GDR)—from the standpoint of an ensemble theater in Anklam, a small town on the banks of the Peene River in northeastern Germany. Despite the exodus of many GDR citizens to the West via Prague and Hungary, most of Anklam's actors have returned for the 1989/90 theater season. As theater manager Walz informs them, they are to have a new director: the talented twenty-six-year-old Kai Falke from Berlin. His first responsibility is to direct Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*.

Kai has his work cut out for him. The blatantly lethargic actors show up hours late for rehearsals, don't take him seriously, and neither understand nor want to understand the play. His problems are compounded by his belief that theater needs to mirror contemporary times. With the inexorable disintegration of the GDR, these are constantly changing. Thus Kai continuously reinterprets the play, each time revising the roles of its actors and even the stage design. The increasingly insecure actors become, however, more interested in the changing times than in the changing play. To keep up with political developments, they watch as much TV as possible. They sign a resolution demanding public discussion of dissatisfactions with life in the GDR, and they join the candlelight protest demonstration organized by Anklam's church (in imitation of church protests in Leipzig and Berlin).

But on the evening of November 9, the cast is unable to go to Berlin to experience and celebrate the fall of the Wall: the last trains of the day have already left and the theater's bus sputters to a halt after barely moving several yards. Not to be deterred, Claudia, the theater's enterprising assistant director, decides to hitchhike to Berlin, but she cannot convince Kai, with whom she is romantically involved, to accompany her. Four days later, Claudia returns to Anklam with a new boyfriend: Thomas, a young man from West Berlin also involved with theater.

Anklam's *Waiting for Godot* premieres soon after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The performance is excellent. But because of the sparse audience, it is difficult for anyone to be joyous. Soon Claudia and Thomas depart for the West (Hamburg). For the first time Kai too thinks of leaving the GDR. But, he decides to stay in Anklam.

BACKGROUND

Belonging to the last generation trained in DEFA (Deutsche Film AG / German Film Company) filmmaking, Andreas Dresen, the director of *Silent Country*, had most of his formative education behind him when the Berlin Wall fell in November 1989. Twenty-seven years old at the time, he could easily have become merely another holdover from the DEFA age—a DEFA-trained director trying to adjust to anti-DEFA times. Despite having produced several excellent shorts as a film student, most of them documentaries, there was no compelling reason for Dresen to make it in the film world of the new Germany. Nonetheless, today he is one of Germany's most respected and successful filmmakers, highly valued for focusing on individuals in their everyday lives and for tackling topics many others avoid—for example, love in old age in *Wolke 9* (*Cloud 9*, 2008). He is also known for his willingness to take risks. In the interests of spontaneity, he filmed entire productions without a script—for example, *Halbe Treppe* (*Grill Point*, 2002) and *Halt auf freier Strecke* (*Stopped*

on *Track*, 2011). He is, moreover, admired for alternating successfully between TV and cinema formats, as well as between documentaries (e.g., two on the politician Henryk Wichmann, in 2003 and 2012) and feature films, the most recent being *Als wir träumten* (*As We Were Dreaming*, 2015), based on Clemens Meyers's 2006 best-seller about a group of youths trying to cope with the excesses and deprivations of life in post-*Wende* Leipzig.

Though not to be taken for granted, Dresen's remarkable successes in post-unification Germany are in keeping with his successes as a film student at the GDR's Hochschule für Film und Fernsehen "Konrad Wolf" (HFF), now the Film University Babelsberg KONRAD WOLF (the only German film school with university status). In 1987, for example, his twenty-five-minute film *Die Schritte des anderen* (*Steps of the Other*), a film that depicted several bleak aspects of the GDR, won the highest award at the Unica World Amateur Film Festival in Graz, Austria. Dresen, unaccompanied by any East German officials, represented the GDR at this festival. Contrary to some expectations, he did not make use of this golden opportunity to stay in the West, not even after a long meeting in Graz with his famous father, a theater and opera director whom the GDR had sent into exile in 1977 (though with a life-long GDR passport to camouflage the fact that he was not wanted in the GDR).

Dresen did not regret his decision to stay in the GDR to continue his film studies, and he has continuously refused to disparage his DEFA background. Again and again, he publicly states the benefits of the long periods spent on documentary films and praises the careful attention to planning all aspects of a film, including apparently insignificant details, inculcated at the Potsdam-Babelsberg film academy. To be sure, Dresen rejected the Socialist Realism first propagated by DEFA and then reformulated by the Socialist Unity Party (SED: *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*) in the so-called *Bitterfelder Weg* (Bitterfeld way) of the late 1950s. He strongly disapproved of instrumentalizing film for ideological purposes—for instance, for depicting conflicts at a workplace in order to resolve them with the intervention of optimistic working-class heroes who promote ethical behavior, eradicate worker alienation in the industrial process, and of course also increase worker productivity.

By August 1989, Dresen questioned not only the tenets of Socialist Realism but even the term "Socialism," noting that the Socialist label had lost its meaning, for it was being applied to a large number of completely disparate political systems. Its GDR variant, he stressed in an assignment for a course on cultural politics, had been reduced to an ideology rigidly justifying the status quo. He could no longer follow such an ideology, Dresen added, or, for that matter, any other ideology either (Dresen 1993, 290–91).

Despite his critical social and political stances in his student essays, Dresen was never seriously chastised in his courses, and his student films (most of them documentaries) continued to be promoted. Only *Was jeder muss* (*What Every Man Must Do*, 1988), a film emphasizing boredom and senselessness in the East German army, received so much criticism that it was deemed best to remove it from circulation. Yet censors did not object even to Dresen's *Zug in die Ferne* (*Train in the Distance*). Completed before the fall of the Wall (but distributed only in 1990), it shows how time stands still: literally at a railroad station where the hands of the clock have

stopped moving and figuratively when not trains but movies and dreaming provide the only escape from a constricted environment. The oppressive surroundings, the silence, the standstill, the senseless waiting—all these resurface in *Silent Country*.

Yet *So schnell geht es nach Istanbul* (*Shortcut to Istanbul*, 1991), shown at the 1991 Berlinale (Berlin's annual international film festival), is actually the Dresen student film that led directly to *Silent Country*. Filmed soon after the fall of the Berlin Wall, *Shortcut to Istanbul* features a Turkish protagonist who wants to return to Istanbul as quickly as possible but lacks the funds for the trip. He plans to earn his money by working in West Berlin and to save it by living cheaply in East Berlin—in the apartment of a girlfriend he has yet to acquire. Impressed by the short black-and-white, neorealist feature film, the producer Wolfgang Pfeiffer offered to help Dresen create his first full-length feature film.

When Pfeiffer asked Dresen and Laila Stieler, who was to coauthor the script, to volunteer ideas, Dresen suggested creating a story based on *Wende*-aspects that had ruptured their own personal lives (Dresen 2011, 345; Abel 2009, 16). He emphasized that they had no desire to replicate big demonstrations or other *Wende*-events that news programs had already covered superbly. Instead they wished “to create a microcosm of the GDR,” preferably—and here Dresen turns to his own theater background (his mother was a theater actress, his father and his mother's second husband had both been theater directors)—“in a small theater in a small city” (Abel 2009, 16). Pfeiffer approved of Dresen and Stieler's idea of a mini-GDR and of their wish to visit theaters in small towns to gather stories for it (having spent many hours in theater canteens as a child—while his mother was on stage—Dresen knew from experience that countless stories circulate in theater environments). Their research soon resulted in a script for *Silent Country*, now considered by well-informed people the most authentic film on the *Wende*.

Dresen's *Silent Country* is the only *Wende*-film made when the events and moods it highlights were still topical and fresh. Given that other *Wende*-films are laborious attempts to recreate a more or less vanished past, it is surprising that *Silent Country* is often bypassed in considerations of *Wende*-films. Dresen minces no words in this regard. He considers it reprehensible that only the *Wende*-portrayals of West German filmmakers have received widespread notice and acceptance—in particular, Wolfgang Becker's *Good Bye Lenin!* (2003) and Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's Oscar-winning *Das Leben der Anderen* (*The Lives of Others*, 2006). Though Thomas Brussig (author) and Leander Haußmann (film director), both East Germans, were responsible for the temporarily popular *Sonnenallee* (*Sun Alley*, 1999), Dresen does not consider it a serious film or one that depicts life in the GDR realistically. By contrast, he touts *Silent Country* as an honest film and as such a genuine document of the *Wende*-period. He is convinced that its honesty and contemporary resonance compensate for its technical deficiencies, such as a certain disjointedness that could have been eliminated had he been courageous enough to take more risks with his first feature film. Underlining his impassioned defense of *Silent Country* in the interview included on the DVD of the film, Dresen wishes, wistfully, that it could at least occasionally replace the TV showing of a film he likes much less, his enormously popular Bavarian-made TV film *Ein unbekannter Ehemann* (*My Unknown Husband*, 1994).

EVALUATION

In *Silent Country*, the *Wende* takes place in Anklam, a provincial town in the GDR representative of many others. There, however, the *Wende* is more the reverberation of a monumental event than the event itself. Rather than providing yet another film focused on a repressive political apparatus and its reprehensible perpetrators, Dresen wanted to depict GDR citizens far away from the limelight, citizens whose lives were affected in countless contradictory and ambivalent ways by the national turmoil and changes initiated in urban locations such as Berlin and Leipzig.

To be sure, in *Silent Country* the inevitable Stasi (secret police) representative is a *Parteisekretär* (secretary of a political party), a high-standing SED functionary rather than merely one of the thousands of unofficial informers of the Stasi. GDR citizens knew, moreover, that the SED assigned a *Parteisekretär* to every larger organization. With his rank second only to that of the head of the organization, he was to assure that the organization ran strictly according to SED principles.

Though Dresen's *Parteisekretär* is appropriately suspicious of every slight deviation from the norm, he doesn't trust his own judgment on what should or should not be reported to SED headquarters. Rather than assuring that the manager of the theater to which he is assigned acts strictly according to SED tenets, he constantly turns to Walz, the sly but good-natured theater manager, for advice on what to do. Ironically, Walz keeps advising the party secretary to inaction. Yet what good is a Stasi official so unsettled by national changes that he loses his bearings completely?

Dresen was in fact sharply attacked—above all in the West—for depicting the sole Stasi representative in the film as a comical and definitely harmless figure, thereby supposedly downplaying the repressive nature of the GDR. But Dresen is immune to this kind of objection. He criticizes the preponderance of western interpretations that treat the GDR as a particularly repressive dictatorship, with the Stasi lurking maliciously in all shadows and not only there. Others render the GDR silly with generous doses of fluffy *Ostalgie* (nostalgia for the former East Germany), expressed, for instance, in the ardor for certain types of cucumbers and in the frequent affectionate recycling of the Trabi (by far the most common East German car). Yet the GDR was by no means a one-dimensional “either/or” country, Dresen insists. It avoided extremes. In its strange mediocrity, grey, not black and white, dominated (Schütt 2013, 164).

Dresen maintains that in the last years of its existence, the GDR was characterized far less by a strong-armed dictatorship than by absolute unpredictability. One day things were forbidden, the next day they were permitted; one person was not allowed to express the truth in writing, another—more radical and forceful—was waved on without restrictions. The idea was to eliminate all reliable criteria for behavior so that no one would be able to deduce any principles for action. This pervasive arbitrariness held people in check, causing them to be on their guard constantly (Schütt 2013, 157). In *Silent Country*, theater manager Walz best represents this kind of guarded individual.

Accustomed to passing his days promoting productions of *William Tell* and adaptations of fairy tales—for sleepy Anklam a particularly successful one of



Several members of the ensemble theater.

Sleeping Beauty—Walz flounders when democratic forces start to gain the upper hand. He feels uncomfortable when his formerly lethargic ensemble cast confronts him with a resolution demanding open public discussions of the dissatisfactions causing citizens to leave the GDR. The crafty Walz immediately thinks of saving his neck in case the SED again had uncontested control of the country. Thus he asks the *Parteisekretär* to join him in signing the resolution. Perhaps not so surprising in the Anklam context, Walz finds his arm easy to twist. Yet the resolution necessitates not only signatures but also leadership—that is, Walz is expected to mail the letter to Berlin (it is assumed that he knows the best addressee). Walz then becomes indecisive. He is simply not certain that he is truly on the right side. Not returning from the post office empty-handed as he had half-heartedly hoped, Walz ends up putting the letter into a desk drawer in his office.

Anklam, however, becomes an even more pronounced offshoot of Leipzig and thus of unstoppable democratic changes. Its church sponsors a candlelight demonstration. Like in Leipzig, Anklam's citizens carry posters displaying the sentence most emblematic of the peaceful GDR revolution: "*Wir sind das Volk*" ("We are the people"). Because the theater cast enthusiastically joins the demonstration, the manager realizes he can't be the only holdout (but he walks hesitantly at its tail end). Supporting the stirrings of democracy only lackadaisically, he continues to lack the courage to send the resolution on its intended way (Lode 2009, 48). Ironically he becomes convinced that the GDR is at its end only when Egon Krenz, appointed by the SED to replace the dislodged Erich Honecker as SED general secretary (the top political position), addresses the GDR with a speech on TV, assuring all that the SED will again obtain the political and ideological upper hand. That this could occur under Krenz seems preposterous to Walz. Even while Krenz

is addressing the nation on TV (interestingly, this is the only time the theater's TV does not break down), Walz rushes decisively to the post office and mails the letter.

Though Walz had chosen *Waiting for Godot* as the opening play for Anklam's 1989/90 theater season, it is Kai who stresses the play's parallels to the present times—to the GDR of 1989 that is so paralyzed that it can move neither backward into the past nor ahead into the future. To embody this perception, Kai changes Beckett's constellation of two men waiting for Godot into an old man and his equally old wife. The couple had once been in love, had gone through good and bad times at each other's side, but no longer had anything to say to each other. There seemed to be no way out of their stagnation. Like the GDR, they were incapable of moving either backward or forward. But Kai is at a loss for an appropriate answer when one of the actors asks him whether their inability to escape from their stagnation is due to societal conditions or their own character flaws. Later, Kai does develop an answer—in fact, three different answers. The first of these places the fault in the circumstances. In the second, Kai insists that the fault does not lie in the flawed GDR system but in the inner selves of its people.

The third and last answer suggests capitulation. "*Jetzt ist das Ende*" ("This is the end") says the actor who turns the TV off as the fall of the Wall is announced (by then, most of the other actors—those who had wanted to go to Berlin by bus—are asleep). It is now silent, much as the houses, compared to gravestones, are silent in the Wolf Biermann song known as "*Das Land ist still*" ("The Country Is Silent"). It is the song that—along with the book title *And Quiet Flows the Don* (a novel by the Russian Mikhail Sholokhov)—had prompted the title of Dresen's film.

And now it is dark as well. In Biermann's song too, darkness envelops the houses and, by extension, the country. Accordingly, by the time of the premiere—that is, by the time of Kai's final reinterpretation of Beckett's play—all stage props have been repainted in black. Yet the Biermann song, which Dresen knew well since his father and Biermann were friends, also contains the phrase "*noch immer*," and each of its three stanzas ends with the word "*noch*." Both the phrase and the single word "*noch*" mean "still," as in the sentence "it is still dark," a phrasing implying that the darkness will pass. In the last three lines of the song, Biermann again stresses the silence of the country and the deadness of its people. But, through the word "*noch*" he implies that the silence and deadness are about to end. He also supplies a reason for the imminent end: songs from "red" (i.e., Communist) Prague are transporting spring and, with it, an awakening (clearly a reference to the Prague Spring of 1968, associated with attempts to democratize Czechoslovakia). Thus Kai's final reinterpretation of Beckett's spacious *Waiting for Godot* entails the removal of silence and darkness through liberalization.

"*Es ist still in diesem Land*" ("It is silent in this country"), one of the demoralized actors had shouted at the beginning of Dresen's *Silent Country*, at that point implying that nothing was happening and that the waiting highlighted in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* was useless. And yet the act of waiting, Dresden has stressed elsewhere, implies an open-armed acceptance of the world, a way of *being* in the world—in a world, moreover, where people are constantly going somewhere and rarely simply *are* anywhere (Dresen 1993, 310; Schütt 2013, 189). That waiting is to be viewed in a positive light by the end of Beckett's play becomes evident from the

Waiting for Godot-citations from Act II included in the film (quoted in German in the film): “In this immense confusion one thing alone is clear. We are waiting for Godot to come. . . . Or for night to fall. (*Pause.*) We have kept our appointment. . . . We are not saints, [but we are here] we have kept our appointment. How many people can boast as much?” (Beckett 1994).

As Dresen had wondered toward the end of his DEFA days about whether he should or should not leave the GDR, Kai at the end of the film wonders whether he should or should not leave Anklam. First we see him on the stage of the empty theater, most of his face hidden in dark shadows indicative of his troubled thoughts. Then he is suddenly on the street, which of course has two main directions—away from Anklam and back to Anklam. Viewers observe Kai mainly from his side, nervously turning in various directions as if attempting to determine the best path for escape. But then he is seen back on Anklam’s theater stage. This time, in a long close-up revealing his entire face clearly, viewers sense that he has attained clarity—that he has committed himself to stay in surroundings where he has not exhausted all possibilities for change.

To be sure, it was too late for Kai to effect changes in the lives of the people of Anklam through the production of Beckett’s play. Rather than attending the premiere or coming to the theater for inspiration, the people of Anklam were already adjusting their lives according to new realities. In a sense, Kai’s decision to remain in Anklam—his standstill—offers a counterworld to theirs (Schütt 2013, 189). Referring to the wisdom Beckett expressed by having no one leave in response to the emphatic suggestion “Let’s go,” Dresen stresses that Kai’s choice to stay in Anklam, a choice corresponding to waiting, to simply being there, represents the harder path. Involving a certain leave-taking from an ideal, the choice to stay is the path into life itself (Schütt 2013, 196). (MS)

QUESTIONS

1. When asked to explain the title of his first feature film—something that occurs often—Dresen emphasizes that the film title is *Silent Country*, not *Dead Country*. For him, silence is an ambivalent concept: at times negative, at other times positive. Show how the film does or does not do justice to both aspects of silence. Please refer in this process to the song that inspired the film title: Wolf Biermann’s “*Noch Songtext*” (1973), better known as “*Das Land ist still*” (“The Country Is Silent”). The excerpts provided in this analysis should suffice, but the lyrics are available online (in German only) at <http://www.golyr.de/wolf-biermann/songtext-noch-385603.html>.
2. Dresen’s original intent was to present the *Wende* in the German provinces in slapstick fashion. Clearly the film did not turn into a slapstick comedy, but it does retain some slapstick elements—for instance, not only that things break down but *when* they break down and the constant repetition of the same story to the same people. In which ways do

these and other specific slapstick elements enhance or detract from the serious dimensions of the film?

3. Isolate three scenes of the film that depict some kind of protest or rebellion. How are these filmed? Discuss the camera angles and the *mise-en-scène* of these segments and how they shape viewer perception(s) of the protest (e.g., its effectiveness or ineffectiveness).
4. When and how does the film present landscape images or images of the town of Anklam? How do these images correlate or jar with the filmic narrative?
5. Only one West German appears in the film. What is his role? How does he present himself? How does the cast of the Anklam theater respond to him? How do visual elements condition their response? What role does the verbal element play?
6. There are many online interviews of Andreas Dresen. Please find three. Which questions are contained in all three of the interviews? Which questions prompted the most thorough and most interesting responses from Dresen? Then, think of two questions you could ask him about *Silent Country* that could elicit more than short, perfunctory responses and could truly add to your appreciation of the film.

RELATED FILM

Zug in die Ferne (1989). Filmed in the *Wende*-days of October 1989, this remarkable nineteen-minute student film by Dresen foreshadows important components of *Silent Country*, such as a paralyzed country and the act of continuous waiting. It is available on the *Stilles Land* DVD set.

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Lola rennt

(*Run Lola Run*, Tom Tykwer, 1998)



Lola (Franka Potente) runs through a group of nuns on the streets of Berlin. In the first two sequences represented in the photo, Lola rushes through the group of nuns, not noticing that she forces the nuns off the walk. In the third sequence, she steps off the walk and runs around them. In another scene she bumps into a woman with a stroller in the first two runs but not in the third, suggesting nonaggressive behavior leads to better results than aggression.

CREDITS

DirectorTom Tykwer
ScreenplayTom Tykwer
Director of PhotographyFrank Griebe
EditorMathilde Bonnefoy
Music..... Reinhold Heil, Johnny Klimek,
Franka Potente, Tom Tykwer
Producers.....Stefan Arndt, Gebgard Henke, Maria Köpf,
Andreas Schreitmüller
Production Companies.....X-Filme Creative Pool, Westdeutscher Rundfunk, rte
Length..... 81 Minutes; Color

Principal Cast

Franka Potente (Lola), Moritz Bleibtreu (Manni), Uta Lubosch (Mama), Herbert Knaup (Papa), Nina Petri (Jutta Hansen), Armin Rohde (Herr Schuster), Joachim

Król (Norbert von Au), Ludger Pistor (Herr Meier), Suzanne von Borsody (Frau Jäger), Monica Bleibtreu (the blind woman), Hans Paetsch (Narrator).

THE STORY

After announcing that life is a soccer game and that everything else is theory, *Lola rennt* begins to tell its story. Unfolding in a mere twenty minutes and then repeated in two additional twenty-minute segments with only slight, though crucial variations, the narrative is surprisingly simple. Receiving a frantic phone call from her boyfriend Manni, located in a phone booth far away from her, Lola promises to come up with 100,000 Marks, the amount Manni needs to deliver to car racketeers for a successfully executed car smuggling deal, the same amount that he had carelessly left on a subway train in a reflex action to escape from policemen controlling passengers for tickets. Lola has exactly twenty minutes not only to locate this large sum but also to deliver it to the far-away Manni, whose criminal boss would definitely kill him were he to show up empty-handed.

Lola's impassioned attempt to secure the money from her banker father fails. She ends up helping Manni during a supermarket holdup but is accidentally killed by a policeman. Refusing to die, Lola receives a second chance to accomplish the same hopeless task of securing 100,000 Marks to save Manni. Though she obtains the necessary money by robbing her father's bank and reaches Manni within the allotted twenty minutes, the outcome is again tragic: this time Manni is killed accidentally, but by a speeding ambulance rather than a policeman's bullet. Since neither ending is satisfactory, Lola receives a third chance to rescue Manni and their relationship. This time her twenty minutes conclude with a happy Hollywood ending: Lola wins 100,000 Marks in a casino. But Manni no longer needs it, for he has succeeded in recouping the lost money from the derelict who had taken it from the subway car. Thus Lola and Manni walk into a bright future, knowing that they can spend the extra 100,000 Marks as they wish.¹

BACKGROUND

During one week in September 1998, Tom Tykwer's *Lola rennt*, a low-budget film costing slightly more than three million German Marks (one and a half million dollars), suddenly transformed a particularly quixotic German dream into reality: a German film, rather than a Hollywood production, garnered the largest number of moviegoers. Like *The Butterfly Effect* (Eric Bless, J. Mackye Gruber, 2004) and Krzysztof Kieslowski's *Przypadek* (*Blind Chance*, 1987), whose sequences of a young man running after a train may have influenced the structure of Tykwer's movie, *Lola rennt* leans on chaos theory to construct its narrative. The film's success, however, rested less on perceptions of its conceptual depth than on its immensely

1. For a more detailed, longer version of this chapter, please see my article in the online journal *Glossen*, listed in the "Information" section at the end of this chapter.

successful blend of image, motion, and sound. Responding to the flame-haired, tattooed Lola's kinetic energy, Tykwer's accomplished, playful use of a broad array of filming techniques, and the film's pulsating soundtrack, German cinema critics emphasized that Tykwer had not only created something new but had expanded the possibilities of the filmic medium itself.

Just as astonishing as its success in Germany was the film's success outside Germany. Like Germans, most international viewers found the incredibly fast-paced *Lola rennt* simply fun to watch. They too gladly subjected themselves to the vicarious experiences of *Chaos*, *Verwirrung*, *Liebe, Tod* (chaos, confusion, love, death) that even the first movie flyer (distributed to Berlin audiences in the fall of 1998) had promised. Again and again, international reviews expressed astonishment that a German film—German films were generally regarded as excessively slow, dark, and without humor—could be so enjoyable.

When elaborating on the appeal of *Lola rennt* for Americans, Tykwer stresses its universal theme (a tiny moment has immense repercussions), its romantic aspects, and the emotional identification its main protagonists Manni and Lola generate. For most Americans, however, *Lola rennt*'s universal nature is probably attributable mainly to its innovative, even dazzling recycling of familiar elements of international youth culture (music, video games, interactive links). But the emotional identification with the main protagonists is far less pronounced than it was in Germany, where the male star who plays Manni, Moritz Bleibtreu, had the stature of a youth idol when the film premiered.

Despite emphasizing the universal aspects of *Lola rennt*, in particular when abroad, Tykwer repeatedly highlights its connection to Germany, usually by comparing it to his second film *Winterschläfer* (*Winter Sleepers*, 1997), a beautifully slow-paced film that depicts the personal and societal stagnation suffocating an entire generation of Germans that had experienced no German chancellor other than Helmut Kohl. In contrast, the very urban *Lola rennt* (Tykwer's third film), shot in the spring preceding the fall 1998 elections that removed Kohl from the chancellorship after a sixteen-year tenure, was meant as a wake-up call from lethargy, as a clarion call for change.

Germany's bulky, impenetrable bureaucracies and the malaise of its population had of course caused concern for a long time. But former Federal President Roman Herzog's "Berliner Rede" (Berlin speech), held in the Hotel Adlon on April 26, 1997, jolted the entire nation into reflecting seriously about its societal ills—among them the widespread culture of complaint, the prevalence of rigid behavior, and the unwillingness to initiate reforms of fossilized institutions. Exhorting his fellow citizens to self-renewal—to actively seek new ideas, to dare to be more daring, to create a society that encourages risk taking and does not punish initial failures, and above all to assume personal responsibility in all aspects of their lives—Herzog thundered: "*Durch Deutschland muss ein Ruck gehen*" ("a jolt must go through Germany"). Sprinting ahead courageously and determinedly, regardless of the odds against her, and undaunted by initial failures (the first two rounds of the plot, as well as failures within all three), Tykwer's fiery-red-haired Lola becomes a filmic emblem of the kind of jolt Herzog may have had in mind.

Admirably self-reliant, Lola responds to life optimistically. When events do not unfold to her liking, she recreates them until they do. As opposed to the protagonist in *Groundhog Day*, who is doomed to relive the same day until he develops a likable personality, Lola herself chooses to relive her twenty minutes until her world becomes one that *she* likes. And she does not in any way alter her personality during the entire course of the film. In Berlin, *Lola* attained the status of a political icon expressing passionate commitment, movement, and change. But the film's multi-option plot may have helped turn Lola into a multi-option icon that could be adopted just as readily by the staid political spectrum as by the progressive one. For example, Berlin's mayor Eberhard Diepgen (CDU), advised by a savvy, new marketing agency, appropriated the design of *Lola rennt* posters for the posters of his reelection campaign. These "*diepgen rennt für Berlin*" posters ("Diepgen runs for Berlin"), six hundred of them plastered all over Berlin by the end of December 1998, were intended to signal a zestful leap into the new year and to depict a physically fit, totally committed Diepgen, already running to ensure advantages for his city, even though the mayoral election was not to take place until October 1999. Because of the threats of lawsuits for appropriating the film's image, the Diepgen posters were removed before the projected removal date of January 12, 1999.

In contrast to his reaction to the Diepgen appropriation, Tykwer did not protest on June 15, 1999, when the Lola-look was transferred to Michael Naumann (SPD), Germany's first minister of culture, in a large digitized photo printed by the newspaper *Berliner Morgenpost*. There Naumann appears in Lola's attire with Lola's tattoo, running through Berlin flanked by nuns—exactly as Lola had been in one episode during the first round of the plot. Presumably because Naumann had already become a firm advocate of change during his few months in office, Tykwer did not mind his adoption of the Lola icon.

EVALUATION

Lola rennt's opening metaphor of life as a soccer match suggests that life is open to any and all possibilities (beyond some simple, unchanging rules, anything goes). It implies that outcomes depend on the speed, force, and trajectory of the ball. There is continuous motion, which leads to results that may or may not be permanent. Indeed, after a limited amount of time, the whole game starts over again. While the metaphor pertains to Lola, Manni, and those around them, Tykwer also applies it to Berlin—a city famous for never merely being but always becoming. In part because of this apparently unshakable reputation, Berlin has often been perceived as a veritable mecca of possibilities. Capitalizing on this reputation, Tykwer triggers an unusually high number of virtual reality simulations of Berlin.

Tykwer already accentuates the constructed nature of the new Berlin in the opening sequence of the film. First, an aerial shot shows a Berlin without the Wall but still divided into halves. Suddenly, accompanied by an unpleasant, deafeningly loud clank, similar to an explosion, the two parts (separated by the Spree River) are forced into union with each other, as if spoofing Willy Brandt's well-known words "*Es wächst zusammen, was zusammengehört*" ("things that belong together will grow



Lola and Manni strike an aggressive pose as they are trapped while fleeing the police after robbing the Bolle supermarket. Not until they resolve their money problems without force does the couple achieve a happy ending.

into each other”), a 1989 pronouncement on the two Germanys by now legendary because of the myriad of reformulations it has induced. Whereas Brandt had predicted the organic fusion of the two opposite parts of Berlin, Tykwer in *Lola rennt* forcibly merges areas scattered throughout Berlin, creating in virtual reality fashion spatial unity where none exists. In keeping with his heroine Lola, whose credo is to create a world pleasing to her, Tykwer fabricates a Berlin pleasing to him.

Though not necessarily aware that Tykwer’s crew filmed at more than forty Berlin locations, those conversant with Berlin’s geography do realize that the space portrayed in the film as a sequential chain for Lola’s run is by no means a single district, but an entity composed of many rearranged parts. Large sections of the movie were filmed in Berlin-Mitte, with several other districts such as Charlottenburg, Friedrichshain, Kreuzberg, Schöneberg, Wedding, and Wilmerdorf also involved. Rather than a haphazard, patchwork arrangement, the Berlin projected in *Lola rennt* is a carefully planned construct, meant to show the synthetic millennial Berlin wedged between demolition and regeneration.

The supermarket where first Lola is shot and then Manni is run over by an ambulance is a particularly good example of how Tykwer intentionally creates a synthetic Berlin. Though supposedly located in Berlin-Mitte (a district in the center of Berlin), the street shown in the film resembles a street in an American western. Lola and Manni meet here at 12:00, the high-noon showdown time of American westerns. Gun in holster, Manni approaches the Bolle supermarket with the swagger of a self-righteous cowboy, his movement accentuated by the use of slow motion. The entire setting is a spoof of the inorganic nature of Berlin-Mitte at the

time of the millennium. Tykwer is convinced that his film succeeds in being so alive precisely because of the contrast between its absurdly synthetic background and the emotions expressed so honestly and vividly by its main protagonists. To encourage the perception of Lola and Manni as particularly genuine and consequently deserving of viewer identification, the scenes in which they appear are shot with 35mm film rather than with the video footage reserved for the other, less real characters.

An absence of traffic contributes to the constructed, artificial feel of the film's Berlin. In the midst of *Lola rennt's* many unnaturally empty streets, heightening the recurring impression of Berlin consisting of a set of props, people still act as if the streets belong to them and not to vehicles on the road. They are constantly surprised by the few vehicles that do appear. Lola never counts on vehicles obstructing her way and is surprised when a truck almost hits her in the last twenty-minute sequence. She is similarly surprised whenever a bicycle materializes next to her, or when businessman Mr. Meier's Citroen appears in front of her. Workers crossing the street with a huge plate glass are caught unawares by the ambulance that rushes into the pane. Manni too, walking in the middle of the street (toward the end of the second twenty minutes) as if he owned it, certainly does not expect a car to hit him, much less the ambulance.

While the ubiquitous ambulance specializes in crashing into people, the only two personal cars driven in the center of the German capital, a Citroen and a BMW, keep crashing into each other. When there are more than two cars on the road in Berlin-Mitte (other than on the Karl-Marx-Allee), they tend to be police cars rapidly materializing in surreal abundance. Rather than naturally belonging to urban life in Berlin, they seem transplanted from the many TV programs zealously fashioning Berlin into Germany's capital of crime. On her sprint across the Berlin-Mitte section of the German capital, Lola does of course meet at least a small number of people, each a representative of a social class: the sharp-tongued housewife with the baby buggy, the derelict with his plastic bags (including Manni's bag with the 100,000 Marks), the youth with his stolen bicycle, businessman Mr. Meier (her father's associate) in his elegant car, and an old woman with a watch. And yet, other than a group of nuns strangely out of place in Berlin-Mitte, she encounters no crowds and no evidence of teeming life. Surprisingly, Lola nimbly forges ahead in Berlin-Mitte (despite her heavy Doc Martens boots) and reinvigorates it by her presence. Not once does she pause to ascertain the right direction, for she never experiences spatial dislocation. Her metropolis contains no obvious historical markers of Berlin's checkered history and no fragmentary, disassociated spaces. Rather, the most disparate city spaces readily fold into each other. A sea of German Democratic Republic (GDR) apartment high-rises, for example, yields to the neobaroque Bode-museum. As much at home in the Karl-Marx-Allee as in Wedding's Gartenstraße, Lola becomes the first filmic protagonist equally at home in all of Berlin's disparate parts. Oblivious to contraries, she in essence affirms them. In contrast to the angels and Berlin inhabitants in Wim Wenders's *Himmel über Berlin* (1987), who wander aimlessly about, Lola exudes a sense of belonging. Indeed, *Lola rennt* becomes the first German film to present a truly unified Berlin.

Music plays a large role in Tykwer's simulated Berlin construct. The song "Believe," not included in the film but placed at the beginning on the *Lola rennt* CD and meant to supplement the film, provides a long list of what Lola doesn't believe in, such as trouble, silence, panic, fear, history, truth, chance, and destiny. But—in virtual reality fashion—she does believe in one thing: fantasy. Thus the songs initiating her first and third runs ("Running One" and "Running Three"), as well as the song "Wish" ("*Komm zu mir*") that accompanies the closing credits of the film, all express wishes of pure fantasy, none possibly capable of being realized. The following, occurring in varying order from song to song, exemplify the kinds of wishes expressed: "I wish I was a forest of trees that do not hide"; "I wish I was a stranger who wanders down the sky"; "I wish I was a heartbeat that never comes to rest." "Running Two," with its list of "nevers" (for example, "never letting go"; "never saying no"; "never giving up"), consists of similarly unrealistic wishes, but they are placed into the context of Lola's and Manni's love for each other, a love proving that no impossibilities exist in their lives. The concluding song of the film stresses that the love began with an explosion that had shattered all limitations. And at the end of sequence one, we hear "What a Difference a Day Makes," conjuring up time and the possibilities it provides.

That the best possible future has a chance of being realized is conveyed in the film in various ways, but especially at the beginning with the off-voice of Germany's consummate fairytale narrator Hans Paetsch, his audio tapes a household presence in most German children's lives, and with the cartoon Lola (in the opening tunnel sequence and as she spurts down the staircase before turning into the real Lola outside), animation of course signaling that anything—even the most positive outcome—could happen. In Berlin, arguably the iconic millennial city, much is happening. Needed in this setting are individuals like Lola, who respond with various answers to single challenges, as not only the repetitions of the twenty-minute plot sequence but also Lola's behavior within each version indicate. In the second version, for example, when her father refuses to give her the needed money, she snatches the guard's gun, thereby getting her way; in the third version, when her father had departed before her arrival, she decides to obtain the money in a casino. Lola's seemingly cursed twenty minutes turn into lucky twenties at the roulette table, suggestive as well of lucky fortunes in the millennial year 2000.

Lola wins her battle against fate because of her ability to make decisions and her talent to forge ahead, exactly the ability her banker father and many other Berliners lack. In virtual reality fashion, Lola also generates endless possibilities for the people into whom she crashes on her run, particularly for those whose lives seem the most humdrum and inconsequential. The Polaroid camera flash forwards on each of Lola's three rounds project in five-second linear narratives that the future lives of these people vary radically. The woman with the baby buggy, for example, may end up as a child kidnapper, a lottery jackpot winner, or a Jehovah's Witness. Only the stationary mother, sipping drinks and talking on the phone all day, remains impervious to and consequently unaffected by Lola whenever she sees her daughter before her fateful run-in with the dog on the stairs.

In essence, *Lola rennt* accommodates multiple ways of perceiving and responding to images, just as it accommodates diverse perceptions of time and dissimilar

means of filling it. While Manni's twenty minutes are constrictive, allowing room for maneuvering only in the last segment, Lola's same twenty minutes expand and contract, fill out or fill up, rush forward and back, and influence outcomes in unforeseen ways. *Lola rennt* thus points to the delights of improvisation in the midst of an uncompleted environment. Surely it is the ideal film to impel more participation and enthusiastic involvement in shaping yet another temporary future of Berlin. (MS)

QUESTIONS

1. *Lola rennt* tells the same story three times.
 - a. Which elements of the story, if any, are exactly the same each time?
 - b. Which elements change?
 - c. Which elements are found in only one or two of the versions?
2. Tykwer's film uses the conceit of being able to relive segments of the past. *Groundhog Day* (1993) and *Butterfly Effect* (2004), two Hollywood films, also address the question "what if I could do that again?" If you have seen either of these films or both, compare them with *Lola rennt*.
3. Describe the music. When is techno music used in the film? What is the difference in the text of the predominant song that accompanies the three runs? What other styles of music can you identify in the film?
4. Describe the scenes that follow "Run One" and "Run Two," when Lola and Manni are lying in bed. What function do they play in the structure of the film? What function do they play in the story?
5. Why is beginning the film with a soccer match an appropriate way to introduce the film's story?
6. What role do the various cartoon elements play in the film?
7. Tykwer also rewards Manni with success at the end of the film. Why do most commentaries focus on Lola's success at the end but not on Manni's? Why did Tykwer assure the success of both protagonists? How does Tykwer depict each of the two main protagonists in the final scene of the film?
8. Does the film treat feminist concerns? If so, in what respect? If not, why not?

RELATED FILMS

- Butterfly Effect* (Eric Bless and J. Mackye Gruber, 2004). The hero of *Butterfly Effect* is able to daydream changes in his reality and that of the people around him.
- Der Krieger und die Kaiserin* (*The Princess and the Warrior*, 2000). Tykwer tries his hand at a German fairy tale in which a bank robber and a nurse escape to a house on a cliff.
- Groundhog Day* (Harold Ramis, 1993). The main character is condemned to relive his day over and over, with some changes, until he succeeds in becoming more likable.
- Przypadek* (*Blind Chance*, Krzysztof Kieslowski, 1987). *Blind Chance* provided Tykwer with the bare outline of his idea, a person who by running just a bit differently in three situations changes his life.
- Winterschläfer* (*Winter Sleepers*, 1997). The pace of Tykwer's second film does not prepare viewers for the far more accelerated pace of *Lola rennt*, but the two films do have some concerns—such as coincidence and chaos—in common.

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Nirgendwo in Afrika

(*Nowhere in Africa*, Caroline Link, 2001)



Regina Redlich (Lea Kurka) and the cook Owuor (Sidede Onyulo) prepare a special celebration.

CREDITS

Director Caroline Link
Screenplay Caroline Link (based on the novel
by Stephanie Zweig)
Director of Photography Gernot Roll
Music Niki Reiser
Producers Andreas Bareiß, Bernd Eichinger,
Peter Herrmann et al.
Production Companies Bavaria Film, Constantin Film Produktion GmbH
Length 141 minutes; Color

Principal Cast

Juliane Köhler (Jettel Redlich), Merab Ninidze (Walter Redlich), Sidede Onyulo (Owuor), Lea Kurka (Regina as child), Karoline Eckertz (Regina as adolescent), Matthias Habich (Süßkind).

THE STORY

Having recognized the danger for Jews in his native Germany after Hitler and the Nazis come to power, Walter Redlich, a successful lawyer, has immigrated to Kenya, finding work managing the farm of a British landowner. Before Redlich can call for his family, he contracts malaria and is nursed back to health by Süßkind, a fellow émigré from Germany, who gives him quinine, the traditional cure. Owuor, his African servant, prefers homeopathic medicines. Süßkind's patronizing instructions to Owuor on how to administer the quinine and Owuor's rejection of the advice once Süßkind has gone introduce a major theme that will not be resolved until the final scene of the movie, namely, the polarity between native and immigrant cultures.

Once he is cured, Redlich sends for his wife, Jettel, a sophisticated but spoiled member of the Jewish professional class, and his young daughter, Regina. Jettel has difficulties acculturating into the life in Kenya: she rejects African culture from the beginning, denying to herself that the past is lost to her and that she will have to make a new life in another culture. Reflecting her denial are an elegant party gown she bought with the last of the Redlich money and an insistence on bringing china rather than the refrigerator her husband had wanted. In contrast to her mother, young Regina Redlich, owing to her age, readily adapts to life in Africa, learning the language with ease and befriending the local children. Based on the novel *Nirgendwo in Afrika* (*Nowhere in Africa* 2000) by Stephanie Zweig, the film of the same name tells the story of a Jewish family faced with the physical and psychological realities of immigration. Each member of the family copes differently in a totally unfamiliar culture as the tragedy of the Holocaust unfolds off-screen.

BACKGROUND

Nirgendwo in Afrika (2001) is one of the many films that try to come to terms with what happened to the Jews in Nazi Germany. Most of the countries that fought in World War II have produced films on the topic of Nazi persecution of the Jews. Most of the initial efforts to deal with World War II and Nazi Germany avoided referencing the Holocaust directly, as the years after the war were concerned with rebuilding Germany and creating bridges between Germany and the Allies. Notable exceptions were Wolfgang Staudte's 1946 movie *Die Mörder sind unter uns* (*The Murderers Are Among Us*), which showed a brief headline proclaiming "2 Million Gassed," and *The Stranger* (Orson Welles, 1946), in which an ex-Nazi, who had practiced atrocities in a concentration camp, has assumed a new identity in the United States. Poland and the former Czechoslovakia also referenced the Holocaust with two films set in concentration camps. But until the 60s other postwar films, if they dealt with the years 1933–45, focused on issues outside the Holocaust. Notable exceptions are *Nuit et brouillard* (*Night and Fog*, Alain Resnais, 1955), a French documentary of Nazi extermination camps whose lyrical narration contrasts with the horrific images of the camps; *Ostatni Etap* (*The Last Stage*, Wanda Jakubowska, 1948), a Polish partly autobiographical film that portrays the misery and death of

prisoners in Auschwitz; and *Daleká cesta* (*Distant Journey*, Alfréd Radok, 1950), a Czechoslovakian film that is set partly in Theresienstadt, a transit camp where Jewish prisoners were held before deportation to Auschwitz or Treblinka. The East German director Frank Beyer took up the theme in 1963 with *Nackt unter Wölfen* (*Naked among Wolves*), a story of how inmates protected a young boy in Auschwitz from being discovered and killed. Italian director Roberto Benigni filmed a similar story in 1997, *La vita è bella* (*Life is Beautiful*).

Other notable examples of the Holocaust on film are Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993), which takes place in the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp, and Roman Polanski's *The Pianist* (2002), which shows both the brutality of the Nazi Holocaust and one man's escape. West Germany's directors for the most part when dealing with the Holocaust have focused on escape from the Nazis rather than events in the camps. Among these are Peter Lilienthal's *David* (1979) and Polish director Agnieszka Holland's *Europa Europa* (1990), filmed in German. Both show youthful Jewish protagonists as they hide from the Nazis among the Germans. Finally, some directors have shown the lucky few who were able to get out of Germany before deportation to the camps. Austrian director Axel Corti's trilogy, *Wohin und Zurück* (*To Where and Back*, 1982–85), follows a young man from Vienna to France, where just as happened to the Redlichs in Kenya, he is arrested as a German sympathizer when war breaks out. Michael Hoffmann's and Harry Raymon's *Regentropfen* (*Raindrops*, 1981) likewise shows a German Jewish family finally able to escape the Nazis only to be refused asylum by the Allied countries fighting Germany.

Link continues the change in perspective that has occurred in films that deal with the Holocaust. Whereas early films focused on unnamed victims and later films told about individual tragedies, more recent films tell about the survivors, the witnesses to the tragedy. Link's characters cannot rightly even declare witness status, except to the early years of the regime, since they escaped before the tragedy began. Thus, she takes the theme of the Holocaust to another level, one that asks Germans and Jews to deal with the aftermath of the Holocaust; for Link's protagonists escaped, but their friends and family did not, leading to feelings of guilt. Moreover, the Redlichs, even if they escaped death, saw the European culture that they felt a part of destroyed. Finally, now that the war is over and the Nazis defeated, they have to ask themselves how much they want to reintegrate into a society that spawned the tragedy. Süßkind, the family friend, cannot ever accept being German again. Walter's military superior, an Englishman, cannot understand why Walter would still consider himself German. And the narrator confesses to not "remembering Germany." Yet Jettel, Walter, and Regina repatriate themselves, an end that seems to offer viewers a sense of final resolution to one of the twentieth century's greatest tragedies.

EVALUATION

That *Nirgendwo in Afrika* won the Oscar for Best Foreign Film of 2002 is no surprise. Members of the Academy of Motion Pictures traditionally favor movies with a serious theme, and without argument, few themes have dominated academic,

intellectual, and public discourse as much as those related to the years of World War II in general and to the Holocaust in particular. But it would be unfair to attribute the film's success to the theme alone, for it is the manner in which Caroline Link addresses the past that has led to the film's success with critics and public. Unlike earlier films about the Holocaust, at least those since the American television miniseries, *Holocaust*, which foreground the atrocities committed by the Nazis, Link keeps Nazi Germany and the persecution of the Jews off screen. Indeed, the scenes in Germany play in a German Jewish household, rather than in a public environment, and the only Nazi to appear is a helpful member of the Hitler Youth, who extends a hand when Jettel falls down while skating. Moreover, in the Africa sequences, which compose most of the movie, Link's focus is on the problems of acculturation, marital and familial relationships, and coming-of-age. Yet the absence of the Holocaust in the film's story paradoxically heightens its presence in the minds of the viewers.

The seeming contradiction of presence through absence becomes a theme as soon as the film begins. Regina's (the narrator of the film) admission that she does not remember Germany places Germany and its past forward in our imagination, and yet Germany, other than for the opening scenes, will not be a visual subject for the remainder of the movie. In the same vein, in the opening scenes when Jettel, Regina's mother, stumbles while skating, she is offered assistance by a member of the Hitler Youth. As the boy extends his hand and Jettel sees his Hitler Youth armband, she refuses his help, a gesture that reminds viewers more strongly of the Jews' status within Nazi Germany than belligerent action on the part of the youth would have. Throughout the film, Link uses cinematography, music, characterization, and setting to create a story behind the one we are watching. Beneath or behind the family squabbles, the coming-of-age story, the African drums, and the learning of cultural tolerance lies a text of irreversible tragedy whose story continues.

The major and minor characters of *Nirgendwo in Afrika* are beset with contradiction. Regina Redlich, played as a child by Lea Kurka and as an adolescent by Karoline Eckertz, narrates the film. It is through her eyes that we experience Kenya, hear about events in far-off Germany, and witness the troubles in her parents' marriage. She is thus our entry into the film. Her admission that she remembers little about the Germany of 1938 would be true for most viewers, and simultaneously distances that country from them, allowing them to experience the events there as vaguely as the narrator. As with another of her child/adolescent characters, Lara in *Jenseits der Stille* (*Beyond Silence*, 1996), Link presents Regina as older than her age, possessing wisdom and selflessness not ordinarily found in children. Yet she embodies the cliché "from the mouths of babes," teaching the adults around her and helping them to grow. Regina is also the one character who, because of her age, acculturates completely. Indeed, she assimilates into the local African culture even as she keeps and grows within her own. She visits the natives in their huts, climbs trees with her friends, and recognizes their culture as equal to her own. When she climbs a tree after returning from school as a sexually maturing teenager, she strips to the waist and climbs with her male friend in an act as natural as that of any of the local children. When her mother does this, at the behest of her husband, it is obviously a sign of how they only mimic the local culture and cannot be a part of it.



Walter Redlich (Merab Ninidze) comforts his wife Jettel (Juliane Köhler) during one of their many disagreements.

Jettel Redlich, played by Juliane Köhler, undergoes the most change in the film. Although told from Regina's perspective, the film is more about the mother's coming to terms with Africa than it is about Regina's coming-of-age there. For while Link focuses the story on the daughter, she does so to contrast the genuineness of youthful naïveté with the deceit of sophistication. Although the mother learns the most in the film, and thus provides viewers with a focus for their own enlightenment, she is also the most difficult person to accept. On a personal level, Jettel is unpleasant. She is a spoiled Jewish socialite, more interested in clothes and societal activity than making a life in Kenya with her husband and child. For the trip to Kenya, she has ignored her husband's instructions to bring a refrigerator and leave the china at home. She has also used the last of her money for an expensive evening gown, suggesting her complete lack of awareness of what awaits. On a sociopolitical level, she is insensitive and ethnocentric. She treats her cook as a servant for all things rather than as a trained employee, and she looks on her life on the farm as a burden she would rather not endure. She finds the African children dirty, the food monotonous, and the culture backward. On a moral level, she seems reprehensible. She has an affair with an officer of the country-club prison she has been sent to, while her husband is in a genuine prison. Moreover, she is tempted to start yet another affair with a friend of the family rather than join her husband and daughter in returning to Germany. And yet, despite all her hostility to the culture, to her fish-out-of-water nature, and to her weakness in character, Jettel becomes one with the African culture. She learns and converses in Swahili, accepts African death rituals, and even teaches her daughter about the importance of keeping and yet accepting the differences among people.

Jettel carries the moral message of the movie, a lesson that is both obvious and complex. On the one hand, she represents the person whose eyes are opened to cultural diversity. She is in Kenya because of persecution back home. And while she does not persecute her African neighbors, she does not respect them either. Only through the intervention of her daughter and husband does she learn to live in another culture as an outsider. On the other hand, she also represents the pre- and postwar Jew who first ignored what was occurring in Germany and then, having survived, has to learn to accept her survival and return, either physically or psychologically, to the land of her persecutors.

Walter Redlich, played by Merab Ninidze, offers a counterweight to Jettel's seeming naïveté about the reasons they are in Kenya. He alone in his family recognized the danger the Nazis posed to the Jews. After the war, he is again alone in his feeling of obligation to return to Germany, to face his persecutors and his family's killers, and to begin the process of healing still going on today. In a sense, he is too good to believe. When letters are received, he has to interpret them for Jettel, who still hopes to return to Germany and who still imagines her family as living in Breslau in the comfortable conditions of the middle class. He also holds together their marriage, which may have been in trouble already before emigrating from Germany. In a conversation between Jettel and Walter's father, her father-in-law tells her to love his son. He implies that he knows the marriage is in trouble and fears that Walter will be hurt. And indeed, the relationship in Kenya revolves around Jettel's initial selfishness in her marriage to Walter. Against his nature, he even tries hunting to satisfy her craving for something other than eggs and bread. And when the farm's harvest is threatened by a plague of locusts just before his departure for Germany, he returns to Jettel to help save the crop, giving up his desire to return home to once again practice law. Only Jettel's newly found wisdom overturns his selfless decision.

Owuor, played by Sidede Onyulo, represents both a strong African personality and a liberal cliché. When Jettel insists he learn German, he turns from her and continues to use Swahili to refer to items in the house. When she wants him to help in the garden, he is truly offended that she would ask him, a cook, to be an outdoor servant. He also refuses to get water for her but then shows his strength by withstanding the taunts of village women when he carries water for Jettel. Yet despite all his strengths, Owuor seems little more than a romantic's vision of the noble savage. He utters wisdom, such as "Black women don't need help, white women are helpless." He introduces us to the customs of the Africans, generally presented as quaint: the need to watch the first fire, or the time when an African man must start his journey. Indeed, the fact that he finds his way back to the family after having been separated from them in time and distance says as much about his determination as it does about the native's devotion to *bwana*, familiar from countless movies about Africa.

Four minor British characters—a British school headmaster, a lieutenant, a landowner, and the Jewish representative in Kenya—create an interesting subtext in the film. For together they represent the historical reality of how non-German Europe ignored the plight of the Jews, either because of lack of concern or latent anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism seems strongest in the headmaster, whose insensitivity

to the Jewish children during assembly and whose patronizing questioning of Regina, who has done well in school, reveal the cultural gulf between British and Jewish culture. In contrast, the Jewish representative in Kenya reflects that non-German Jews could be insensitive to Jewish refugees from Hitler's Germany. Although willing to meet with Jettel to discuss the plight of incarcerated Jews, he does not see their problem as the responsibility of the non-German Jewish community. The British landowner is equally unsympathetic to the German Jews, ignoring common sense, looking past the reasons the Jews have left Germany and firing Walter Redlich, believing him a German sympathizer. Finally, the British lieutenant uses his position and Jettel's vulnerability to seduce her into an affair which will secure the release of her husband.

Underscoring the paradoxical behavior of the characters are lush cinematography, expressive camera movement, and evocative music, which say more than the simple images and melodies. Link's cinematographer captures the vastness of Africa's landscape, whether showing rivers, savannas, or mountains. It is not a frightening landscape; indeed, it is friendly. But in its vastness, it threatens to envelop the foreign inhabitants. Aided by crane shots that pull away from the scene, characters become part of the environment and are swallowed up by it. Their insignificance in the greater whole that is Kenya is further emphasized through contrast with the scenes that take place in Germany. Here, characters are not part of the environment but instead are the environment. The surroundings hardly matter at all. Our attention is drawn to dialogue, facial expressions, familial importance, and noninteraction with German neighbors. But the unseen world of the Germans surrounding them poses more threat than the seemingly hostile Africa.

In the African scenes, the cinematographer also works with contrasting effects. As a counterbalance to the Kenyan vastness emphasized through sun-drenched scenes that seem light and airy, he includes night scenes lit by candlelight and fire. The chiaroscuro play of light and dark in these scenes forces attention to detail: a family Sabbath, a discussion of the concentration camps, Jettel's attendance at a native ceremony wearing her evening dress. Here also the cinematography is enhanced through camera work that moves over faces, circles rooms, and rests on poignant scenes. One of the most poignant of these is reminiscent of Jean Renoir's *La grande illusion* (*The Grand Illusion*, 1937), also a film about war and about understanding the Other. In Renoir's film, a German woman points out a table to some prisoners she is hiding. As the camera glides over the table, she recites battles from the war and ends by saying now the table is too big, a statement being reinforced by the camera work. In *Nowhere in Africa*, the family has just received a letter from Germany explaining the worsening situation. As the father reads the letter, the camera pans the room, seemingly empty, moving closer to a table in the middle. The scene then cuts to Walter, pans to Jettel and then to Regina before pulling away, showing all three positioned at a distance from each other as the empty table sits in the middle of the room.

The musical score for *Nirgendwo in Afrika* is reminiscent of the scores for classical films. It evokes place, time, and mood. It overarches scenes, allowing smooth transitions but also commenting on relationships. As the film begins, African drum rhythms sound behind the credits. In flashbacks to Germany, European-style music

plays. And yet European music bleeds into the scenes in Africa, carrying over the characters' European culture. This is especially true in early scenes, as Jettel is still unable to shed her German culture. European music likewise plays as the Redlich china is unpacked or the parents discuss the need to send Regina to a British school. But in scenes with Regina, who has accepted African culture, the drums sound. Finally, once the mother has accepted the culture, even her scenes contain drum rhythms rather than violins. They beat as she takes over as manager of the farm, and they are joined by chanting voices while Jettel and the villagers fight invading locusts. They also sound as the Redlichs leave Kenya, the final shot freezing on an African peddler, perhaps as a reminder that alien cultures can coexist without obliterating each other.

Nirgendwo in Afrika is both a simple and complex film, laying a straightforward personal tale of the difficulties of immigrants over a universal story of persecution and tragedy. Two things are immediately remarkable about the way Caroline Link handles these themes in her film. First, unlike many films set in Africa and unlike many films about immigration, the film does not for the most part patronize. Despite the too-good-to-be-believed portrayal of Owuor, African culture, the dominant culture of the film, is depicted objectively, from the slaughtering of a goat to the abandonment of an old woman. Moreover, although the Redlichs balk at village customs, in the end, they accept local culture rather than teach the locals European ways. The mother's comment that "tolerance does not mean that we all have to be the same" could well serve as a motto for multi-diversity. Within the world of the movie, the statement allows Africans and Europeans to allow the continued existence of the Other without ultimately eliminating or leveling differences. Jettel accepts the custom of placing the sick out to die where the hyenas can get at them, yet stays to sit with the woman rather than abandoning her completely, comforting her as well as herself. Walter accepts Owuor's explanation of why he can take nothing of the father's on his safari, and Owuor, who had wanted to leave without seeing Regina, is able in the end to pick her up for a last hug.

Lying beneath this tale of acceptance, tolerance, and growth is the darker text of the Holocaust, which is always in the background threatening to disrupt the tale of immigration. The Holocaust comes to the foreground through letters, news reports, and newsreel footage. Letters from Breslau report how the members of the family who stayed behind in Germany are slowly being denied rights, something reflected in their loss of spatial integrity. They are moved first to a ghetto, then to a concentration camp, and then are murdered. News reports and newsreel footage bring the reasons of the Redlichs' status as immigrants to the fore. These are not immigrants looking for a better life—they are refugees hoping to continue living. (RCR)

QUESTIONS

1. Identify and discuss as many of the historical references in the film as possible. That is, when does the story include references to what is going on in Germany and elsewhere?

2. Link uses facial expression and glances to dramatic effect. Can you locate any specific scenes when just a glance or look gives meaning to what the camera shows?
3. What is the significance of the antelope's and the dog's names?
4. In what ways is Regina a device to tell the story rather than a child or adolescent?
5. European movies do not always end happily. When do we know that all will turn out fine for the Redlich family?
6. Describe in detail how the film uses visuals, music, and dialogue to portray the clash of cultures.
7. Define the idea of cultural acceptance using examples from the film.

RELATED FILMS

The following German-language films focus on Nazi persecution of the Jews. All of them are available with English subtitles.

The Book Thief (Brian Percival, 2013). A German teenage girl hides a Jewish refugee, nursing him through illness by reading to him.

Charlotte (Frans Weisz, 1981). The film is based on the true story of a painter of watercolors who died in a concentration camp. The film focuses on Charlotte Salomon's life before her deportation.

David (Peter Lilienthal, 1979). Lilienthal follows a teenage youth as he hides out in Nazi Germany awaiting a chance to escape.

Europa Europa (Agnieszka Holland, 1990). Known in Germany by the title *Hitlerjunge Salomon*, the film was rejected by the German film industry as Germany's entry for the Best Foreign Film category of the Academy Awards on the grounds that its director was not German.

Nackt unter Wölfen (*Naked among Wolves*, Frank Beyer, 1963). This East German film is one of the earliest German-language movies to focus on the Holocaust.

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Good Bye Lenin!

(Wolfgang Becker, 2003)



Christiane Kerner watching the Lenin monument flying by.

CREDITS

Director	Wolfgang Becker
Screenplay	Wolfgang Becker, Bernd Lichtenberg
Director of Photography	Martin Kukula
Editor	Peter R. Adam
Music by	Yann Tiersen
Production Design	Lothar Holler
Producer	Stefan Arndt
Length	121 minutes; Color

Principal Cast

Daniel Brühl (Alex), Katrin Saß (Mutter), Chulpan Khamatova (Lara), Maria Simon (Ariane), Florian Lukas (Denis), Alexander Beyer (Rainer), Burghart Klaußner (Robert Kerner, Vater), Christine Schorn (Frau Schäfer), Michael Gwisdek (Direktor Klapprath).

THE STORY

Good Bye Lenin! takes place in the final days of East Germany in 1989 and centers on the family of Alexander Kerner, who grew up in East Berlin. In flashback scenes

Alex's story of growing up in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) is filled in: after his father escapes to West Berlin, his mother Christiane has a nervous breakdown and refuses to speak for months, indicating the first stages of denial. When she starts talking again, she lets it be known that her husband deserted the family and ran off with a younger woman. She throws herself into political activity and becomes almost fanatical in her support of Communist ideals.

During a demonstration involving students and pro-democracy marchers, which Christiane stumbles on while walking home one evening, she witnesses Alexander being beaten up by riot police and bundled into a van. The experience is so unexpected and shocking that she has a heart attack in the street. For eight months she lies in a coma, during which time the Berlin Wall is demolished, the government collapses, capitalism takes root, and freedom of expression is restored.

When she regains consciousness and is brought back to her apartment, Alexander creates a false world for her in which nothing has changed since her heart attack, for fear that knowing the truth about the demise of the GDR might cause a second heart attack and kill her. To accomplish his ruse, Alexander embarks on an exhilarating project to get hold of East German groceries, which are becoming increasingly rare and for which Christiane so yearns—Mokkafix instant coffee, Globus peas, and Spreewald pickles have all disappeared. These GDR brands have been replaced by an onslaught of Western products, and although they were much hated by Alexander and his sister Ariane, they gain tremendously in emotional value for them as symbols of the old life to which Christiane clings.

At the same time, Alexander's loving project to keep the German Democratic Republic alive for his mother does have a playful political element. Christiane asks for a television set to watch the news, and Alexander makes use of his new job with a Western satellite-dish retailer and gets his workmate Denis to produce GDR-style prime-time news videos, which are then beamed into Christiane's living room. In a reversal of reality, they feature westerners flocking to the GDR because they have realized its Socialist potential. They also show Sigmund Jähn, the only East German in outer space, as Erich Honecker's successor.

Alexander is able to maintain this front for a few months. At the climactic end of the movie his mother reveals the truth: their father had not gone to the West for another woman; instead, he had gone to find a place in West Berlin for the entire family to live, but Christiane had been too scared to follow him. After revealing this sad truth, she has another heart attack. Alexander then visits his father in West Berlin for the first time and asks him to see Christiane in the hospital. After a final fake TV broadcast where the cosmonaut Sigmund Jähn assumes the role of the GDR head of state, Christiane dies and, as Alexander believes, never finds out that the GDR had ceased to exist. But Christiane knows, as the viewer notices from her amusing glance at Alex, but she does not want to rob him of the illusion of having created a fake GDR for her. In reality he had recreated his country for himself.

BACKGROUND

The film's director Wolfgang Becker was born in 1954 in West Germany and studied at Berlin's Free University and at the German Film & Television Academy (DFFB). Produced in 2003, *Good Bye, Lenin!* was his most successful film.

The movie focuses on the events of the year that led to the fall of the Wall and to German unification. After Hungary had opened its borders in the summer of 1989, East Germans who could travel there without restrictions began escaping to Austria. The East German government responded with a number of contradictory regulations that had the goal of keeping their citizens in the country. The people realized the insecurity of their government and began mass demonstrations, which started the "Peaceful Revolution" of 1989 and culminated in Berlin's large Alexanderplatz demonstration on November 4. East Germany's longtime leader Erich Honecker had resigned on October 18, 1989. However, as the wave of refugees kept increasing, Honecker's successor Krenz decided on November 9 to allow refugees to exit directly through crossing points between East Germany and West Germany, including between East and West Berlin.

Later the same day, the ministerial administration modified the proposal to include private, round-trip travel. Krenz's press secretary Günter Schabowski gave a press conference on live television in the evening of November 9 and announced the new regulation, but he had not been told that it was not to take effect until the following day. Eager East Berliners went to the Wall immediately, and pointed to the TV announcement when the guards would not let them through. Eventually it was decided to give everyone permission without any documentation, which in effect ended the existence of the Wall and, ultimately, of the GDR. What followed was the rapid accession of East Germany to the Federal Republic within a year. The quick Westernization process of replacing Eastern products and the Communist life style with a Western way of life in the course of one year is the theme of *Good Bye Lenin!*

EVALUATION

Good Bye Lenin! was one of the most successful German post-unification movies. Labeled a comedy, and one of the funniest German films in years, *Goodbye Lenin!* still contains a serious message. In its tongue-and-cheek presentation of "Ostalgie" or nostalgia for the lost world of the East, we recognize a requiem for a dream of a better world under Socialism, a dream that was held by people in the West as well as the East. This better world is first represented by Alex's mother Christiane, who represents a real and engaged GDR citizen with a firm belief in Socialism. Her enthusiasm is the compensation for her failed marriage—after her husband had defected to the West, she "married the Socialist system," as her son Alex comments sarcastically. Mrs. Kerner redirects herself completely to the Socialist cause and becomes the ombudsman for all those who complain of injustices in the GDR system, helping them write odd *Eingaben* (appeals for change) with a lot of wit and humor.

And as Alex's mother took over and became the Socialist mother figure as it often is represented in Socialist literature, the GDR of *Goodbye Lenin!* becomes yet another representation of the "*Muttirepublik*" ("mommy republic"). This feminine symbolization shows that even those who had been victimized considered their state to be morally on their side. And when Alex's mother falls seriously ill with her final heart attack, she regrets her botched escape from Socialism as the biggest mistake of her life.

The film begins with a series of introductory shots connected by Alex's voice-over. It lends the film a semi-documentary style, especially with the combination of real footage with reenactment and documentary scenes. With this blend in the beginning of the film, we are already prepared for the movie's later artistic deception, when Alex and his friend Denis use documentary footage to recreate a fake reality. The documentary effect of the movie's introduction is enhanced by the use of Super-8 images that were popular for home movies at that time. The introduction, which takes about ten minutes, leads into the main story that begins with the events of 1989.

The film then introduces a number of key scenes in rapid succession; the first one is a demonstration against the celebration of the GDR's fortieth anniversary, where Alex's mother collapses while he is beaten up and taken away by riot police. The second key scene occurs when Mrs. Kerner steps outside her apartment for the first time and witnesses the removal of the Lenin statue from its traditional location at East Berlin's Lenin Square, a much-debated event in Berlin's history. After Mrs. Kerner asks "*Was ist hier los?*" ("What's going on here?"), Alex is challenged to use the GDR's official news program *Aktuelle Kamera* to reinvent history with fake news. The explanation he creates for his mother to watch is that the GDR has granted tens of thousands of Westerners political asylum in East Berlin. And since they had gotten tired of living in the stressful competitive West, Christiane responds with an offer to house some of the homeless Western refugees.

As the movie's protagonist and the film's ever-present narrator, Alex represents another facet of the dream. He looks back with critical distance, recognizing the old system's failures but also its successes. However, Alex seems to enjoy the changes of the *Wende* (fall of the Wall), when Berlin became the center of the universe: "Everything was possible, everything was imaginable." When his mother wakes up from her coma, Alex becomes more engaged in life and recreates his version of the old world in order to ensure his mother's survival.

The trigger for this fantasy is Alex's love for his mother and his desire to shield her from the Westernized GDR. His own version comes to life in the second part of *Goodbye Lenin!* after Christiane explores the area outside her apartment on Karl-Marx-Allee and discovers a plethora of Western products and billboards, BMW car dealerships, lingerie ads, and iconic Ikea billboards. The climax and also the turning point of Christiane's journey occurs when a helicopter buzzes by and hauls off a gigantic Lenin statue across Karl-Marx-Allee. Christiane is shocked and surprised at the same time when the statue's outstretched arm turns slightly into her direction as if Lenin was blessing her. The inter-textual reference to the Jesus statue in Fellini's *La Dolce Vita* is evident—in both movies the statue "blesses" women and sanctions their lifestyle. In reality, the Lenin statue was indeed removed

from East Berlin's Lenin Square in 1991, but since using a helicopter in traffic would have been dangerous, the statue was removed using more conventional methods. The movie shows the helicopter scene by using CGI technology.

As carrier of the film's dream, Alex constructs the image of a GDR, which he himself would have liked to see. With his "creation" of Siegmund Jähn, the GDR's only space hero, to replace Erich Honecker as head of state, he puts words into Jähn's mouth that resemble his own nostalgic dreams of a nicer GDR: "Socialism means moving towards the other person and trying to get along with him, not dreaming of a better world, but creating it. Many have looked for an alternative to the hard struggle of survival in the capitalist system, not everyone wants to participate in careerism and consumerism. Not everyone is made for the 'elbow society.' These people want a different life in our midst."

Jähn's words resemble those of activist groups that brought about the change during the revolutionary events of 1989/90, ideas of a new fear-free society that would soon be pushed aside by the harsher realities of Western power players. Alex, however, feels he has to voice them again and discovers how much he and GDR citizens really lost by abandoning Socialism. His words also reflect the views of many in the West who had hoped an eventually united Germany could someday be a bridge between Eastern and Western Europe. They had hoped this united country could show the world Socialism with a human face.

The movie deals with reality and the perception of reality, communicated through TV images. Viewers who had gotten used to the conventional perception of events following the fall of the Wall as liberating and joyful are challenged. By using traditional images with the use of *Aktuelle Kamera*, East Germany's former news program, Alex turns history upside down. TV again becomes a propaganda instrument in his hands with the Socialist-style language Alex and his friend quickly learn to apply to the new situation. The movie challenges our perception of reality and involves the viewer in this mind game. Although conceived of as a fantasy, it turns *Goodbye Lenin!* into an almost interactive experience. Unlike the scathing criticism by intellectuals of movies like *Downfall* and, to a lesser degree, *The Baader Meinhof Complex*, *Goodbye Lenin!* largely escaped that criticism because of its obvious classification as a comedy.

The charm of the movie lies in Alex's ability to insert ideals into his version of East German TV to create a utopian GDR that substantially deviates from the real GDR. Atrocities, the Wall, the Stasi, and similar realities are never mentioned—only his and Jähn's idealism get airtime. At the same time, Alex's creation also provides the pathos of the movie, as the idealism represented in his dreams is never realized after the quick victory of Western values.

The fake reality of public life is paired with the family situation of Alex's mother. Both the GDR and the mother created their own lies. During his visit to the dacha, when Alex is ready to tell the truth, the mother preempts him with her own tragic lie—her husband and Alex's and Ariane's father wanted the family to follow him to the West, but Christiane was too scared to follow. The implied assumption of this revelation is that nobody in the GDR wanted to live there voluntarily—some people just missed their chance for a better life in the West.



Christiane and Alex at the dacha.

In the end, Christiane has already understood that Alex is playing a game, something she shows with the amused look on her face in the hospital scene. Alex does not recognize this in his mother, and when she realizes that he does not see this, she keeps her presumed ignorance. Even at the end of *Goodbye Lenin!* Alex never understands his mother's game, as his final voice-over indicates: "I believe it was right that mother never found out the truth. She died happily." The "real" Sigmund Jähn finalizes Alex's fairy-tale world—he is the taxi driver Alex had met on the way to his father's house in the West, where he watches with his step-brother and sister how *Sandmännchen* (little sandman) flies to the moon. His own dream of becoming a cosmonaut and *Sandmännchen's* fantasy flight come together here to create Alex's own fairy tale of becoming a cosmonaut like Sigmund Jähn. Christiane's ashes are then catapulted by Alex into space, where dreams of Socialism belong. (RZ)

QUESTIONS

1. Summarize the first ten minutes of *Good Bye Lenin!* Why is this part important? Describe the style the movie uses. How does it differ from the rest of the movie?
2. Describe the demonstration scene and focus on sound, light, and camera position, cut transitions, position of characters, dialogue, pacing. What is the overall result of this scene?
3. Look at the central scene—the removal of the Lenin monument. What is the significance of this scene for Alex's mother?

4. Try to determine what the original text might have been for some of the *Aktuelle Kamera* news stories. You can find some on YouTube.
5. How are West and East Germans shown in the movie? Describe a scene where West and East collide. How does the movie show this?
6. Why does the movie focus so much on products? What do products represent? Is that still the case? Can you list some products and their meaning?
7. How could one criticize the movie from a current political perspective? Would you consider it revisionist?
8. What is nostalgia? What is your attitude toward nostalgia? Is it dangerous or necessary?

RELATED FILMS

Berlin Is in Germany (Hannes Stöhr, 2001) is about a former GDR citizen who is released from jail and has trouble connecting with the unified country.

Das Leben der Anderen (*The Lives of Others*, Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, 2006). The story of a Stasi agent who is transformed into a “good man” and helps his surveillance victim. The movie won the Academy Award for Best Foreign Film in 2006.

Sonnenallee (*Sun Alley*, Leander Haußmann, 1999). A comedy about growing up in East Berlin.

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Der Untergang

(*Downfall*, Oliver Hirschbiegel, 2004)



Hitler outside the bunker.

CREDITS

Director Oliver Hirschbiegel
Producer Bernd Eichinger
Based on Traudl Junge's memoirs
Music Stephan Zacharias
Cinematography..... Rainer Klausmann
Running Time 155 minutes (theater), 178 minutes (TV); Color

Principal Cast

Adolf Hitler (Bruno Ganz), Traudl Junge (Alexandra Maria Lara), Magda Goebbels (Corinna Harfouch), Joseph Goebbels (Ulrich Mattes), Eva Braun (Juliane Köhler), Albert Speer (Heino Ferch), Ernst Günther Schenck (Christian Berkel), Werner Haase (Matthias Habich), Hermann Fegelein (Thomas Kretschmann), Gerda Christian (Birgit Minichmayr), Constanze Manziarly (Bettina Redlich), Otto Güntsche (Götz Otto), General Weidling (Michael Mendl), General Mohnke (André Hennicke), Heinrich Himmler (Ulrich Noethen), General Hans Krebs (Rolf Kanies), General Wilhelm Burgdorf (Justus von Dohnányi), Generalfeldmarschall Keitel (Dieter Mann), Generaloberst Jodl (Christian Redl), Martin Bormann (Thomas Thieme),

Hanna Reitsch (Anna Thalbach), Ritter von Greim (Dietrich Hollinderbäumer), Hermann Göring (Mathias Gnädiger).

THE STORY

Der Untergang begins in East Prussia in 1942 in Hitler's headquarters, when twenty-two-year-old Traudl Junge is interviewed by Adolf Hitler for an opening as personal secretary. Traudl gets the job, and three years later in 1945 we find her in the bunker below the *Reichskanzlei*, where Hitler celebrates his fifty-sixth birthday to the sound of the Soviet artillery. In the chaos, Albert Speer wants Hitler to stay in Berlin, but others want him to leave. Above ground, the Hitler Youth, among them Peter, are fighting while SS doctor Schenck wanders around in the disintegrating city. Eva Braun tries to keep up spirits and has a birthday party for Hitler. Outside the bunker, Hitler gives medals to the Hitler Youth, among them Peter. General Mohnke arrives at the bunker to find he has been appointed commander in charge of defending Berlin. When Hitler realizes his orders have been ignored, he goes into a rage and then gives Traudl and others suicide pills. Traudl then types up Hitler's last will, and Hitler and Eva Braun are married. Hitler then kills his dog. After that, he kills Eva and himself, having arranged to have their bodies burnt. Magda Goebbels murders her six children, and Joseph Goebbels shoots Magda and himself. At the end, Traudl escapes with Peter and rides with him through a spring countryside.

BACKGROUND

The film is written and produced by Bernd Eichinger and based on several books—*Inside the Bunker* by historian Joachim Fest; *Until the Final Hour*, the memoirs of Traudl Junge, one of Hitler's secretaries (co-written with Melissa Müller); Albert Speer's memoirs *Inside the Third Reich*; *Hitler's Last Days: An Eyewitness Account*, by Gerhard Boldt; *Das Notlazarett unter der Reichskanzlei: Ein Arzt erlebt Hitlers Ende in Berlin* (*The Emergency Ward under the Chancellery: A Doctor Experiences Hitler's End in Berlin*) by Ernst Günther Schenck; and Siegfried Knappe's memoirs *Soldat: Reflections of a German Soldier 1936–1949*. The film was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film.

Der Untergang is the first German movie to portray Hitler in a movie. Non-German movies had shown Hitler before, above all the 1938 Chaplin film *The Great Dictator*, which would define Hitler images for decades to come. As Eichinger said, it was about time that Germans tell their own story and that they have the courage to show the real actors in this tragedy with the means of real cinema. Other Nazi figures appear as well, among them Eva Braun, Joseph Goebbels, Magda Goebbels, and Albert Speer. Many others remain in the background. The most provocative character is Ernst Günter Schenck, whom the movie tends to present as an identification figure, for lack of a better one, other than Traudl Junge, who never gets past being the naïve twenty-one-year-old Hitler fan.

Der Untergang can be placed within the debate about the role of German cinema in examining the nation's traumatic past. Reimer and Reimer note, "The German term for coming to terms with the past through film, *Vergangenheitsbewältigungsfilm*, implies that film can be used as a means for reflection on and judgment and internalization of the past" (Reimer, 2). The tradition began with *Trümmerfilme* ("rubble films"), such as *Die Mörder sind unter uns* (*The Murderers Are Among Us*, 1946), which dealt with questions of guilt and atonement and sought "to come to grips with the recent past against the still contemporary background of ruined cities" (Kaes 1989, 12). It was not until the late 1970s that filmmakers once again broached the subject of World War II with the New German Cinema movie *Die Blechtrommel* (*The Tin Drum*, 1979), where Volker Schlöndorff explored the difficulties of growing up during the Nazi era.

Der Untergang provides a break that began in the 1980s with Wolfgang Petersen's movie *Das Boot* (*The Boat*, 1981), which according to Sabine Hake indicates the "continuous compromise between art cinema and popular film" that since has shaped German cinema (Hake, 3). The success of *Das Boot* originates in the sense of universality it provides. It touched on universal issues and the experience of war, but it did not force spectators to identify with the Nazi leadership presented. Filmmakers like Bernd Eichinger realized the potential in the Nazi story of reaching mass audiences. This happened for the first time in 1978 with the American TV miniseries *Holocaust*, which, when broadcast in West Germany, was watched by over twenty million people, about 50 percent of the country's adult population.

Holocaust was a game changer as producers realized the mass-market potential of Nazi movies, which resulted in Steven Spielberg's 1992 film *Schindler's List*. Despite its realist and skillful portrayal of ruthless SS butchers, it became an international blockbuster because it provided a "good German" as an identification character. We can deplore the exploitation of the "affective" power of classical Hollywood in Holocaust movies as some German critics do, but opening Nazi, World War II, and Holocaust movies to a larger audience seems the only reasonable thing to do to begin any kind of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (coming to terms with the past).

EVALUATION

According to the producers and filmmaker, *Der Untergang* tried to give an authentic image of the Nazi period because it follows original sources slavishly—Fest, Traudl, Junge, and the others noted above. For that reason, the discussion mostly focused on the film genre and its claim of authenticity and how this presumed authenticity was achieved. Therefore, our discussion will focus on the issue of authenticity and whether the movie is giving a false sense of what happened, deliberately or not. A lot of discussion, especially in Germany, centers on the question of whether "authenticity" is desirable or potentially dangerous with its various ideological implications. To them it seems wrong to call an art product authentic since *Downfall* is not a documentary but a recreation of historic events. Critics also see this procedure as dangerous since a lot of people might take what they see as real and as reflecting the events. As the movie switches its point of view between the bunker, the Hitler

Youth, and outside events, this linkage has been criticized by Wim Wenders as resulting in a fragmented and contorted narrative perspective (Radke).

Der Untergang is trying to strike a balance between historical accuracy and conventional movie making. Because Hirschbiegel and Eichinger did not experience the war themselves, they understand the audience's need for a fictionalized recreation to comprehend from a current perspective how the Nazi system worked and how the majority of Germans could fall for it. Most intriguing for them was the "upstairs/downstairs" scenario of the movie that showed the Nazi leadership in a confined space from which they directed the rest of the country after having lost any grasp on reality. Therefore, Eichinger and Hirschbiegel decided to divide the movie into two different spheres, the quiet subterranean bunker with its dark color tones opposite the war scenes above. The movie characters are divided between these areas, Hitler and Traudl Junge in the bunker scenes and Schenck and Peter on the outside.

The "authenticity" of the story focuses mostly on the bunker scenes, which bring to life Traudl Junge's authentic dialogues, while the fictitious battle scenes add a more traditional war-movie element. Both spheres compensate each other well—the noisy and chaotic battle scenes are compensated by the sometimes-heated dialogues in the underground. Because they are largely fictional characters (Peter) or characters made up from fictional and authentic elements (Schenk), these outside scenes appear more stereotypical and fake than those involving the Nazi leadership.

Since the action takes place mostly in the bunker, a somber end-of-the-world atmosphere prevails. In this starkly reduced setting, the main components play out in a stage-like *mise-en-scène*. Hitler's dual personality becomes obvious, his caring and fatherly relationship with Traudl Junge and his screaming fits of a mass murderer in the situation room. This crosscutting between the interior bunker scenes and the exterior Battle of Berlin scenes is needed to visualize the consequences of Hitler's commands. Therefore, two story lines for the exterior scenes are developed—the story of the fanaticized Hitler youth Peter with his one-dimensional sense of duty to resist the Red Army, and the SS-doctor Schenck's inevitably failed attempt to maintain a sense of order in the chaotic confusion.

The movie gives a worm's-eye view of the events of Hitler's final ten days in Berlin by using Fest's account of the proceedings and to a greater extent Traudl Junge's diary of the same time. As is normal in war, the participants did not see the big picture, neither soldiers nor civilians. They are largely cut off from communication; no news is passed along in the trenches or in combat areas. Eichinger and Hirschbiegel wanted to show this confusion and lack of information. Therefore, Hirschbiegel did not mix this limited perspective with outside information such as documentary footage.

Der Untergang is mostly a movie about Hitler as a character. It was the first attempt in German film to humanize Adolf Hitler and is based on Joachim Fest's description of Hitler in *Hitler: Eine Biografie*. Bruno Ganz, who played Hitler in the movie, was definitely a major factor in creating the eeriness audiences were supposed to feel when watching Hitler in the bunker scenes. Danusha Goska wonders whether "humanizing" Hitler could recruit new Nazis since this is the major

concern mentioned by critics. "Downfall isn't just innocent of the charges against it—that by 'humanizing' Hitler it makes Nazism newly attractive—it is a great movie. It's in the same class with *Intolerance*, *Gone with the Wind*, *Lawrence of Arabia*, and *Saving Private Ryan*" (Goska).

Next to Bruno Ganz's portrayal of Hitler, Corinna Harfouch's performance of Magda Goebbels stands out for one single scene where she poisons her six children with cyanide after having sedated them. This horrifying scene does not happen in silence—the oldest daughter resists, apparently suspecting something fishy is going on. Harfouch is a popular German movie actress, cool, blonde, and very German. And that is the reason for the audience's reaction, the efficiency with which she disposes of her children. It is an important scene because it represents the mad dedication to National Socialism and the madness to die for the cause, as her farewell letter indicates that is read in a voice-over: "The world that comes after the Führer and National Socialism is not any longer worth living in and therefore I took the children with me, for they are too good for the life that would follow, and a merciful God will understand me when I will give them the salvation. . . . May God help that I have the strength to perform the last and hardest. We only have one goal left: loyalty to the Führer even in death."

Most critics agree that this scene is the most brutal because it reflects more than just Nazi fervor and madness. This scene is not only terrible to watch, it is also brilliantly set in scene and adds another story line not previously represented in the movie. Magda Goebbels's efficiency replicates the Nazis' determination for murdering Jews, as can easily be seen in comparing her murderous determination with that represented in Himmler's infamous speech thanking SS guards for murdering Jews: "To have endured this and at the same time to have remained a decent person—with exceptions due to human weaknesses—has made us tough, and is a glorious chapter that has not and will not be spoken of" (IMT 29, 146).

In *Der Untergang*, Joseph Goebbels declares that the Germans chose their own fate and should not be surprised to have their throats slashed at the end of the war, which puts the entire dilemma back into the hands of the Germans. Goebbels acts like a criminal who when caught implicates the ones he lured into the horrible situation. Similarly, Traudl Junge stated at the beginning and the end of the movie that she had no idea of Hitler's atrocities and came to realize her ignorance when she saw a plaque in Munich in honor of Sophie Scholl. Although this ignorance is hard to understand now, the intention of this framing device is clear—Eichinger and Hirschbiegel believe that many Germans must have had little information about Nazi atrocities.

Traudl Junge's commentaries are intended to offer a way to make up for this ignorance and to enable current viewers to apply lessons from the past to the present and future. Traudl Junge also stated that she "felt that being young is no excuse but that one could have found out more." *Der Untergang* therefore wants to give the message that it is never too late to begin the redemption process, which certainly captures where the majority of the Germans were mentally when the movie was aired. As A. O. Scott wrote, "The movie is sending its domestic audience the soothing message that ordinary Germans were above all the victims of Nazism" (Scott 2005).



Traudl Junge (Alexandra Maria Lara) at the end of *Downfall*.

When teaching and discussing this movie, its reception needs to be addressed. One concern is that the Hollywood tradition of opposing “good” and “bad” guys in movies raises the fear that young viewers will not be able to detect the perceived manipulation of the filmmakers. The disparity between the movie’s reception in Germany and the United States is cause for concern. While German popular and academic reception condemned the movie, the reaction in the United States is more complex. Academics in the United States largely follow the arguments of German criticism, whereas popular American criticism rates this movie as one of the top movies, with 91 percent rating on *Rotten Tomatoes*. *Der Untergang* (*Downfall*) is currently the most popular German movie in the United States. A brief survey of the criticism launched against *Der Untergang* reveals the disparity between academic criticism and the general public.

While critics in the United States have described *Der Untergang* as, among other things, “one of the best war films ever made,” the German news magazine *Der Spiegel* called *Der Untergang* “ridiculous, superficial . . . and banal,” (*Filmspiegel*) and the Berlin newspaper *Der Tagesspiegel* declared it “the worst comedy of the year” (*Filmspiegel*). “Why did this film have to be produced,” asks Peter Reichel. “The film is a *Zumutung* (imposition) for anyone who is interested in more than entertainment in viewing Nazi movies. It is obscene because it does not sympathize with the many acts of cruelty committed. Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen, Plötzensee, they do not exist in this movie. That won’t do from a director who claims to be knowledgeable about the history of the *Third Reich*” (Reichel, 2005).

QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think Eichinger felt it so important that the film was made in Germany?
2. How much does the film assume that you already know about Hitler's Nazi regime? For example, the Holocaust is never mentioned. Is it fair for the filmmakers to assume that the viewers come to the film with some background knowledge? Is this knowledge necessary to understand the film?
3. Read Roger Ebert's review and respond with your own ideas: "As we regard this broken and pathetic Hitler, we realize that he did not alone create the Third Reich, but was the focus for a spontaneous uprising by many of the German people, fueled by racism, xenophobia, grandiosity and fear. He was skilled in the ways he exploited that feeling, and surrounded himself by gifted strategists and propagandists, but he was not a great man, simply one armed by fate to unleash unimaginable evil. It is useful to reflect that racism, xenophobia, grandiosity and fear are still with us, and the defeat of one of their manifestations does not inoculate us against others" (Ebert, 2005).
4. Write a list of the characters in the film that you felt sympathetic toward. What made you feel more sympathetic toward them? Were there any characters that you did not feel any sympathy for? Why not?
5. Think of the important decisions that characters make in the film *Downfall* and write them down. For each of the decisions that you have written down, explain what the consequences were (you may not be able to do this for every event). Do you think you were shown the consequences of characters' decisions and actions often enough?
6. The film *Der Untergang* has caused some debate over whether it presents Hitler in a sympathetic light. Do you think this view is justified? Did you find yourself feeling sympathy with the figure of Hitler; if so, how do you feel about this?
7. Reading about the actual events of Hitler's days in the bunker, do you think the filmmakers have exaggerated or played down anything? If so, what? How do you think audiences in Germany and in the United Kingdom may view this film differently?
8. Whose point of view do we follow in the film *Downfall*? What reasons could there be for this? Do you think the film explores different perspectives? If so, how? Do you think the film gives a balanced perspective on events?

9. Imagine you were the scriptwriter of *Der Untergang* and director Oliver Hirschbiegel asks you to write in another character whose point of view we would follow for several scenes. Whom would you choose and why? What scenes would you use to represent this character's experiences?
10. Discuss the representation of Hitler in *Der Untergang*.
11. Which elements of World War II are shown, and which are missing? Can you explain the inclusion and absence of any such elements?
12. How do you react to the many confrontational readings of the movie? Is there compromise possible?

RELATED FILMS

Die Blechtrommel (*The Tin Drum*, Volker Schlöndorff, 1979) is an adaptation of Günter Grass's novel of the same name and tells the story of a family during the Nazi times. The movie won Germany's first Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film in 1980. The movie is discussed elsewhere in the book.

Das Boot (Wolfgang Petersen, 1981) follows a German submarine in the North Atlantic in World War II. The movie is discussed elsewhere in the book.

Napola: Elite für den Führer (*Before the Fall*, Dennis Gansel, 2004) pictures a Nazi elite training school.

Fünf letzte Tage (*Five Last Days*, Percy Adlon, 1982) chronicles Sophie Scholl's final day in prison before being executed for distributing anti-Nazi leaflets in Munich.

Die Weiße Rose (*The White Rose*, Michael Verhoeven, 1982) presents a larger picture of the White Rose resistance group from which Sophie Scholl operates with her anti-Nazi leaflets.

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Sophie Scholl: Die letzten Tage

(Sophie Scholl: The Final Days, Marc Rothemund, 2005)



Sophie and her friend Gisela in the opening scene.

CREDITS

DirectorMarc Rothemund
Written by Fred Breinersdorfer
Music..... Reinhold Heil
Cinematography..... Martin Langer
Producer Fred Breinersdorfer and Marc Rothemund
Running Time 120 minutes; Color

Principal Cast

Sophie Scholl (Julie Jentsch), Robert Mohr (Alexander Held), Hans Scholl (Fabian Hinrichs), Else Gebel (Johanna Gastdorf), Christoph Probst (Florian Stetter).

THE STORY

Sophie Scholl and her friend, Gisela Schertling, are bent over a radio in their student apartment and sing along with Billie Holiday's "Sugar." Sophie leaves and walks through darkened streets to meet her friends of the White Rose student organization, including her brother Hans. They are busy preparing copies of their sixth leaflet, but they have copied more than they can send through the mail. Hans hits on the idea of distributing the extra leaflets at the university the next day. The group discusses the risk, and when Sophie volunteers to go, the decision is accepted.

The next day Hans and Sophie walk to the main building of Munich University, where classes are in session. Both distribute leaflets near the lecture rooms, and Sophie runs to the top floor with a stack of leaflets, which she impulsively pushes over the edge of the balustrade. When Sophie and Hans leave with the students, a janitor who saw Sophie scatter the leaflets shouts at them to stop and detains them until the *Gestapo* comes to arrest them. They are taken to the prison, where Sophie is interrogated by investigator Robert Mohr.

Claiming to be apolitical, Sophie presents a believable alibi that seems to be working, and she is dismissed. As her release form is to be approved, the order comes not to let her go, and she is placed in a prison cell with Else Gebel. The investigation has found enough evidence that Sophie and Hans were responsible for the distribution of anti-Nazi leaflets. Sophie concedes her involvement, but to protect the others she maintains that the production and distribution were the work of Hans and her. What follows is a discussion of law and order that reveals the fundamental differences between the Nazi Mohr and the Protestant Sophie. The discussion/interrogation concludes with an exploration of law versus conscience, culminating in Mohr's question "Without law, there is no order. What can we rely on if not the law?" to which Sophie replies, "Your conscience. Laws change. Conscience doesn't." The confrontation ends with Sophie admitting the charges.

Sophie, Hans, and Christoph Probst are then charged with treason, and the three are examined in the trial by Roland Freisler, the head judge of the *Volksgerichtshof* (People's Court). Sophie declares that many people agree with what she and her group have said and written, but they dare not express such thoughts. After the guilty pronouncement, she tells the court "where we stand today, you [Freisler] will stand soon."

Sophie learns that she is to be executed that day and is visited by her parents, who express their approval of what she has done. Mohr also comes to the prison and watches Sophie taken away and led into a cell where Christoph Probst and Hans await and quietly share a cigarette. The sequence ends with the execution of the three, which can only be heard but not seen on screen. In the closing shot, thousands of leaflets fall from the sky, reproductions of White Rose leaflets that were dropped on many German cities.

BACKGROUND

There were a number of resistance groups against the Nazis in Germany, but most remained relatively unknown, except for the group surrounding the attempt on Hitler's life on July 20, 1944, and the White Rose. Although Sophie was not the main actor in the group, her youthful, idealistic, anti-Hitler attitude found admirers.

It is also important that many of her papers and letters were preserved to give an intense image of her thoughts. Director Marc Rothemund used documents for the movie made accessible after German unification. The documents were part of the East German Stasi archive, that contained the detailed interrogation reports of investigator Mohr and reports of the trial led by Freisler. In comparison to other movies about Sophie Scholl, especially Michael Verhoeven's *Die weiße Rose* (*The White Rose*, 1982), Rothemund's *Sophie Scholl: The Final Days* shows less of Sophie's emotional distress but more of her intellectual abilities. The movie also reveals more of the inner workings of the *Gestapo* machine.

The White Rose was a nonviolent resistance group in Nazi Germany. It consisted of students from the University of Munich and their philosophy professor. The group became known for an anonymous leaflet and graffiti campaign that lasted from June 1942 until February 1943 and called for active opposition to Hitler's regime. The six most recognized members of the resistance group were arrested by the *Gestapo*, tried for treason, and beheaded in 1943. The text of their sixth leaflet was smuggled by Helmuth James Graf von Moltke out of Germany to England, and in July 1943, copies of it were dropped over Germany by Allied planes, retitled "The Manifesto of the Students of Munich." Today, the members of the White Rose are honored in Germany among its greatest heroes.

The activities of the White Rose followed the Nazi army defeat at Stalingrad. Their leaflets were left in telephone books in public phone booths, mailed to professors and students, and taken by courier to other universities for distribution. At first, the leaflets were sent out in mailings from cities in Bavaria and Austria, since the members believed that southern Germany would be more receptive to their anti-militarist message. Here is an excerpt from the second leaflet of the White Rose: "Since the conquest of Poland, 300,000 Jews have been murdered in this country in the most bestial way. . . . The German people slumber on in dull, stupid sleep and encourage the fascist criminals. Each wants to be exonerated of guilt, each one continues on his way with the most placid, calm conscience. But he cannot be exonerated; he is guilty, guilty, guilty!"

The *Volksgerichtshof* (People's Court) was a special court established in 1934 by Hitler, who set it up outside the operations of the constitutional frame of law. The court had jurisdiction over a broad array of "political offenses," which included *Wehrkraftzersetzung* (disintegration of defensive capability) and were accordingly punished severely. The court handed down an enormous number of death sentences under Judge-President Roland Freisler, including those of the White Rose. The president of the court often acted as prosecutor, denouncing defendants, then pronouncing his verdict and sentence without objection from defense counsel, who usually remained silent throughout. It almost always sided with the prosecution, to the point that being hauled before it was equivalent to a death sentence.

Julia Jentsch is the star of this film. She acts with reduced emotion and body language, communicating tremendous control under the greatest tension. Her intellectualism and composure gives an impression of what must have been an extraordinary performance by the real Sophie Scholl. This explains Mohr's reaction, which is completely unusual for what is known from *Gestapo* interviewers. The barking Nazi language is absent, and Mohr is able to seriously discuss issues with Sophie. And it is apparent that his attempt to match her stems from the increasing respect he feels for her performance. He must have been used to anxious prisoners pleading for their lives.

"Jentsch's steely performance is brilliant. The composure of twenty-one-year-old Sophie Scholl boggles the mind. Not just her life, but also the lives of her friends and family are at stake, and yet she manages to lie with great ease and intelligence. In the presence of formidable Nazi authority, she does not break down. In the single instance where Mohr witnesses tears, Sophie has a ready explanation. For the last five days of her life (the title, of course, gives her well-documented fate away), Sophie wears a red cardigan sweater, a neat blouse and skirt, knee socks and Oxford shoes. She looks like the schoolgirl that she is. To see her in these clothes, day after day, is heartbreaking" (Dermansky).

EVALUATION

The movie begins with a scene typical for Germans during the war. Sophie and her friend Gisela listen to banned swing music on the radio. The scene shows Sophie as a typical child of her time but also shows how she is somewhat careless in dealing with the danger she is in. From this scene she moves directly to the studio where the leaflets are being printed and where we meet the group—her brother Hans, Schmorrell, and the others. When they find out they printed too many leaflets, they come up with the idea of taking them to the university the following morning, again as a spontaneous decision. Warnings are issued, but Sophie and her brother are confident in their youthful energy that they can handle it. The scene in the university reinforces Sophie's exuberance when she pushes the leaflets over the rail (a key symbol in the movie), which would become the fateful trigger to attract the janitor's attention.

The center of the movie is Sophie's interrogation at *Gestapo* headquarters, where she is separated from her friends and brother. In the first interrogation, she begins to develop a strategy of first saving her skin by making up a story for the day of her arrest. She wants to protect her family and the other members of the group from implication, which turns out an elusive goal as she had misjudged the intensity and cruelty of the *Gestapo* machine. The interrogations are interrupted by conversations with her cellmate Else Gebel, a Communist who had been assigned to prevent her from suicide. Although everything we are presented with in this movie is based on facts (there was a real Else Gebel), the director uses this scene cleverly—first, to introduce a person from one of the many anti-Hitler groups in operation at the time, thereby giving us an indication of the depth of the anti-Nazi movement; and second, to introduce Mohr as a conversation partner whom Sophie can trust and whom she can reveal her feelings to.

In the second interrogation about Sophie's background, her motivation and the liberal attitude of her family becomes clear: she has a fiancé who has been at the Eastern front, and she herself had been a member of the *Bund Deutscher Mädel* (the Nazis' girls and young women organization), which indicates Sophie's initial leaning toward the Nazis. Most facts of Sophie's life up to her arrest are revealed, thereby quickly turning into an intense confrontation between the youthful intellectual and the inquisitive yet intelligent *Gestapo* interrogator. Mohr is a pro, and it does not take him very long to find out Sophie tried to fabricate her whole story to protect her friends and family.

Mohr is a good and intelligent partner for her strategies, and when he recognizes her intelligence, he begins the conversations that turn the interrogation into a discussion about the fundamentals of National Socialism. It becomes increasingly clear, however, that Mohr does not comprehend Sophie's motivation, especially her ethical humanism. As Adolf Eichmann confessed in his trial, and as is shown in the movie *Hannah Arendt*, fervent Nazis had checked their humanism "at the door" and relegated all ethical questions to the leaders, a practice copied from the military at that time. As the Nazi movement has its beginnings in the confused core values of frustrated World War I soldiers, the practices of Nazi dictatorship are an extension and continuation of a military system under the disguise of a civilian government.

In Sophie's and Mohr's conversation, it becomes clear how ingrained Mohr's life and his conviction are in his biography, a life of growing up poor in Weimar Germany. When Mohr heard about Sophie's involvement with the Nazi organized *Bund Deutscher Mädel*, he immediately wanted to see her as a Nazi-sympathizer who needed to find her way back. Mohr does not recognize that it was too late for this, and also too late for most Germans who, as we know, began to lose faith in Nazism at that time and could only be kept in line with terror. And because of this error in his judgment, Mohr shows Sophie a way out, a "golden bridge", which would help her renounce her anti-Nazi ideology as a mistake and which might persuade the judge to save her life. However, even Mohr might have underestimated the murderous purposefulness of the Nazis, especially Roland Freisler.

As Sophie's resistance was an indicator for the mood of the people, so was Goebbels' Sportpalast speech, which was given on the evening of February 18, 1943, the day Sophie was jailed. This historical parallel between Goebbels' speech and Sophie's resistance is significant. While the Nazis were drumming up major support, which as shown in the movie was broadcast nationwide, Goebbels' speech was intended to turn the German war sentiment around by acknowledging it for the first time. Goebbels claimed that no German considered compromise to be a realistic alternative, and he attempted to counter reports that German civilians had lost faith in victory. He therefore challenged his audience with his call to arms—"Do you want total war? If necessary, do you want a war more total and radical than anything that we can even imagine today?" Goebbels later admitted that the Nazis had assembled a carefully trained audience to rehearse the rousing response that was broadcast nationwide.

The exposure of the basic conflict between Sophie and Mohr becomes the climax in their confrontation and presents the conflict as an existential question for



Freisler and Sophie in the *Volksgericht* trial.

any viewer. Sophie's and Mohr's discussion centers on the opposition of *Freiheit und Ehre* (freedom and honor) and *Gesetz und Gewissen* (law and conscience) and reveals the fundamental difference between them: Sophie sees freedom as an essential element of human expression, whereas Mohr thinks of his country that had been occupied by foreign forces. For Sophie, law is the inner law of dignity possessed by every human being, whereas law for Mohr means a strong state supporting structure and preventing chaos. In these discussions, both argue forcefully for and against the very different country that was outlined in Sophie's mind as the country Germany should eventually become. And most significantly, Sophie's law rests in God, whereas Mohr responds, "*Gott gibt es nicht!*" ("God does not exist!"). Do we follow rules and laws beyond our reach that exist in most of us in a rudimentary way, or do we set up rules in a desperate world that would sink into chaos because people do not have an internal compass?

The final trial is the ultimate travesty. Freisler is no intellectual match for Mohr, but he has the power. And he uses his power to squelch any discussion that he cannot win, but not until some of the phrases of the defendants have been mentioned, such as Sophie's comment that "so many think and feel like us but don't dare mention it." Since nothing of this was reported at the time of the trial because of censorship, it did not reach nor stir up any sentiments then. But the smuggled pamphlet reached the Allies and was distributed from airplanes, as was the transcript of the interrogation and trial that the Nazis made in their painstaking manner and that would inform people after the war. (RZ)

QUESTIONS

1. What other Nazi resistance movements were there? Make a list and decide how effective each attempt was.
2. Select one interrogation scene in detail and explore how the director maintains the tension in the scene. Which interrogation scene is the most effective? Focus on dialogue and mise-en-scène.
3. Can you identify with Sophie? Why is she so strong? What would other people have done in her situation? How was she a model for her time?
4. Compare the different reactions to the Nazis of Sophie, Gisela, and Else Gebel.
5. Was Sophie's engagement with the White Rose worth the effort? What is our general attitude to political protest? When is it worth it and when not?

RELATED FILMS

Fünf letzte Tage (*Five Last Days*, Percy Adlon, 1982) shows the final five days of Sophie Scholl before her execution in 1943.

Die Weiße Rose (*The White Rose*, Michael Verhoeven, 1982) presents a larger picture of the White Rose movement from which Sophie Scholl operates with her anti-Nazi leaflets.

Should *Die Weiße Rose* be italic? is checkmark a yes or no?

Die Blechtrommel (*The Tin Drum*, Volker Schlöndorff, 1979) is an adaptation of Günter Grass' novel of the same name and tells the story of a family during the Nazi era. It was West Germany's first Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film in 1980. The movie is discussed elsewhere in the book.

Das Boot (*The Boat*, Wolfgang Petersen, 1981) follows a German submarine in the North Atlantic in WWII. The movie is discussed elsewhere in the book.

Hitlerjunge Salomon (*Europa Europa*, Agnieszka Holland, 1990). A young Jewish man hides from the Nazis in plain sight, first as a runner for an army unit and later as a student in an elite training school for young Nazis.

Comedian Harmonists (*The Harmonists*, Joseph Vilsmaier, 1997) is about a popular Jewish German vocal group in the 1920s and 30s.

Aimée und Jaguar (Max Färberböck, 1999) chronicles the love affair of two women during the Nazi period; one of the two was Jewish.

Nirgendwo in Afrika (*Nowhere in Africa*, Caroline Link, 2001) tells the story of the life in Kenya of a German-Jewish family that emigrated there to escape persecution in Nazi Germany. The film won the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film in 2001. The movie is discussed elsewhere in the book.

Der Untergang (*Downfall*, Oliver Hirschbiegel, 2004) depicts the final ten days of Hitler's reign over Nazi Germany in 1945. The film was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film. It is discussed elsewhere in the book.

Napola: Elite für den Führer (*Before the Fall*, Dennis Gansel, 2004) pictures a Nazi elite training school.

Die Fälscher (*The Counterfeiters*, Stefan Ruzowitzky, 2007) is an Austrian film that fictionalizes Operation Bernhard, a secret plan by the Nazis during the Second World War to destabilize the United Kingdom by flooding its economy with forged Bank of England pound notes. The movie is discussed elsewhere in the book.

John Rabe (*City of War: The Story of John Rabe*, Florian Gallenberger, 2009) is a biopic about a Nazi businessman who saved over 200,000 Chinese from death by the Japanese army during the Nanjing massacre.

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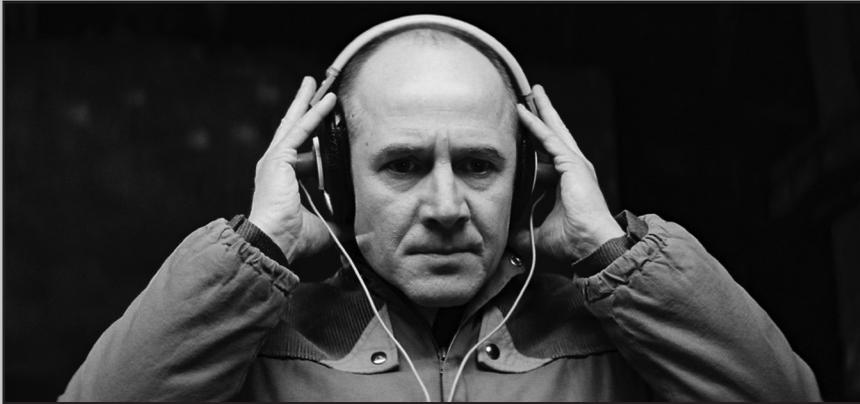
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Das Leben der Anderen

(The Lives of Others, Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, 2006)



Wiesler in his attic surveillance.

CREDITS

Director and writer Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck
Music Gabriel Yared
Cinematography Hagen Bogdanski
Producer Wiedemann & Berg
Length 137 minutes, Color

Principal Cast

Hauptmann Gerd Wiesler (Ulrich Mühe), Christa-Maria Sieland (Martina Gedeck), Georg Dreyman (Sebastian Koch), Anton Grubitz (Ulrich Tukur), Minister Bruno Hempf (Thomas Thieme), Paul Hauser (Hans-Uwe Bauer), Albert Jerska (Volkmar Kleinert).

THE STORY

The movie takes place in the eastern part of Berlin in 1984, where Stasi officer Hauptmann Gerd Wiesler is assigned to spy on playwright Georg Dreyman. Wiesler and his team bug the apartment and set up surveillance equipment in an attic to report on Dreyman's activities. Wiesler finds out that Minister Bruno Hempf is interested in Dreyman's girlfriend, the actress Christa-Maria Sieland, and wants to eliminate Dreyman. After Hempf forces Sieland into sex with him, Dreyman finds out about their relationship and pleads with her not to meet Hempf again.

Sieland flees to a nearby bar where Wiesler, posing as a fan, urges her to be true to herself. She returns home and reconciles with Dreyman, rejecting Hempf.

Though a loyal Communist and supporter of the regime, Dreyman becomes disillusioned with the treatment of his colleagues by the state. At his birthday party, his friend Albert Jerska, a blacklisted theatrical director, gives him sheet music for "*Sonate vom guten Menschen*" ("Sonata for a Good Man"). Shortly afterward, Jerska hangs himself. Dreyman decides to publish an anonymous article on the East German suicide rate in the West German news magazine *Der Spiegel*. No suicide statistics in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) had been published since 1977. Since all East German typewriters are registered, Dreyman uses a smuggled miniature typewriter, which he hides in the floor of his apartment. Before talking openly in his apartment, Dreyman and his friends test whether the flat is bugged by feigning an attempt to smuggle one of their blacklisted friends through the Berlin Wall. Wiesler, having become sympathetic to Dreyman, does not alert the border guards, and the conspirators believe they are safe.

Dreyman's article is published, enraging the authorities. From an agent at *Der Spiegel*, the Stasi obtains a copy of the suicide article in red ink that cannot be linked to a registered GDR typewriter. Hempf, livid at being jilted by Sieland, orders Grubitz to destroy her career using her illegal prescription of birth control medication as grounds for arrest. Sieland is blackmailed into revealing Dreyman's authorship of the article. When the Stasi search his apartment, however, they do not find the typewriter. Grubitz then orders Wiesler to interrogate Sieland again, warning that failure will cost them both. Wiesler, resuming his role as Stasi interrogator, forces Sieland to tell him where the typewriter is hidden.

Grubitz and the Stasi return to Dreyman's apartment, and Sieland panics and flees the apartment, unaware that the typewriter is gone because Wiesler had already seized the evidence. When Dreyman realizes that Sieland informed on him, a guilt-stricken Sieland runs into the street and throws herself in front of an oncoming truck. Grubitz offers a perfunctory claim of sympathy and informs Dreyman that the investigation is over. Upon reaching the Stasi headquarters, he tells Wiesler that his career is over, and that he will be demoted to Department M, a dead-end position for disgraced agents. As he leaves, Grubitz discards a newspaper announcing Gorbachev as the new leader of the Soviet Union.

In November 1989, Wiesler is steaming open letters in a cramped, windowless office when a coworker tells him about the fall of the Berlin Wall. Realizing what this means, Wiesler and his coworkers silently get up and leave their office. Two years later, Hempf and Dreyman have a chance encounter. Dreyman asks Hempf why he was never monitored, and Hempf tells him he was, in fact, under full surveillance. After uncovering surveillance equipment in his apartment, Dreyman goes to the Stasi archives to read the files on his activities. He reads that Sieland was released just before the second search and could not have removed the typewriter. After re-reading the files, he discovers that a lot of false information has been written about his activities and finds a fingerprint in red ink on the final typewritten report. He realizes that the writer, Stasi agent HGW XX/7, had knowingly concealed his illicit practices, such as the authorship of the suicide article, and had been the one who had removed the typewriter before the search team arrived.

Dreyman searches for Wiesler and finds him delivering mail, but at the last moment he decides not to approach him.

On his rounds two years later, Wiesler passes a bookstore window display promoting Dreyman's new novel, *Sonate vom guten Menschen*. He goes inside, opens a copy of the book and discovers it is dedicated "To HGW XX/7, with gratitude." Wiesler buys the book. When the sales clerk asks if he wants it gift wrapped, he responds, "No, it's for me."

BACKGROUND

Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's parents were both from East Germany where they fled from Silesia after World War II. The Donnersmarcks were old Prussian aristocracy who had owned an estate in Silesia for generations. When they were resettled to Communist East Germany, they were looked at with suspicion owing to their aristocratic background. Donnersmarck himself, who was born in West Germany, had heard family stories about Silesia and East Germany and decided to use them for his first feature film as part of his training at Munich's film academy.

Donnersmarck likes music and recalls a quote from Maxim Gorky that Lenin's favorite piece of music was Beethoven's *Appassionata*. Lenin told Gorky he could not listen to music since it makes him say sweet things. And Donnersmarck also told a *New York Times* reporter that he had the image in his head of a person sitting in a room with earphones on his head, seemingly listening in to the activities of "enemies of the state" but in reality listening to beautiful music that touched him.

The opening scene was meant to be set in Hohenschönhausen prison (now a Stasi memorial site), but Hubertus Knabe, the director of the memorial, refused to give Donnersmarck permission. When Donnersmarck used Schindler of *Schindler's List* as a model for a "good man" in a bad society, Knabe responded, "There was a Schindler but no Wiesler." Knabe alludes here to the most problematic aspect of the film, during a time in which the former Stasi and their supporters were attempting to rehabilitate the historical image of the force, that the film tells the story of a Stasi officer who never existed. Dreyman finds out in the Stasi archive after the fall of the Berlin Wall that it was Stasi Captain Wiesler's actions that kept Dreyman out of prison. The problem is that not one single Stasi ever did this sort of thing—no Stasi operation gave any one person this range of flexibility.

The Stasi (*Ministerium für Staatssicherheit* or "Ministry for State Security") was East Germany's state security service. It was one of the most effective and repressive intelligence and secret-service organizations that existed. One of its main tasks was spying on the population through a network of informants. The Stasi also used heavy-handed methods such as intimidation and blackmailing to demonstrate power and to make it clear that an adversarial attitude against the GDR would result in serious consequences, such as arrest, expulsion from the country, fines, and so forth. The Stasi were among the most effective and repressive police operations in modern history. The force employed about 100,000 people and worked with over 200,000 citizen informants. In a population of seventeen million, about one person in fifty had direct involvement with the Stasi. This can be put into better context

when we consider that the Russian KGB had about the same number of agents for a population of nearly three hundred million. The Stasi archive on East Germans contained, by 1989, about fifty million pages. Typical interrogation techniques included long periods of solitary confinement, which led many artists to never make art again, and the threat and actual practice of removing children from parents and placing them in horrific state-run institutions. The Stasi were masters of fear and psychological torture.

Before filming, the director extensively researched the methods and history of the Stasi, including the interviews of several veterans, who told him about the cloth samples that the dogs could track. All of the props of surveillance equipment used in the film are actual historical artifacts on loan from museums and collectors. The prop master himself spent two years in a Stasi prison and insisted on accuracy.

EVALUATION

The Lives of Others restored the seriousness of life in East Germany after *Sonnenallee* (*Sun Alley*, 1999) had turned it into a farce. The screenplay is one of the most precisely constructed stories in recent German film. Every piece fits together, starting with the opening sequence, where Wiesler is introduced as a skillful interviewer with amazing psychological insight into his opponent. No physical torture is used—just sleep deprivation. He is so sure of himself, and so are his superiors, that he can demonstrate his method to a class at the Stasi school. Wiesler seems to be in total control of any possible interrogation method. When a student asks why he uses sleep deprivation, Wiesler marks his name, thereby indicating that he considers this question to be too critical and that in this student Wiesler found another potential target. Wiesler seems to have internalized the Stasi motto that they were the sword and shield of the Communist Party.

Wiesler is a man who believes in the system in which he operates. He has completely adapted to his surroundings. His beliefs, and those of the party, are reflected in the simple functional nature of his apartment. His apartment has been carefully constructed to communicate the values of what he believes in. Critics have noticed the stylized look of the movie, which focuses on grays and greens with the color removed from most scenes. The film is a striking example of how cinema tells a story by visual means as much as the script. Most of the walls are pallid green, the lighting is almost always dim, and the sun almost never shines for the two and a half hours of the film. The clothing is plain, and bright colors are almost nonexistent. The entire movie looks as if the Stasi gray overshadows all aspects of life, even when using actual locations like the Stasi's one-time headquarter in Normannenstrasse. There are only occasional shifts in this monochrome color palette, and then it is to mute browns and reds that intentionally refer to Nazi films. The movie set, the frequent night scenes, and the modernist architecture and unimaginative furnishings of Wiesler's apartment all contribute to a distinctly Orwellian 1984 atmosphere. The setting is reminiscent of Orwell-evoking images of North Korea, the movie *Her*, or the British TV miniseries *The Prisoner*. It is surely not accidental that

Das Leben der Anderen is set in the year 1984. It seems as if the movie is trying to emulate Communist Berlin at that time; various people have commented on how accurate the portrayal is.

Wiesler is the technocratic Everyman found in many Orwellian societies. Compared with Grubitz, Wiesler appears as the incarnation of a monkish party man who lives for the ideals of the party. Grubitz does not; he is a typical careerist who would be successful in many societies, in the East and in the West. History has shown that East Germany's party apparatus consisted mostly of Grubitzes who afterward claimed they had always believed in capitalism but unfortunately had not been able to follow their dreams. There is a word in German, *Mitläufer* (fellow traveler), that seems to come directly out of the vocabulary of the autocratic societies Germany has had its handful of. The Grubitzes, who personify the achiever type not tied to any society, later became grotesquely successful in their new environment.

It is Grubitz's compliance with Hempf's request to bug Dreyman's apartment that causes Wiesler to question the legitimacy of the surveillance procedure. Many critics found fault with this issue as representing the weakest element in the script. It is true, however, that there was no Stasi agent who changed sides as Wiesler did. But to produce a story that illustrates both the fervent commitment to party ideals seen in Wiesler, on the one hand, and the 90 percent *Mitläufer* that constituted the Stasi and certainly the SED, the character of Grubitz is needed. And Grubitz's and Hempf's betrayal of party ideals were also needed to change Wiesler's mind and to convince the not-so-informed public of the colossal shift in the ethos of East German society. The absence of a Wiesler character in GDR society is more of a comment on that society than on the idea of Communism. Donnersmarck was justified in "inventing" this character since it provided him with a classical drama script. As a result he elevates the GDR society to a classical scenario that it probably never was.

Wiesler's opponent is not the meek Grubitz but Dreyman. And by finding out more and more about Dreyman, Wiesler gets pulled more and more into his world. It is a world of classical beauty that is indicated in a very different color palette in the movie, with rich and subdued orange, brown, and red tones in an apartment that does not seem to belong to East Berlin's proto-modern technical architecture. In the same way, Dreyman's and Sieland's stylish world is the extreme opposite to Wiesler's spartan apartment. The contrast between the classic art world and Wiesler's lifeless tech world could not be greater. A recent book by Uwe Tellkamp, *Der Turm (The Tower)*, illustrates that this world of art really existed but was never recognized during the GDR. Dreyman's world differs from Tellkamp's in his compliance with Marxist principles. Dreyman is a bit of an oddity among artists as he follows independent thinking but also the party line. Again, as Wiesler is an idealist, so is Dreyman; both have their firm beliefs in Communist party principles. And as Wiesler is pulled more and more into Dreyman's world, so is the reader. The 2003 movie *Good Bye Lenin!* does exactly that when the protagonist Alex, in recreating a fictitious GDR for his ailing mother, introduces a number of highly idealistic SED party program points for his mother that are supposed to represent a changed GDR. It is the irony of history that this idealized GDR would never become real but remain an idea similar to the GDR Dreyman envisioned in his plays.



Sieland and Dreyman in their apartment.

Von Donnersmarck himself emerges with his script as an idealist who may have harbored hidden sympathies for a pure version of Communism. Many people did just that during the 1970s and 80s when they described the increasing difference between the “*real existierender Sozialismus*” (existing Socialism) of the GDR, which they detested, and Marx’s idealist intentions. In this subtext, Donnersmarck elevates his story to a more general dimension.

As Wolf Biermann argues, it would have been difficult to produce a compelling documentary about Stasi activities because of the clandestine nature of its operations. Filming a documentary at the Stasi prison at Neuenschönhausen would indeed not have had the same effect as *The Lives of Others* with its strong but fictional narrative. By adding fictional elements, Donnersmarck elevates a unique GDR feature, Stasi surveillance, into something important to all people, whether old-fashioned Stasi surveillance or modern-day Internet surveillance.

Dreyman’s “betrayal” of East German classified material to the West had become common practice after the expulsion from East Germany of the young poet Wolf Biermann in 1976. Biermann had been a prominent artist who criticized East German politics through his songs and poems, but like Dreyman, Biermann had also been a steadfast supporter of Marxist doctrines in its purest and most idealistic form. After Biermann’s expulsion, many artists either left East Germany or were censored and subsequently decided to publish in West Germany. They had to find ways of moving their manuscripts to the West and to bypass Stasi surveillance, as the movie’s dramatic scenes with the red-inked typewriter show. There were many such recorded attempts—even the author of this article did his part in helping with texts for the GDR author Stefan Heym.

Andreas Dresen, an East German filmmaker, criticized the movie as inaccurate and as not representative of GDR culture. He complains that the general public rejected his movies because they did not want to “look at my view of things.” But Wolf Biermann (2006), another East German, supports Donnersmarck’s creation of the “miraculous transformation of Wiesler” because we are all addicted to stories that show how people can change for the better. Gerry Coulter does not like the movie because it lets fiction trump history and plays with it at will. He cites Baudrillard with his concern that fictionalized history could “contaminate reality and model” history (Coulter 2010, 6). Jens Gieseke remarks that the “genre of historical film is doubtlessly useful for awakening curiosity. At the same time, such films can contaminate our remembrance with a flood of artistic images or with what only appears to be authentic historical narrative” (Gieseke 2008, 585).

Even if we bear these concerns in mind, the result will be that the representation of the Stasi in *The Lives of Others* will be the definitive portrayal for most people. Although it may be slightly over-interpreted owing to the nature of film drama, the movie presents in its own artistic terms the operations of the Stasi. It also seems that the political turmoil Germany experienced with Communism can best be represented from a distance, as a West German perspective such as Donnersmarck’s provides. This is similar to the typical treatment of the Nazi era, which is dominated by a Hollywood perspective. The historic winner provides *Deutungshoheit* (authority to interpret) on events. (RZ)

QUESTIONS

1. Consider how totalitarian states demonstrate power and authority toward every single person.
2. Consider the consequences of a lack of humanity and morals in totalitarian regimes.
3. What happens to personal freedom and human rights in a Communist society?
4. In which countries do these circumstances currently exist?
5. What happens to the human need for privacy and intimacy when surveillance is a common instrument? How might people feel if they can’t be sure if they are ever in safe surroundings?
6. Which consequences of the totalitarian state can be seen in *The Lives of Others*?
7. Why do the ideals of Communism and Socialism and the ideal of self-realization and individuality conflict with each other?
8. How necessary is historical accuracy in this type of film?

9. The actors in this film agreed to work for 20 percent of their normal salaries. Why do you think they would agree to this?
10. Here is Brecht's poem "Remembering Marie A." that Wiesler reads (in a translation by David Bowie). Why do you think this poem was used by von Donnersmarck as a turning point for Wiesler's introduction to the world of art?

It was a day in that blue month September
Silent beneath the plum trees' slender shade
I held her there
My love, so pale and silent
As if she were a dream that must not fade
Above us in the shining summer heaven
There was a cloud my eyes dwelled long upon
It was quite white and very high above us
Then I looked up
And found that it had gone

And since that day, so many moons in silence
Have swum across the sky and gone below
The plum trees surely have been chopped for firewood
And if you ask, how does that love seem now
I must admit, I really can't remember
And yet I know what you are trying to say
But what her face was like, I know no longer
I only know I kissed it on that day

As for the kiss, I long ago forgot it
But for the cloud that floated in the sky
I know that still and shall forever know it
It was quite white and moved in very high
It may be that the plum trees still are blooming
That woman's seventh child may now be there
And yet that cloud had only bloomed for minutes
When I looked up
It vanished on the air

RELATED FILMS

Barbara (Christian Petzold, 2012) is a movie about the operations of the Stasi. Christian Petzold, who belongs to the Berlin School, directed it.

Der Tunnel (*The Tunnel*, Roland Suso Richter, 2001) is a German TV movie that reconstructs a daring escape from East Germany following the construction of the Berlin Wall in August 1961.

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Auf der anderen Seite

(*The Edge of Heaven*, Fatih Akin, 2007)



Lotte and Nejat in Istanbul.

CREDITS

Director and writer Fatih Akin
Music Shantel
Cinematography Rainer Klausmann
Producer Corazón International
Length 122 minutes; Color

Principal Cast

Baki Davrak (Nejat), Tuncel Kurtiz (Ali), Nursel Köse (Yeter), Nurgül Yeşilçay (Ayten), Yelda Reynaud (Emine), Patrycja Ziółkowska (Lotte), Hanna Schygulla (Susanne), Lars Rudolph (Book storeowner), Andreas Thiel (Consular officer).

THE STORY

Auf der anderen Seite (*The Edge of Heaven*) has three chapters—“*Yeters Tod*” (“Yeter’s Death”), “*Lottes Tod*” (“Lotte’s Death”), and “*Auf der anderen Seite*” (“On the Other Side”). It begins with Ali, a Turkish immigrant and widower in the northern German city of Bremen, who offers Yeter money to stop working as a prostitute and live with him. While Yeter accepts the offer because she had received threats from

Turkish men, Ali's son Nejat, a professor of German literature, is not happy with a prostitute living with his father. When Ali enters the hospital after a heart attack, Yeter and Nejat get to know each other better and Ali suspects they have a relationship. Ali strikes Yeter who falls and hits her head, which kills her. Ali is then sent to prison and is later expelled from Germany.

Nejat flies to Istanbul to search for Yeter's daughter Ayten, but when he cannot find her, he posts flyers with Yeter's picture around town, including in a German bookstore. Meanwhile, during a riot a policeman loses his gun, which is picked up by Ayten, who hides the gun on a rooftop. Ayten is a member of a Turkish Communist resistance group and flees from Turkey to Germany where she lives on the streets. Lotte, a university student, offers to help her, a gesture that is not welcomed by Lotte's mother Susanne. As Ayten and Lotte become lovers, Lotte decides to help Ayten search for her mother. A traffic stop exposes Ayten's illegal status, and when she claims political asylum, the court rules against her. She is deported and imprisoned in Turkey. Lotte travels to Istanbul to try to free Ayten but learns that Ayten faces a lengthy jail time. Susanne pleads with Lotte to come home, but she refuses. Lotte ends up renting a room from Nejat, and when she is finally granted a prison visit with Ayten, she grants Ayten's request to retrieve the handgun that Ayten had hidden. But the gun is snatched by Istanbul street children, whom Lotte chases. When Lotte demands the gun be returned, a boy points it at her and kills her.

After his release from prison, Ali is deported to Turkey and returns to his property in Trabzon on the Black Sea. Susanne goes to Istanbul after Lotte's death and meets Nejat, who shares Lotte's diary with her. After visiting Ayten in prison, Susanne decides to try to free Ayten. Nejat removes the poster of Yeter from the bookshop, which Nejat now owns, and asks Susanne to look after his shop while he drives to Trabzon to see his father.

BACKGROUND

Fatih Akin became first known for his road movie *Im Juli* (*In July*, 2000), but he rose to prominence by winning the Golden Bear for Best Film for his movie *Gegen die Wand* (*Head-On*, 2004) at the 2005 Berlinale, Berlin's international film festival. It was the first time for a German-Turkish filmmaker to win this award. The movie was also nominated for the 2008 Academy Awards. *Auf der anderen Seite* is the second part of Akin's trilogy *Liebe, Tod und Teufel* (*Love, Death, and the Devil*), following *Gegen die Wand* and preceding the 2014 movie *The Cut*. Death is a central theme in *Auf der anderen Seite* and a motif that brings the protagonists into motion.

Auf der anderen Seite is a combination of a road movie from Germany to Turkey and a movie about German-Turkish relationships. Although the script was praised before it premiered at Cannes, Akin had the movie recut because he thought it too complicated. In the final version, Akin settles on three chapters, "Yeter's Death," "Lotte's Death," and "On the Other Side." Since the movie plays out in Germany and in Turkey, the characters communicate in a mix of English, German, and Turkish.

The Golden Bear for *Gegen die Wand* was an important signal to German-Turkish filmmaking and to the Turkish culture that they had arrived in the center of German society. The Turkish immigrant society now has a model they can look up to, and Germans were forced to accept the previously sidelined Turkish immigration culture that for a long time had been relegated to providing cheap labor and to owning ethnic restaurants and produce markets. Most of Akin's films take place in the Altona neighborhood of Hamburg where he grew up as the child of a Turkish guest worker. A working-class neighborhood, Altona was originally Danish and became part of Hamburg in 1937. Born in 1972, Akin never left his home, nor did his parents and friends, some of whom also appear in his movies.

The difference and tension between Turkish and German culture has become the topic Akin explores in *Über die Brücke* (*Crossing the Bridges*, 2005), *Im Juli* (*In July*, 2000), *Gegen die Wand*, and *Auf der anderen Seite*. Although the first guest workers recruited in Germany were from southern European countries, Turkish immigrants soon surpassed the Europeans. Initial reservations in Germany against Muslim workers were prevented by intervention from the United States, who wanted to stabilize and create goodwill with Turkey as a potential new ally. The German-Turkish guest worker agreement was reached in 1961.

EVALUATION

The movie has its roots in Akin's biography. Growing up in northern Germany, the port cities of Bremen and Hamburg feature strongly in his movies, as does the atmosphere of the Hamburg neighborhoods Altona and Ottensen. The immediate attraction Akin's movies provide lies in their action scenes with cars and guns. However, Akin does not stop there. He designed his movie with an almost classic narrative of loss and redemption, a theme he weaves into a multicultural tale. Inter-titles allude to an almost Brechtian structure—"Yeter's Death," "Lotte's Death," and "On the Other Side," which is the German title of the movie. "The Other Side" reveals a multifaceted meaning to the movie by referring to the cultural antagonism between Turkey and Germany, as in the movie's most memorable scene, where we see two coffins at the Istanbul airport, one with Yeter's body, which is coming home, and one for Lotte's body, which is leaving.

The characters are connected in a nonlinear way and are linked at random as their narratives overlap; events do, however, occur in chronological order. A prime example of this is Ayten sleeping at the university first during the beginning of the movie and again at the end. Or Nejat's trip to Trabzon, which opens and closes the movie. Akin reuses these shots to emphasize the circularity of his narrative.

All six characters are either father and son (Ali and Nejat) or mother and daughter (Yeter and Ayten and Susanne and Lotte). Ali, an older Turkish man and first-generation migrant of the 1960s, is still very connected with his language and his hometown of Trabzon. Nejat grew up only with his father, as his mother died when he was very young. He is a second-generation German Turk and teaches German literature at Hamburg's university. Nejat behaves like a regular German citizen, although he is still able to relate to Turkish culture.



Susanne and Ayten in Bremen.

Yeter, in her late forties, violates the Muslim code by working as a prostitute. Her daughter is equally rebellious by having worked in the Turkish resistance in Istanbul and later in Germany. Susanne and Lotte, both well-off Germans from Hamburg's affluent Harvestehude district, complement the rebellious Turkish mother-daughter couple. Susanne, played by Fassbinder's screen icon Hanna Schygulla, is a comfortable representative of Germany's liberal class that embraces global interaction. Lotte is the blue-eyed, protected student who has her first encounter with the exotic east when she meets Ayten.

Akin shows himself to be the legitimate heir to the Fassbinder estate. His casting of Hanna Schygulla as Susanne in *Auf der anderen Seite* is a conscious invocation of Schygulla's career as Fassbinder's muse, especially in *Die Ehe der Maria Braun*. Her solo scene in an Istanbul hotel, shot from above using stop motion, shows Schygulla's powerful acting in mourning the loss of Lotte (Isenberg 2011). Nejat acts mostly as a spectator, and despite his Turkish background he acts very much like a German man. He is comfortable with both languages and does not struggle against his roots. Starting as a son and in conflict with his father, he changes after meeting Susanne and tries to find reconciliation with Ali.

Framing becomes an artistic device that Akin uses to reveal the tension between the cultures. As Claudia Barucca and Ilaria De Pascalis (2009) have shown, the camera often stays on the edge and outside of the scene. Many shots are framed by doors, windows, or glasses, such as in the encounter between Yeter and Ali. Yeter's death happens when Ali is drunk and slaps her, and she falls out of frame. Yeter's death is not shown, nor is Lotte's, who is filmed in a long shot that does not reveal any details.

Sound becomes another important structuring device for the movie, which helps with constructing a complex and multi-layered story with six characters. This

is most notable in Akin's documentary *Crossing the Bridge: The Sound of Istanbul*. All cuts in *Auf der anderen Seite* are supported by musical rhythm. With his experience as a DJ, Akin tried to present the story as a silent movie. "Silent" is here used in the sense of the sound that supports all silent movies and constructs a non-diegetic sound experience, as in the classic *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City*. The soundtrack for *Auf der anderen Seite* emphasizes diversity by providing a musical heterogeneity of eclectic songs originating from Turkish, German, French, and Romanian musical settings. As Akin showed in his selection of German and Turkish characters, his music score supports this multicultural European society as an audio-visually diverse European space (Güneli 2011).

The topic of repentance and forgiveness is first mentioned when the Muslims ask Yeter to repent for her life as a prostitute. Although this scene seems somewhat disconnected from the story at first, it later becomes the focus of the movie. One of the signs of Ali's gradual understanding of his mistakes is when he begins to read the book his son had given him, *Die Tochter des Schmieds (The Daughter of the Blacksmith)* by Selim Özdoğan. Nejat's later decision to reconnect with his father originates in Susanne's question about the background of the Bayram festival—God's command to Abraham to sacrifice his son—and Nejat's childish question to his father if he would also sacrifice him. Nejat quotes his father as saying he would make God his enemy to protect him.

Susanne demonstrates her lack of understanding of the sacrificial story; to her only a confluence of narratives is relevant. Nejat, whose future points to his becoming a "son" to Susanne, is restored to his parent of the "flesh" and a new covenant. Like so much else in the film, the personal level indirectly reflects a broader society that in turn is in flux. The longstanding German stance that Germany was not a country of immigration, and that Germanness was determined by ethnicity (*ius sanguinis*), took a dramatic turn with new laws coming into effect at the turn of the millennium (Hillman and Silvey 2012).

In a few short scenes, the movie plays with the idea of crossing lines of life that never touch and the viewer's expectation that chance should help create such connection. Ayten sits in one of Nejat's lectures to find a place to sleep and does not realize that her search could end right there. The car in which Lotte sits with Ayten when she is looking for their mother drives for a few moments next to the tram where Yeter and Nejat sit, probably on the way to the hospital. When Nejat asks Lotte about the name of the woman she wants to help, he gets the wrong name because the official had told her not to mention the name to anyone. The flyer with Yeter's picture that Nejat posted for an entire year in his bookstore is removed at the moment when Ayten shows up. We wait in vain for a combination of these people to discover they are connected. But the film's message is much larger than that of connecting four or five of the characters.

As with music, Akin offers a multicultural approach to language as well. The movie uses a combination of German, Turkish, and English. And when these characters communicate in another language, they speak with an accent. When Lotte and Susanne speak English, the characters carry over a variation of their German accents into the other language. The same is true for Nejat or Markus when they speak Turkish. This multi-linguistic, accented mix of languages will eventually

become common in the European Union and is another sign of Akin's attempt to construct a utopia. Because of his own experience, Akin seems to firmly believe that Europe has a future and that this future will be multicultural on many levels. (RZ)

QUESTIONS

1. Make a list of scenes where images of Istanbul are displayed. Do the scenes show typical images? How do they differ from your perception of Turkey?
2. Explain the attitude toward Turkey that Susanne, Lotte, and Ayten display. Explain also the attitude toward Turkey taken by the European Union. What is the current situation of Turkey's admission to the Union? Consult the link below for more information: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Accession_of_Turkey_to_the_European_Union.
3. Explore the political context of Ayten's activism in Turkey. She is Kurdish, as were her parents. Her father was killed in the 1970s during an anti-Kurdish raid in Turkey. More information can be found in the following links: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_the_Turkey%E2%80%93PKK_conflict; and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turkey%E2%80%93PKK_conflict.
4. Find examples of English in the movie. Give an explanation for its use beyond the immediate need for communication. Connect it to the ideas conveyed.
5. When watching the movie, write down the songs or music styles you hear into a log. Try and connect the movie scenes with the music played—diegetic and non-diegetic. What does the music achieve?
6. Hartmut Bitomsky states in his documentary film *Das Kino und der Tod* (*Cinema and Death*, 1991) that death constitutes the basic principle of cinema. "There is hardly a movie where not at least one person dies. Death is an axiom of cinema—as love and crime and depicting reality are axioms of cinema." Choose a scene to support this thesis and explain the aesthetic principles the movie uses to support this axiom (lighting, color, music, cuts).

RELATED FILMS

Gegen die Wand (*Head-On*, Fatih Akin, 2004) won several prestigious awards, among them the Golden Bear at the Berlinale. The movie tells the story of Sibel, a young Turkish woman who marries an older Turkish man to free herself from her confining family.

- Kurz und schmerzlos* (*Short Sharp Shock*, 1998) was Akin's first movie. It pictured his own background of growing up in a Turkish community in Germany.
- 40 qm Deutschland* (*40 Square Meters of Germany*, Tevfik Başer, 1986) is one of the first German films dealing with Turks in Germany.
- Yasemin* (Hark Bohm, 1988) was West Germany's official submission to the 61st Academy Awards for Best Foreign Language Film.
- Im Juli* (*In July*, 2000) is a popular relationship comedy by Fatih Akin.
- Almanya: Willkommen in Deutschland* (*Almanya: Welcome to Germany*, Yasemin Şamdereli, 2011) shows the history of a Turkish family in Germany.

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Die Fälscher

(The Counterfeiters, Stefan Ruzowitzky, 2007)



Salomon Sorowitsch (Sally) looks up from his work on a counterfeit note.

CREDITS

Director Stefan Ruzowitzky
Screenplay Stefan Ruzowitzky (Based on Adolf Burger's
Book, *The Devil's Workshop*)
Director of Photography Benedict Neuenfels
Music Marius Ruhland
Producers Josef Aichholzer, Nina Bohlmann, Babette Schröder
Production Companies Magnolia Filmproduktion, Josef Aichholzer
Filmproduktion, Studio Babelsberg,
Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen
Locations Nice, France; Monte Carlo, Monaco;
Babelsberg Studio: Potsdam, Germany; Vienna, Austria
Length 98 minutes; Color

Principal Cast

Karl Markovics (Salomon Sorowitsch, aka Sally), August Diehl (Adolf Burger),
Devid Striesow (Sturmbannführer Friedrich Herzog), Martin Brambach (Haupt-
scharführer Holst).

THE STORY

Die Fälscher is a fictionalized account of an actual plan by the Nazi SS known under the code name Operation Bernhard to undermine the economies of the Allies by counterfeiting British and American banknotes. The story is told in flashback by Salomon (Sally) Sorowitsch, a Jewish inmate in the concentration camp at Sachsenhausen, who was the leader of the counterfeiting team of prisoners that were being coerced into forging the bills. The film begins and ends in Monte Carlo at the end of World War II. The story proper begins in Berlin in 1936, where Sally is a master forger who enjoys the high life. Arrested after spending the night with a client, a beautiful woman for whom he had forged papers, he is first sent to Mauthausen, a prison camp for criminals, where he ingratiates himself with the guards in order to have an easier existence. He secures himself extra food by offering his service as a portrait artist to the guards. His talent catches the attention of SS *Sturmbannführer* (Major) Herzog, who heads Operation Bernhard, a prisoner unit in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. Under Sorowitsch's direction, the prisoners create virtually perfect 5, 10, and 20 pound British bank notes. After this success, Herzog demands that the counterfeiters turn to producing fake U.S. dollars. The effort is sabotaged by Adolf Burger, one of the team members, who refuses to help the Nazis, as he believes that the counterfeit notes will merely serve to lengthen the war. Herzog gives a deadline for creation of the counterfeit money and threatens to kill five of the Jews in the unit if they resist. Despite Burger's sabotage, Sally is able to produce a counterfeit American bill; but before the bills can be produced in quantity, the camp is liberated. The final sequence returns to Sally at gaming tables after the war, intentionally losing the counterfeit money that he has brought with him from the camp. When the woman he is with consoles him over the loss, he replies that he can always print more.

BACKGROUND

During World War II, Nazi Germany planned to weaken the Allies' economic ability to finance the war by releasing counterfeit British currency on the market. The goal was to destroy the international community's confidence in the value of the British pound, at that time an important means of currency exchange among Allied and neutral nations. The initiative was given the code name "Operation Bernhard" after *Sturmbannführer* Bernhard Krueger, the SS officer who directed creation of the forgeries. The operation succeeded in creating genuine-looking bank notes. Rather than dropping the notes on England, as originally planned, the Nazis used the fake money to purchase needed materials for the war. After the war, secrecy still surrounded the counterfeit notes, some of which were still circulating, as the British government preferred not to disclose its vulnerability (Malkin 2006).

Die Fälscher is based on Adolf Burger's memoir *The Devil's Workshop*; but when asked in an interview if the film was accurate, the author stated, "No, it was a movie. You have to read the book and then you will know the truth. The SS officers

never screamed at us as they did in the movie. They never shot anyone in front of us as they did in the film. Six prisoners who fell ill were murdered, but never in front of us. And in real life, I was not such a revolutionary as I was made out in the movie. The actor [August Diehl] who played me came to see me before the film was made, but I didn't recognize myself in his performance" (Round 2009).

Die Fälscher won an Academy Award as Best Motion Picture in a foreign language, the first Austrian film to win the honor. It was the eleventh film of twenty-one dealing directly or indirectly with the Holocaust to win in this category, the most recent in 2016 being *Son of Saul*, a Hungarian film. That is, although World War II ended for Europe on May 8, 1945, over seventy years ago, artists continue to examine the Third Reich and its systematic killing of Jews, Gypsies, Poles, homosexuals, and Communists. The works of filmmakers inform, console, question, and analyze what eludes understanding and illumination. Hundreds of feature-length films that tell the story of the Holocaust have been made. Some, such as *Deutschland bleiche Mutter* (*Germany, Pale Mother*, Helma Sanders-Brahms, 1980) and *Die Blechtrommel* (*The Tin Drum*, Volker Schlöndorff, 1977), both treated elsewhere in the book, examine the lives and motivations of ordinary citizens who turned away from seeing what was occurring around them. Others—such as *Nirgendwo in Afrika* (*Nowhere in Africa*, Caroline Link, 2001), also treated in this book, and part three of *Wohin und Zurück: Welcome in Vienna* (*Welcome in Vienna*, Axel Corti, 1986), an Austrian examination of Jewish persecution—look at how the lives of those who escaped unfolded after emigration. Some movies, such as *David* (Peter Lilienthal, 1979) and *The Pianist* (Roman Polanski, 2002), follow individuals who went into hiding, escaping deportation to the camps but living in fear of being caught. Still others, such as *Ein Tag: Bericht aus einem deutschen Konzentrationslager 1939* (*One Day: A Report from a German Concentration Camp 1939*, Egon Monk, 1965), *God on Trial* (Andy de Emmony, 2008), and *Bent* (Sean Mathias, 1997), are set in the concentration camps, depicting those who neither emigrated in time nor survived by hiding. Films about Jewish resistance, such as *Defiance* (Edward Zwick, 2008) and *Inglourious Basterds* (Quentin Tarantino, 2009), form another genre—the thriller. *Die Fälscher* belongs to yet another category, one that shows the extent to which a person might go to stay alive. Gillo Pontecorvo had first examined this question in *Kapò* (1960), a film about a young Jewish girl who prostitutes herself to prison guards. In *The Grey Zone* (2001), Tim Blake Nelson told of the special commando squads of prisoners who worked in the crematoria in exchange for better treatment and a few extra weeks of existence. The same theme is again taken up by László Nemes in *Saul fia* (*Son of Saul*, 2015). In *Die Fälscher*, Ruzowitzky reprises the dilemma of choosing between two equally unacceptable options.

EVALUATION

Most films about the Holocaust explore the moral questions of the Holocaust within a particular genre—love story, thriller, or horror movie, among others. Depending on the genre, the answers may thus sometimes be obscured. One may judge the



A woman he has picked up at the casino in Monte Carlo consoles Sally after he lost all of his money in cards and at the roulette table. Since the money was counterfeit, his response is that he can always print more.

story too light (*Life Is Beautiful*), too absurd (*Inglourious Basterds*), too erotic (*Black Book* and *The Night Porter*), too slick (*Holocaust* and *Schindler's List*), too manipulative (*Boy in the Striped Pajamas*), or too trivial (*The Boys from Brazil*). *Die Fälscher* escapes most of these criticisms, although some critics see it as overly commercial. Mary Wauchope, for example, writes, "Whereas the complex ethical debates broached by the film are illustrated by the relationships Sally had with Burger and Herzog, the film's plot is ultimately driven by the traditional suspense mechanisms of a thriller, with 'good' triumphing over 'evil,' success over failure, and survival over death. The deeper moral issues entertained in *The Counterfeiters* are at the end of the film not only unresolved, but unaddressed" (Wauchope 2010, 71). Raymond Burt, on the other hand, writes that "Ruzowitzky's work explores moral stances and, ultimately, seeks universality and not historical memory" (Burt 2011, 307). While acknowledging the film's commercial elements, Burt writes that the film "blends both aspects (commercial and auteur) of the filmmaker" (Burt 2011, 308).

Die Fälscher does indeed occasionally lose track of the moral dilemma of choice in scenes of contrived suspense. After the team succeeds in counterfeiting the British bank notes, Ruzowitzky relies on conventional parallel editing to show the worried faces of the men in the camp and the agent assigned to take the notes to a Swiss bank for inspection. During a recreational break in the prison yard, a stray bullet comes through the wall that separates the counterfeiters from the rest of the camp, creating a moment of panic. Other generic clichés of pathos occur when an inmate discovers the passports of his children, confirming to him that they have been killed; when a boorish guard kills a young inmate with a shot to the head; or

when Sally responds to a fellow inmate at Mauthausen by saying “if you touch me, I’ll cut your throat.” Such moments add to the Hollywood or commercial nature of the film and may seem to have been included more out of a desire to shock rather than from a consideration of the moral issues at play in the film. At the same time, Ruzowitzky repeats motifs and includes scenes that reinforce the setting (a concentration camp) and the situation (probable death regardless of what one does).

Ruzowitzky might obscure the moral dilemma facing the inmates. And yet the confrontation between Sally and Burger remains central to the movie. From their first meeting, when Burger misunderstands Sally’s generous act toward another inmate, the two disagree, argue, or even fight. Both are, however, on the same side of the debate, namely, how best to defeat their tormentors. Burger, the idealist, insists that it is better to die than to satisfy the requests of the *Sturm-bannführer*. Sally sees such a response as a defeat because it gives the Nazis what they want. Sally, the pragmatist, believes one should do whatever it takes to remain alive. The counterfeit notes may indeed be prolonging the war by offering the Nazis a financial lifeline, but as long as the men remain alive, he sees a victory of sorts: “Only by surviving can we defeat them.” And that of course is the real moral of the film. The question is not whether it would have been a better choice morally to sacrifice oneself or to continue living. That is an unfair question to viewers, most of whom did not experience life in the camps. As the story returns to the frame at film’s end, Sally’s actions give another answer to the debate on moral choice. His haste to lose the money he had forged for the Nazis suggests survivor’s guilt. However, his closing response to his companion’s words of sympathy for having lost his fortune reveals that he has not lost his zest for life—“I can always print more.” The response would have been impossible had he allowed the Nazis to defeat him. (RCR)

QUESTIONS

1. Tell how the opening frame comments on postwar Europe.
2. How is the precarious situation for Jews in Germany presented in the opening scenes of the flashback?
3. Why is Sally not welcomed by the other Jewish prisoners?
4. Locate the scenes that suggest Sally, although a pragmatist, is not entirely an egotist.
5. Give arguments supporting both Burger’s and Sally’s views as presented in the movie.
6. In your opinion, is there an answer to the question “what would you have done in this situation?”

RELATED FILMS

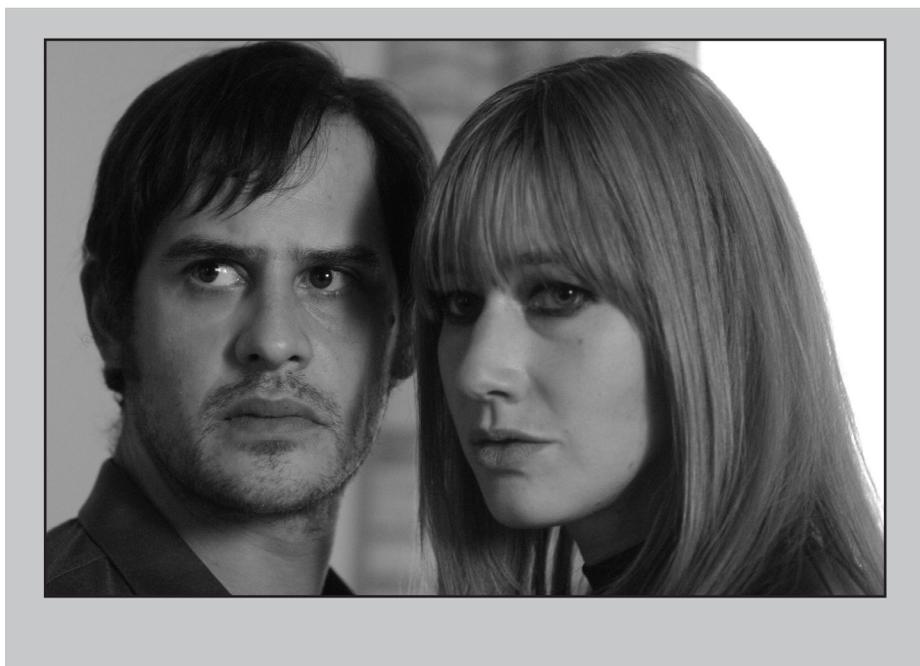
- Die Siebtelbauern* (*The Inheritors*, Stefan Ruzowitzky, 1998). Villagers inherit a farm after the murder of its owner. The film follows the genre of the *Heimatfilm* (films about village life in times past).
- Anatomie* (*Anatomy*, Stefan Ruzowitzky, 2000). This tale of horror takes place in a Heidelberg medical school.
- The Grey Zone* (Tim Blake Nelson, 2001). Jewish inmates in Auschwitz are part of a special task force to work in the crematoria. In exchange they get special privileges and a temporary reprieve from being gassed.
- Zwartboek* (*Black Book*, Paul Verhoeven, 2006). A young Jewish woman works for the Nazis as well as the resistance. After the war, others mistake her for a collaborator.
- Lili Marleen* (R. W. Fassbinder, 1981). Lale Andersen, a singer who became famous in Nazi Germany on the basis of the song "Lili Marleen," was seen as an opportunist for capitalizing on the popularity of the song. Secretly, she and her Jewish lover helped smuggle Jews out of Germany.
- Invincible* (Werner Herzog, 2001). A Jewish blacksmith becomes a favorite among Nazis with his strongman act. When he sees that his performances entertain the crowds at the expense of his Jewish heritage, he leaves the show.
- Hitlerjunge Salomon* (*Europa Europa*, Agnieszka Holland, 1990). A young Jewish man hides from the Nazis in plain sight, first as a runner for an army unit and later as a student in an elite training school for young Nazis.
- Saul Fia* (*Son of Saul*, László Nemes, 2015). A Jewish prisoner who works in the crematoria detail in Auschwitz witnesses the death of a young boy and tries to find a Rabbi to recite Kaddish for him.

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Der Baader Meinhof Komplex

(The Baader Meinhof Complex, Bernd Eichinger, 2008)



CREDITS

Director Uli Edel
Producer Bernd Eichinger
Script Bernd Eichinger and Uli Edel
Based on *Der Baader Meinhof Komplex* by Stefan Aust
Music Peter Hinderthür, Florian Tessloff
Cinematography Rainer Klausmann
Running time 149 minutes, 164 minutes extended cut; Color

Principal Cast

Ulrike Meinhof (Martina Gedeck), Andreas Baader (Moritz Bleibtreu), Gudrun Ensslin (Johanna Wokalek), Brigitte Mohnhaupt (Nadja Uhl), Holger Meins (Stipe Erceg), Jan Carl Raspe (Niels-Bruno Schmidt), Peter-Jürgen Boock (Vinzenz Kiefer), Horst Mahler (Simon Licht), Petra Schelm (Alexandra Maria Lara), Christian Klar (Daniel Lommantzsch), Rudi Dutschke (Sebastian Blomberg), Horst Herold (Bruno Ganz), Herolds Assistant (Heino Ferch), Peter Homann (Jan Josef Liefers), Susanne Albrecht (Hannah Herzsprung), Josef Bachmann (Tom Schilling).

THE STORY

Der Baader Meinhof Komplex covers the active period of the Baader-Meinhof terrorist group from 1967 to 1977. When the Shah of Iran was visiting the opera in West Berlin on June 2, 1967, the student Benno Ohnesorg was shot and killed by an undercover policeman during the student protests against the Shah's visit. This incident was publicized by the journalist Ulrike Meinhof in the left-wing *konkret* magazine, which inspired the student Gudrun Ensslin to leave her husband and child to carry out a fire bombing of a Frankfurt department store with her new lover Andreas Baader. After being caught and put on trial, they are represented by left-wing attorney Horst Mahler. Ulrike Meinhof covers the trial for *konkret* and interviews Ensslin, whom she befriends.

Meinhof leaves her husband with her two children as well, and after being released from prison, Baader, Ensslin, and Astrid Proll begin to live with Meinhof, who abandons journalism for political activism. After Baader is arrested again, Meinhof helps him escape, thus beginning her period of illegality along with the others. They flee to Jordan to train with the Palestinian Fatah movement and transform into the Red Army Faction (RAF). After a number of bombing attacks, Baader, Holger Meins, Ensslin, and Meinhof are captured.

A second plot shows Rudi Dutschke, Berlin's student leader in the protest against American involvement in Vietnam. Since Berlin was governed by the Allied powers, Berliners felt close to U.S. politics, especially since Berlin's surging student population was fueled by its special status, which exempted young men from military conscription service once they had moved to Berlin. Dutschke is shot by a right-wing terrorist.

At Stammheim Prison, the RAF members engage in a hunger strike, which causes the death of RAF member Holger Meins. Following this, Baader, Ensslin, Meinhof, and Jan-Carl Raspe are moved to the same quarters in Stammheim Prison. In 1975 RAF members seized the West German embassy in Stockholm to negotiate the release of the core group, but their action fails. In the meantime, Meinhof was ostracized by the prison's core group and hangs herself.

Mohnhaupt is released from Stammheim and smuggles weapons back into the prison. The federal prosecutor Siegfried Buback is assassinated and Mohnhaupt, along with Susanne Albrecht, attempt to kidnap the president of Dresdner Bank Jürgen Ponto, but he is killed. Mohnhaupt's group then kidnaps industrialist Hanns-Martin Schleyer to demand the release of all imprisoned RAF members. To enforce their plan, they hijack a Lufthansa plane with the help of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). When the plane is stormed, the core RAF group, including Baader, Raspe, and Ensslin, commit suicide and Schleyer is executed.

BACKGROUND

Der Baader Meinhof Komplex is the first movie in attempting to capture the entire ten years of RAF activity from 1967 to 1977. After 1977, interest in the group's activities waned but was reignited after German unification. The group dissolved in 1997

when discussion began to focus on Germany's political left and its position in unified Germany. Earlier films about the RAF had explored the relationship between the Ensslin sisters (*Die bleierne Zeit* [*Marianne and Juliane*, 1981]), the role of Andreas Baader (*Baader* [2002]), the importance of RAF members hiding in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) (*Die Stille nach dem Schuss* [*The Legend of Rita*, 2000]), the assassination of the Deutsche Bank CEO Alfred Herrhausen (*Black Box BRD* [2002]), and most often the kidnapping of Martin Schleyer and the Lufthansa Landshut plane (*Mogadischu* [2008]; *Deutschland im Herbst* [*Germany in Autumn*, 1978]; *Todesspiel* [1997]; and *Wer, wenn nicht wir* [*If Not Us, Who?* 2011]). The stakes for *Der Baader Meinhof Komplex* were high from the beginning, and this ambitious project will influence and ultimately define our interpretation of the events. The fascination with the RAF myth or trauma has shaped the Federal Republic for fifty years. To highlight its significance, Inge Stephan and Alexandra Tacke (2008) dedicated an entire volume to the RAF in their three-book series *NachBilder* on visual representation of traumatic periods in recent German history; the other two volumes analyze images of the Holocaust and of German unification.

The unresolved traumatic core of the RAF debate resurfaces whenever a major movie or publication attempts to define to what extent the RAF constituted a threat to the foundation of the Federal Republic. What becomes more and more apparent is that the RAF activities left nobody untouched in West Germany between 1967 and 1977, since they were a symptom of a political paradigm change in German history. Rainer Werner Fassbinder's staged interview with his mother in the movie *Deutschland im Herbst* is still one of the most chilling examples of this debate—in light of the West German inability to deal with the RAF crisis, she longs for a “benevolent dictator.” This polarization of the older generation brought up under Nazi totalitarianism and the younger West German liberalism is the source of the conflict. Surveys reveal that a significant number of young Germans were *Sympathisanten* (sympathizers) with the RAF, to recall the popular term of that time.

Bernd Eichinger, the producer of *Der Baader Meinhof Komplex*, and the director Uli Edel both belong to the first post-WWII generation, the *Baader-Meinhof-Generation*, which is also Fassbinder's generation. Eichinger and Edel had known each other since their student days at Munich's film academy, where they considered themselves “anti-authoritarian,” as were about 80 to 90 percent of students during the late 1960s (Conrad 2009). Since that time, Eichinger has become one of Europe's most prominent filmmakers as owner and CEO of Munich's Constantin Film, which has produced movies such as *Christiane F.* (1981), also directed by Constantin Film's director Uli Edel.

The issue of veracity in *Der Baader Meinhof Komplex* has dominated the critical discussion from the beginning. With his movie *Der Untergang*, about the Hitler saga, Eichinger had gained a reputation as falsifying historical facts; most reviewers were concerned that *Der Baader Meinhof Komplex* would take equal liberties with the truth. Eichinger asserted, however, that he faithfully followed Stefan Aust's book *Der Baader Meinhof Komplex* and changed only minor details. Eichinger repeatedly refers to the movie's international positive reception, especially in the United States. However, German movies in the United States usually appeal to a different audience than they reach in Germany. Whereas facts about the RAF are mostly unknown to

non-German audiences, Germans of the Baader-Meinhof-Generation will look for a new interpretation in evaluating the RAF story. In anticipation of this reaction, Eichinger says he intended his movie primarily for two viewer groups: audiences abroad and the younger, post-Baader-Meinhof-Generation at home, not the post-World War II generation that had experienced the RAF activities.

Insofar as the movie is aimed at a German audience, it added to its popularity by using a number of highly popular German actors as representations of terrorists, among them Martina Gedeck (*Das Leben der anderen* [*The Lives of Others*, 2006]) as Ulrike Meinhof, Moritz Bleibteu (*Lola rennt* [*Run Lola Run*, 1999]) as Andreas Baader, Johanna Wokalek (*Nordwand* [*North Face*, 2008]) as Gudrun Ensslin, Nadja Uhl (*Tatort and Sommer vorm Balkon* [*Summer in Berlin*, 2005]) as Brigitte Mohnhaupt, Hannah Herzsprung as Susanne Albrecht, and Bruno Ganz (*Der Untergang* [*Downfall*, 2004]) as Chief Prosecutor Horst Herold—a virtual celebrity parade of contemporary German film. Because of the actors' prominence, viewer identification with the terrorists is easier to achieve; it would be easier to portray the terrorists as "bad guys" with lesser-known actors. However, German audiences were quick to distinguish the good guys from the bad guys: Meinhof and Albrecht as "good," Baader and Ensslin as "bad." Because the actors playing the federal prosecutors Herold and Koch (played by Ganz and Ferch) had been playing Nazis in *Der Untergang*, presenting them as government figures adds a provocative aspect to the movie.

Der Baader Meinhof Komplex is a docudrama or historical reenactment, and the characters are used to recreate the atmosphere of the 1970s. With meticulous attention to details, historic scenes have been recreated from well-known press photos to imprint these iconic events once and for all in the collective memory—Dutschke's assassination, Meinhof's arrest, Baader's and Mein's arrest, and above all the terrifying scenes in which Ponto and Buback are assassinated and Schleyer is kidnapped. The hijacking of the Lufthansa plane is not part of this story since it had been reenacted in *Todesspiel* (1997).

EVALUATION

Der Baader Meinhof Komplex incorporates several overlapping aesthetic concepts which represent artistic concepts of the original RAF members themselves. Although Eichinger and Edel were not consciously recreating those concepts, they serve as an important internal structuring device. Gudrun Ensslin, Ulrike Meinhof's rival in leading the RAF, had given each member of the core group a code name based on Hermann Melville's novel *Moby Dick*—Baader was "Ahab" and Holger Meins was "Starbuck." In Melville's novel, Ahab, the tyrannical captain of the whaling ship *Pequod*, is driven by a monomaniacal desire to kill Moby Dick, the whale that maimed him on a previous voyage. As a result, Ahab's obsession with Moby Dick ultimately dooms the crew of the *Pequod* to death. During their incarceration in Stammheim Prison, Ensslin made the connection to Melville's tragic tale and thus predicted their likely fatal end.

By using Melville's novel, Ensslin became a participant in the discourse about the nature of the RAF involvement even before it ended. Ensslin's perception

was influential on Meinhof, whose notes indicate she was reading *Moby Dick* in her prison cell at Ensslin's recommendation (Aust 2008). The ability to see the tragic structure of the RAF's monomaniac reach for power—its *Größenwahn* or “delusions of grandeur,” as German chancellor Helmut Schmidt called it—opens up an important dimension of the Baader-Meinhof story. As Theodor Adorno had postulated, art is an expression of antagonisms in society, as structure and content replicate actual events. Thus, Ensslin's connection of the RAF's fate with the biblical saga of Ahab and Leviathan elevates the Baader-Meinhof story into a timeless tale of man versus society, according to Ensslin's own interpretation of her story.

Stefan Aust used a similar structure in his book *Der Baader-Meinhof Komplex*, which is divided into five parts (or acts). Part I is entitled “Paths into the Underground” (exposition), part II “The Splendor of Terror” (the story develops), part III “Costume of Fatigue” (climax and the tragic turn), part IV “Court Session” (falling action), and part V “Fall 1977” (tragic end). In condensing the nearly nine hundred pages of Aust's book into a movie of two and a half hours, Eichinger and Edel retained the essential five-act book structure. By focusing on characters and dialogues, they eliminated large parts of the pamphlets and the counterterrorist activities of the police.

As movies are governed by images, whether authentic or reconstructed, the presentation, reconstructing, and editing of those images establishes the event in the collective memory. Eichinger claims that he produced an “objective” movie with high documentary power, saying that what the film tells was authentic. Eichinger backs his claim in the film with a combination of original documentation footage, which are incorporated in a number of reenactment scenes that showcase the main players in the drama. By focusing on characters, the film turns into an action movie in which the viewer is “immersed” in intense close-up scenes that generate a very personal movie. The intentional result is a lack of critical reflection.

Although this intense proximity to the protagonists has been called political pornography, it achieves a degree of sympathy for the protagonists. Frank Schirmacher (2008) described Edel's reenactment method as “cinematic cloning of an entire world,” where the recreated scene is indistinguishable from the original. This is especially true for Andreas Baader, who as the leader of the group achieved a degree of iconization within the group. Thorwald Proll described Baader, who had written movie scripts inspired by French New Wave films such as Godard's *Breathless*, as a movie buff with aspirations of looking fashionable. With his interest in avant-garde cinema, Baader lived in his own artificial world with movie characters such as James Dean, Jean Paul Belmondo, and Marlon Brando.

Ensslin, however, represented a more classical approach, perhaps owing to her upbringing in a Protestant minister's family, whereas Baader was more radical, innovative, and spontaneous. It is obvious that Jean-Paul Belmondo's character Michel and his girlfriend, Patricia, in *Breathless* became the model for Baader's and Ensslin's character change after they both had experienced the Parisian lifestyle. This lifestyle shown in *Breathless* appealed especially to Ensslin, which she emulated. Both, Ensslin and Baader, appear as kindred spirits, with their preference for fast cars and avant-garde fashion earning them the nickname *Prada Meinhof*. In the movie *The Battle of Algiers* (1966), one scene in particular of three banks being robbed



Ulrike Meinhof's arrest.

simultaneously became the model for the Berlin bank raids. Baader's and Ensslin's reenactment of a cinematic fantasy appealed to the *Generation Berlin* that was brought up on movie fantasies and had trouble separating art and life.

By using authentic photos from which to recreate the action, *Der Baader Meinhof Komplex* tries to maintain a French New Wave look, something for which cameraman Rainer Klausmann is responsible. With the advance of modern film technology, reenactments have become fashionable in movies, and they are preferable to the original and grainy black-and-white photographs. However, with improved technology, authentic photos of more recent historical events, such as the death of Benno Ohnesorg on June 2, 1967, still hold considerable fascination.

Jürgen Henschel's original photo of Ohnesorg's death captures the dramatic scene in a photo that uses mainly flash photography and highlights the Pietà-like effect of the well-composed shot. In recapturing this scene, Edel does not use the light in the same way as the original but instead bathes the scene in a uniquely obscure light to remove the unevenness of the flash. Frank Schirmacher (2008) called the effect "heartbreaking" since it creates a heightened sensibility in the viewer. The light makes the movie look more like a science fiction movie, "as if the figures were shown through an aquarium or a clear water surface," (Schirmacher, 2008) a cool and modern effect, which hurts our eyes. The effect is mesmerizing. Thus, Klausmann's lighting transcends the intended authenticity and creates a more flawless film than a documentary would.

As the scene sequence clearly shows, the cinematographer framed most authentic shots with the photographer in the scene and thereby adds another layer for the modern viewer that did not exist in the original photograph. The effect is that we are constantly reminded that we are watching a reproduced event. The cool

and distancing light is also reflected in the actress's expression that no longer shows the shock of the original photograph.

Other frames Edel uses are TV sets and doors or window frames. An example is Ulrike Meinhof's jump out of the window of the Institute for Social Studies in Berlin, where she helped Andreas Baader shoot his way into freedom. With the jump, Meinhof left her regular life behind and began her underground terrorist activities. The pictures showing Meinhof's arrest show a similar effect. As in the Ohnesorg scene, Meinhof's original arrest photo seems unrefined, with the flash focusing on her face and the jagged and crude movements of the arresting policeman.

Just as Ulrich Schlöndorff frames a similar scene in *Die verlorene Ehre der Katharina Blum* (*The Lost Honor of Katherina Blum*, 1974) through the camera lens, so does Edel. As in the Ohnesorg sequence, Edel again portrays the scene in his signature uniform light. A single policeman uses his hand to touch Meinhof's shoulder lightly, more to support her sagging torso than to present her to the camera, as in the original photo. Edel centers on her expression, which seems subdued; he interprets her arrest as a mental and physical breakdown. Unlike the original photo and Schlöndorff's movie, Edel's Meinhof does not show any reaction but exhaustion. Aggressive emotions have disappeared.

A similar pattern can be seen in the arrest scene of Andreas Baader, Holger Meins, and Jan-Carl Raspe. The scene is framed first by a picture of a girl taking a photo of the event. We then see the advance of the police, followed by Raspe's arrest, which in turn is followed by Baader's and Meins's retreat into one of the garages. After this, Baader is shot, and finally Meins and Baader are arrested. By assuming the child's point of view, the camera copies the location of the original police photo and makes the girl the key figure for the RAF story. Thus, a ten-year-old child becomes the witness for all of those viewers who were children during the 1970s, which is Edel's intended target audience.

To extract Meins and Baader from the garage where they had barricaded themselves, the police used teargas, which blurred the arrest scene. In the Meinhof arrest scene, the camera had focused on her face and invited identification and sympathy with the victim, which was reinforced by her submissive expression, with no hint of aggression, just as the authentic photograph showed. However, in Baader's and Meins' arrest scene, the camera does not close in but rather pulls back to a long shot of a foggy teargas scene, which obscures Baader's aggression. By focusing on the girl as its point of view, the movie does not provide an identification with Baader and Meins as it did with the medium shot of Ulrike Meinhof.

The closing shot shows Schleyer's body on fall leaves and in fading light with subdued earth tones similar to the colors in the scenes at the beginning of the movie. With its closing frame, *Der Baader Meinhof Komplex* turns into an epitaph for the RAF dead. The movie mourns both culprits and victims, just as in Hans-Peter Feldmann's photo cycle *Die Toten* (*The Dead*, 1998), with its lineup of posters of all ninety who were killed during the RAF activities. No distinction between culprits and victims is made. The movie has become a requiem for all dead. The overwhelmingly positive reactions to Feldmann's exhibits in Germany affirm that this type of neutral presentation of the RAF is an appropriate way to begin the *Trauerarbeit* (mourning process) that *The Baader Meinhof Complex* attempts. (RZ)

QUESTIONS

1. Analyze the shot sequence in the Schleyer kidnapping scene. Compare it to other fast-paced action scenes, such as the shower scene in *Psycho*.
2. Find information about American terrorist activities in or against the United States before 9-11.
3. Discuss the background of the film characters in more detail. Pick one whose motivation you understand and explain why.
4. What 9-11 movies can be compared to *Der Baader Meinhof Komplex* (for example, *Fahrenheit 9/11*, *World Trade Center*, *United 93*, *September 11*)?
5. List some of the motivations and causes for the activities of the Baader-Meinhof group and how they are presented in the movie, such as dissatisfaction with post-World War II developments, the “economic miracle,” lack of discussion about fascism and the Holocaust between the generations, social privileges, and so forth.
6. Explain Horst Herold’s reflection on terrorism. Here is a quote: “The world has always been unjust and intelligent people have always protested. Why does terrorism happen only in certain historical phases? What do they have in common?”

RELATED MOVIES

Todesspiel (Heinrich Breloer, 1997). Breloer mixes documentary with fictional elements based on the abduction in the fall of 1977 of Hanns Martin Schleyer, the president of Germany’s employer’s association.

The Battle of Algiers (*La Battaglia di Algeri*, Gillo Pontecorvo, 1966) about the independence of Algeria in the 1950s. The movie became the inspiration for the RAF movement.

Wer wenn nicht wir? (If Not Us, Who?) (Andres Veiel, 2011) tells the story of Bernward Vesper’s relationship with the terrorist Gudrun Ensslin, one of the founders of the RAF (Red Army Faction).

Die bleierne Zeit (*Marianne and Juliane*, Margarethe von Trotta, 1981). The story of Gudrun Ensslin’s path to terrorism and the relationship she had with her sister.

Die Stille nach dem Schuss (*The Legend of Rita*, Volker Schlöndorff, 2000). The terrorist Rita Vogt lives in East Germany with a new identity.

Black Box BRD (Andres Veiel, 2001). The story of the assassination of Alfred Herrhausen, CEO of Deutsche Bank, by the RAF member Wolfgang Grams in 1989.

Mogadischu (Roland Richter, 2008). A TV production about Lufthansa flight 181 that was hijacked by Palestinian terrorists to pressure the release of the Red Army Fraction members from Stammheim Prison.

Deutschland im Herbst (*Germany in Autumn*, Alexander Kluge, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, and others, 1978). This collection of short movies about the mood after the events in the fall of 1977 portrays the mood in Germany at the height of RAF terrorist activities.

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Barbara

(Christian Petzold, 2012)



Barbara returning to town from an illicit trip.

CREDITS

Director Christian Petzold
Screenplay Christian Petzold, with contributions by Harun Farocki
Director of Photography Hans Fromm
Music Stefan Will
Producers Florian Koerner von Gustorf, Michael Weber
Production Companies Schramm Film, Koerner&Weber, ZDF, Arte
Length 105 minutes; Color

Principal Cast

Nina Ross (Barbara), Ronald Zehrfeld (André), Rainer Bock (Stasi agent Klaus Schütz), Jasna Fritzi Bauer (Stella), Jannick Schümann (Mario).

THE STORY

Because she applied for an exit visa to leave the German Democratic Republic (GDR), Barbara, a pediatrician at Berlin's prestigious Charité Hospital, was incarcerated.

In 1980, upon her release from prison, she was demoted to a hospital located in a midsized town close to the Baltic Sea—a punishment that only strengthened her resolve to leave the GDR. Mentally finished with her past, Barbara lives only for the future. She envisions it in the West. There she would be married to her lover Jörg, a West German businessman she had met in (East) Berlin. Jörg was to devise an escape plan for her and make all arrangements for carrying it out.

While waiting for her escape, Barbara has to endure the present, which—in several major respects—is just as terrible as expected. She is relegated to particularly unattractive housing that is also rather far from the hospital where she works. Much worse, however, Barbara is under strict surveillance. When she looks out the window, she almost always meets the gaze of a Stasi officer spying on her from a car parked in the courtyard. (Stasi is the shortened form of *Staatssicherheit*, the East German state security police.) Whenever she succeeds in evading him for a few hours, her place is turned upside down by Stasi men in search of evidence for her betrayal of the state. On these occasions, she is also subjected to especially demeaning body scans by a female Stasi agent with plastic gloves.

Barbara's work at the hospital counteracts such debasing experiences. She easily establishes rapport with her adolescent patients—in particular, with the sixteen-year-old Stella, a chronic runaway from the inhumane reformatory in Torgau. But Barbara is far less certain about how to respond to André, her supervising doctor. Because André knew so much about her at the outset, Barbara assumes that he is an unofficial Stasi coworker. Still, because of the humanistic values they share in their work and their similar appreciation of art, literature, and music, Barbara falters in her original harsh assessment of André. She can, in fact, no longer categorize him easily.

Though the film does not resolve Barbara's questions about trust and mistrust, its end implies that she no longer automatically dismisses life in the GDR as hopelessly impoverished. Thus, rather than take advantage of her opportunity to flee by means of a raft that would transport her to Denmark via the Baltic Sea, Barbara enables Stella—practically in the last minute—to take her place on the raft. She, however, returns to the hospital, as well as to André.

BACKGROUND

Barbara (2012), Christian Petzold's first historical film, is set in East Germany in 1980; the second, *Phoenix* (2014), focusing on a Holocaust survivor in the immediate postwar days, goes further back into history. Unlike the setting of the second film, the East German setting of *Barbara* was by no means alien territory for Petzold, as critics tend to assume because he was born and raised in West Germany. When confronted with this assumption, Petzold is quick to correct it: his parents were East Germans who had escaped from the GDR not long before the Berlin Wall went up.

Petzold did not, however, derive most of his knowledge of East Germany from parental tales but experientially: between 1966, when he was six years old, and 1976, he and his brothers spent their summer vacations with relatives in East

Germany. He notes that his father may have liked to show off his Ford there—his most prized material acquisition in the West—but stresses that his parents kept returning to the GDR simply because they were homesick. His brothers and he might have caught some of their homesickness, he adds, for they too longed to visit the GDR in the summers (Schenk 2015, 11).

Though it is understandable that Petzold wanted to focus entirely on East Germany in at least one of his films, it may be somewhat puzzling that he chose to set it in the year 1980, not a year that immediately calls forth important associations with either East or West Germany. But 1980 was the kind of transitional time period that Petzold has favored throughout his film career. Shying away from momentous events and the equally momentous dates associated with them, Petzold prefers the in-between times, the times when change has either just occurred or is imminent—its nature, though, still indefinite and its repercussions unknown. All of his feature films and his various TV crime films show this preference in one way or another—for example, his so-called *Ghost Trilogy* films: *Die innere Sicherheit* (*The State I Am in*, 2000), *Gespenster* (*Ghosts*, 2005), and *Yella* (2007).

Petzold emphasizes that around 1980 the West was experiencing the dissolution of the hippie era. Punk and New Wave-music had already been ushered in. And with the election of Margaret Thatcher to British prime minister in 1979 and Ronald Reagan to U.S. president in 1980, a new brand of neoliberalism was in the making. That life would soon change in unforeseen ways—first in the West and eventually in the East too—was clear (Ratner 2012, 24).

By 2008, Petzold was able to pinpoint some of the changes set into motion by the new neoliberal form of capitalism: while constantly exhorting citizens to independence, government abdicated many of its responsibilities in areas such as health, prison, and schooling; on the other hand, it strengthened its regulatory capacities to promote capitalism on all fronts. The resultant privatizations led to the massive outsourcing of work, destruction of wage labor, impoverished communal life, severe loss of security, and ultimately to people “staggering about” because they weren’t being used anymore (Abel 2008a, 11–13).

These unneeded, discarded, and alienated people turn into the “ghostly” characters or phantoms populating Petzold’s film world. To be sure, in *Barbara* they are not the discards of capitalism but the victims of a GDR government unable to tolerate criticism and rejection (Barbara’s crime) or weighty human errors in showcase medical experiments (André’s offense). Removed from high profile hospital positions (André from Eberswalde and three years later Barbara from Berlin), they are relegated to a provincial town that has fallen off the radar. Located in northeastern Germany, close to the Baltic Sea, it does not even have a name. It is simply a disconnected, fragmented space to which GDR losers and those fallen out of favor are relegated.

But, rather than dismiss the town or judge it prematurely, Petzold responds to it in the mode of the Berlin School he represents: he observes the site closely in order to perceive how it shapes its inhabitants. In short, he is convinced of its singularity and that the precise nature of the singularity reveals itself only through close, intense observation. In contrast to plot- and action-driven narrative cinema, his films—like those of the Berlin School in general—thus represent a “cinema of

observation," a filmmaking approach that has its own consequences for character portrayal and formal film aesthetics (Hochhäusler 2013, 25).

Praised in 2013 by Glenn D. Lowry of the Museum of Modern Art as "one of the most influential auteur movements to emerge from Europe in the new millennium" (Lowry 2013, 9), the Berlin School is not an actual movement but a loose grouping of filmmakers with comparable artistic concerns. Noting similarities in the cinema of some German filmmakers emerging in the mid-1990s—traits differentiating their films from the comedies of the early 90s that were no longer laughing matter—film critics came up with the designation "Berlin School." The three listed in the first grouping—Thomas Arslan, Petzold, and Angela Schanelec—had at least studied at the Deutsche Film- und Fernsehakademie Berlin (dffb, or "Film and Television Academy Berlin"). Petzold studied there from 1988 to 1994 after studying theater and German literature at Berlin's Freie Universität from 1981.

Since the mid-90s, many other names have been added to the roster of Berlin School filmmakers (e.g., Valeska Grisebach, Benjamin Heisenberg, and Christoph Hochhäusler). Regardless of whether they were born in Berlin, had studied in Berlin, or made films set in Berlin, most now live in Berlin. In some instances, though, filmmakers use the rubric merely as a convenient advertising label, capitalizing on the fact that the Berlin School stands for quality filmmaking and aesthetic innovation. In France, its films are celebrated as "nouvelle vague allemande" (New German Wave) and garner large audiences. *Barbara*, for instance, had at least 300,000 viewers. In the United States, moreover, *Barbara* was the first Petzold film to receive distribution (it ran in forty-three cities). As a whole, though, showings on German TV lead to the largest viewership figures for Berlin School films. This is not surprising, since TV networks in Germany co-finance cinema productions to a far larger extent than networks do in the United States; it is assumed that many of these will also be shown on TV.

Yet Berlin School films might seem out of place on TV. Their emphasis on patient observation and its attendant formal techniques—long shots, lingering images, lengthy silences, precise framing, very little non-diegetic music—runs counter to the plot and action emphasis of mainstream TV programming. Their "aesthetics of reduction" do not, however, result in the avant-garde types of film generally avoided by TV networks (Abel 2008b, 5). Rather, the films center on everyday reality—on everyday objects, events, and people.

Berlin School filmmakers tend to locate everyday reality in transitional sites such as border areas and neglected or forgotten urban spaces. Often these are inhabited by people who have fled from somewhere and have nowhere else to go, or by those who are so stuck in their lives that mobility of any sort seems, at best, a pipe dream. Yet they turn up in places that can be construed (among other possibilities) as places suggesting mobility—for example, in hotel rooms that serve as waiting rooms for the future. In the case of *Barbara*, the Interhotel offers both a hiding place for Barbara's illicit affair with her West German lover Jörg (she can reach the hotel suite only at night and only by climbing through a window) and the launching site, so to speak, for her flight (that is where Jörg discloses the precise plan for her escape). Along with impersonal, generic hotel rooms, Berlin School films accentuate another staple of modern life: cars. But the filmmakers, Petzold at the forefront, no

longer value cars as vehicles for speed or change. Encased in their automobiles, the protagonists of the Berlin School may be asserting power, but they glide on highways that have no exits. Rather than mobility, driving or being driven results in what has aptly been described as “automobility” (Koenig 2013, 76).

When, on the other hand, the eye of the Berlin School camera focuses on the face of a supposedly immobile person—as it frequently does—its “tendency to stare” alters what is stared at “from *within* the act of seeing” (Abel 2008b, 5). That is, because of the long duration and intensity of the “stare,” the face and the person behind it are eventually perceived in a new way: not only conceptually but affectively or with the senses. Yet, because not much is divulged verbally about their backgrounds or interior lives, people highlighted in this way are able to “preserve their mystery and with it their dignity” (Hochhäusler 2013, 25).

EVALUATION

It is probably inevitable for filmgoers to assume that Petzold’s *Barbara* is a film about the GDR and perhaps just as inevitable for Petzold to deny this, but he has needed to explain himself. In 2012, he stated flatly that it was not his intent to present the GDR from the perspective of a surveillance camera (Schenk 2012, 12). Thus *Barbara* does not provide an “objective” view of the GDR. Rather, it offers only Barbara’s subjective perspective on the GDR. Petzold is adamant, moreover, about differentiating between his own views and those of the character he created. Barbara’s subjective perspective, Petzold explains, is limited, just as her world is. The GDR, for that matter, was also a limited world—one consisting of thousands of small private islands, each a bubble of its own. Citizens tended to live in their own bubble: a private space to which they often withdrew (Schenk 2015, 12). There were, in essence, thousands of GDRs.

In his “Director’s Note” on the official website of *Barbara*, Petzold continues to stress what he had *not* intended with his film. By no means had he wanted to suggest that the power of love—innocent, pure, liberating love—could overcome GDR oppression. That kind of symbolic positioning is alien to him, for it tends to encourage entrenched viewing habits. Petzold explains on the *Barbara* website that when people discover symbols, they readily decode them. But afterward they are left only with what they already knew.

To view a film and be no wiser than before is anathema to Petzold. Yet that is inescapable when films merely confirm expectations—when, for example, yet another narrative film ties up loose plot ends or induces viewers to identify with its protagonists. Petzold, on the other hand, thwarts expectations as a matter of principle—first of all, those of his actors (he usually works with them in ensemble fashion). So that the actors of *Barbara* shed as much as possible of what they already knew or thought they knew about the GDR, Petzold scheduled several communal film viewings and discussions. But of the large number of DEFA (Deutsche Film AG/ German Film Company) films he himself had watched in preparation for writing the screenplay of *Barbara*, Petzold showed the cast merely one: Jürgen Böttcher’s *Jahrgang ’45* (*Born in ’45*, 1966), a censored film that had its first public showing only

after the fall of the Wall. Simply capturing a young man roaming around Berlin for a day, the film has none of the doctrinaire feel of many other DEFA films.

In particular, Petzold cared about countering the assumption that the GDR was exclusively a drab place. Thus Petzold had people gather thousands of photos of life in the GDR that were in private households and had them hung up in several rooms of the building where the cast was staying before the start of filming. Everyone, including Petzold, was surprised at the lively colors in many of the photos and at the cheerfulness the photos conveyed.

Annoyed at the preponderance of desaturated colors (mainly brown and grey) associated with the GDR in contemporary films, Petzold stresses color variety in *Barbara*. To name only a few instances: the blue color of the bus in the beginning, Barbara's various blue clothes, vibrant green landscapes, large yellow sunflowers protruding from a garden, glaring red tail lights, colorful garden vegetables, and equally colorful book covers. One image in particular highlights how Barbara is awakened to the vibrant aspects of the GDR that she had overlooked. Returning by train to her town after the hotel stay—where Jörg had provided her with the final details of the escape plan—Barbara suddenly sees two young couples next to two motorcycles at the edge of a wide meadow. Dressed in lively colored clothes, they spontaneously wave to the train passengers. As Petzold states, this is an affirmation of life that doesn't match Barbara's image of the GDR. On the verge of leaving, she recognizes that the GDR has its charms after all (Leweke 2013, 33). And at the end of the film, when one visualizes Barbara's continued life in the GDR, it is impossible to forget the powerful images of Barbara on her bike, the wide sky, the fiercely blowing wind, the enigmatic faces and their enigmatic gazes—in short, the many sensual aspects suffusing the GDR in *Barbara*.

Yet Petzold certainly does not render the GDR harmless. He too includes a Stasi agent, Officer Schütz, who makes many of Barbara's days unbearable. When Barbara arrives in town by bus, Officer Schütz is with the doctor André, upstairs in a building close to the bus stop—that is, he has an ideal surveillance position. Later, when he observes her from his car in front of her lodging, he and Barbara have exchanged positions: he is now at street level, while she is upstairs. In a sense, she too is now spying on him, since she often looks out the window to see if he is still there. She usually catches his gaze looking upward. Only once is she able to chase him away: when she plays Chopin on her newly tuned piano.

Officer Schütz is ready to mete out punishment whenever Barbara returns from an out-of-town trip. He is aware of two of Barbara's departures: the first to a distant restaurant where a clandestine meeting with a waitress results in the handover of the large sum of money needed for her escape; the second to an Interhotel in another city to meet Jörg. In both instances, the trips involve preparations for Barbara's escape from the GDR. Upon both returns to the town, Stasi officer Schütz is already waiting for Barbara in order to subject her rented room to a thorough search (e.g., all drawers are emptied, objects are upturned, hiding places sought). But worse than the search of her room is the search of her body—that is, the body scan to which she is subjected both times by a female Stasi agent.

Yet the Stasi officer is not as thorough as he thinks: Barbara's trip to meet Jörg in the forest remains undetected, as is befitting of the fairytale nature of German



The dining hall: Barbara (in the back, on the left) does not wish to sit with André.

forests. So that viewers make the connection with the Grimm Brothers's *Rotkäppchen* (*Little Red Riding Hood*), Barbara is suddenly shown with a basket, looking very much like a fairytale character herself. In the forest, moreover, she meets Jörg, the person whom the Stasi, so to speak, could easily label the "bad wolf." But Barbara remains unpunished (a clever way for Petzold to show that forests were havens in the GDR—in fact, for all sorts of conspiratorial meetings, since directional microphones were useless among the many trees).

But the film does provide another example of particularly reprehensible governmental punishment: the Torgau reformatory, well known in the GDR for torture and for other kinds of inhumane treatment. That Stella ran away from Torgau several times and that she was desperate not to return there is understandable. The film also makes clear that she needs to leave the GDR more than Barbara does. Despite her young age, there are no opportunities left for her. The escape route that had been planned for Barbara is Stella's only hope for a better life.

Whether Barbara, on the other hand, could have a better life in the West is debatable. Once in the West and married to him, Jörg tells her in the Interhotel, she won't need to work anymore. But that is not a pleasant prospect for Barbara. Her work is highly important in helping to define her. By the same token, the attitude toward work that André and Barbara share clearly motivates their personal relationship. André understands Barbara and Stella's closeness and willingly searches for Barbara when Stella refuses treatment from him; Barbara, in turn, searches with genuine urgency for André when she discovers the nature of the patient Mario's illness, for she knows how very much André was concerned about him after his suicide attempt. André's offer to put Barbara in charge of anesthetics for Mario's operation is a far more attractive proposition for Barbara than Jörg's offer to absolve her of work and let her sleep—every day—as long as she wants to.

Petzold nonetheless set himself a difficult task to make Barbara's decision to stay in the GDR credible. To explain it with a love story, such as the one with Jörg,

would not have sufficed. But Petzold carefully paves the way for Barbara's turn-about not only by emphasizing the desirability of mobility and change throughout the film but also by mobilizing the arts—music, literature, painting—to inspire the willingness to change. This strategy begins on the evening of Barbara's first workday, when she hears a radio announcer praising Wilhelm Furtwängler's conducting of an overture. Though he had heard the music dozens of times before, the radio announcer felt that Furtwängler's rendition gave him the impression that he was hearing it for the first time. This short episode clearly has diegetic value: the music can still be heard the next day, when Barbara starts to work in the hospital.

At times, the function of an artistic selection becomes clear only in retrospect. For example, once Stella becomes the one to leave the GDR for Denmark via a raft on the Baltic Sea, the passages on hiding, freedom, escape, and water read to her from *Hucklebery Finn* can be understood as foreshadowing her own escape. The excessively flimsy nature of this raft might also be an allusion to *Huck Finn's* unlikely escape.

The most prominent example of change through art highlighted in the film is André's interpretation of Rembrandt's *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp* (1632), based on W. G. Sebald's interpretation of the painting in *Ringe des Saturn* (*The Rings of Saturn*, 1991), as pointed out by Jens Hinrichsen (2012, 10). A thief who had been hanged recently is lying on a dissecting table, surrounded by doctors. But the left arm in the painting turns out to be the reproduction of the right arm that the doctors see in the anatomy book in front of them. Only the anatomy book captures the doctors' attention. But Rembrandt forces viewers to see the human being in front of them. Barbara becomes confused at the explanation. Once again, André, who never denies being an unofficial Stasi coworker, baffles her with his humane disposition.

At the end of the film, Barbara thwarts expectations—this time those of the Stasi officer who had been convinced that she would not come back. Like the journeys of many literary travelers, hers too turns into an arrival at her starting point. When she returns to the hospital and, by implication, to André, viewers see the two of them as equals, each seated at Mario's bed—Barbara on one side, André on the other. Neither says anything. But they speak with gazes—long prolonged gazes eventually softened by hints of a smile. What the future holds for them remains unclear, but it is difficult to remove one's own gaze from theirs. (MS)

QUESTIONS

1. Choose a 15- to 20-minute segment of the film. How does the segment reflect the filmic modes of the Berlin School? Conjecture about how another director—preferably one also discussed in this book—would film the same segment.
2. How do the following support mobility or change in the film?
 - a. Music: The music of Wilhelm Furtwängler, Mozart, Chopin, the lullaby Stella sings, and the concluding song by Chic, "At Last I Am Free" (1978).

- b. Literature: Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) and Ivan Turgenev, *The Country Doctor* (1852).
- c. Art: Rembrandt, *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp* (1632).
3. Barbara and André are both doctors. What role does their work play in the film? Discuss how three images in the film frame their work.
 4. Though *Barbara* is not an “objective” film about the GDR, what were you still able to learn about the GDR? How did Petzold interweave these aspects with the concerns of the film?
 5. What clichés about West Germans does the film highlight?
 6. The film does not include any non-diegetic music so that moviegoers can experience the many diverse sounds of Barbara’s environment, thereby intensifying their sensual responses to the film. Discuss what you hear in at least three different locations.

RELATED FILMS

Alice in den Städten (*Alice in the Cities*, Wim Wenders, 1974). Filmed to a large extent in the Ruhr Valley of the German state Nordrhein-Westfalen, where Petzold was born and grew up, this film was literally an eye-opener for him. Not much happens in this road movie, but the camera probes unspectacular places until it renders them magical.

Jahrgang '45 (*Born in '45*, Jürgen Böttcher, 1966). Censored in the GDR, this film was released in 1990. It was the only GDR film Petzold asked his cast to view and discuss. Depicting a young man wandering around aimlessly in Prenzlauer Berg and other rather run-down districts of 1960s East Berlin, the film lingers on stark images, underlining the importance of place in evoking longing.

Händler der vier Jahreszeiten (*The Merchant of Four Seasons*, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, 1972). On the surface, this film—set in West Germany during the economic miracle years of the 1950s—doesn’t have much to do with *Barbara*. But Petzold was impressed with how effectively Fassbinder’s film entwines characters and their surroundings. Love, hate, or simply quarreling—all aspects of living adhere to their surroundings until they can no longer be removed.

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Oh Boy

(*A Coffee in Berlin*, Jan Ole Gerster, 2012)



Niko in his apartment, "thinking."

CREDITS

Director Jan Ole Gerster
Screenplay Jan Ole Gerster
Director of Photography Philipp Kirsamer
Music..... Cherilyn MacNeil, The Major Minors
Producers..... Marcos Kantis, Alexander Wadouh
Production Companies.....Schiwago Film, Chromosom
Filmproduktion, HR, Arte
Length.....85 minutes, B/W

Principal Cast

Tom Schilling (Niko Fischer), Marc Hosemann (Matze), Friederike Kempter (Julika), Ulrich Noethen (Walter Fischer), Michael Gwisdek (Friedrich).

THE STORY

Oh Boy starts at an early morning hour in the Berlin district Prenzlauer Berg, in the apartment of protagonist Niko Fischer's girlfriend. Niko's furtive attempts to leave without waking her up not only fail but also backfire. By the end of their verbal exchange, which includes his rejection of a cup of coffee and refusal to make joint plans for the evening, the relationship is officially over. From her place, he goes to his own apartment. Though he moved in several weeks ago, his belongings are still in boxes. Reading his accumulated mail, he discovers that he has an appointment on that very morning with a psychologist at the department of motor vehicles. Because his driver's license had been confiscated for driving under the influence, the psychologist was to rule on whether Niko is fit to drive.

Niko's meeting with the psychologist leads to the loss of his license. Even worse, when he later tries to obtain money to pay for a cup of coffee, the ATM swallows his credit card. Because Niko's wealthy father found out that Niko had stopped attending law school classes two years ago, he revoked his credit card. At the end of Niko's meeting with him—at a golf course, of all places—his father lets him know that the days of financial support are over. After all, Niko is in his late twenties and should be looking for a job.

Rather than look for a job, Niko spends much of the day with his friend Matze, an actor also without a job but one who still has his driver's license. Their road movie through Berlin includes several stops: an American restaurant, where they run into the performance artist Julika, a childhood schoolmate of Niko; the set of a Nazi era film; the home of a drug dealer whose grandmother eagerly explains the wonders of her electric armchair; and a performance-art event featuring Julika as one of its stars.

The traumas Julika had to endure as a child owing to her excessive weight—especially the constant stream of insults hurled at her by Niko and other schoolmates—resurface in her unrestrained stage performance, her reactions to the insulting rowdies Niko and she meet on the street, and her responses to Niko's romantic advances. By the end of his encounter with Julika, Niko loses her as well. Matze, probably still arguing with the performance-art organizers, is also gone from Niko's long night.

Niko, though, continues to drift through Berlin. Eventually he enters a pub and sits at the bar. He is joined by an intoxicated old man who has returned to the area after a sixty-year absence. Ignoring Niko's wish to be alone, the man relates his childhood experience of the *Reichskristallnacht* (Night of Broken Glass) on November 9, 1938. He recalls starting to cry—not because of the Jewish victims but because there was so much shattered glass everywhere that he was unable to ride his beloved bicycle. The man leaves when he finishes his story. After falling down, he is rushed to a hospital in an ambulance, a very worried Niko at his side. Niko stays in the hospital waiting room all night. When a nurse awakens him in the morning, it is with the news that the old man is dead. Soon afterward viewers see Niko pensively drinking the black coffee he had tried so often to find the previous day.

BACKGROUND

When Jan Ole Gerster, the director of *Oh Boy*, started presenting his film at international film festivals (by the end of 2013 he had attended more than forty), he soon noted an overwhelming preference—everywhere—for the English title, *A Coffee in Berlin*. A Berlin setting was clearly a powerful drawing card for audiences. The expression “oh boy,” used when people are somewhat disappointed or annoyed at something, proved to be no match for the magic word “Berlin,” not even when people found out that the inspiration for the German title was the “oh boy” appearing repeatedly in “Day in the Life,” the closing song of the Beatles album *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967). Gerster’s film references the Beatles song in another way as well: it presents one “day in the life” of its protagonist (more or less twenty-four hours, extending from one dawn to the next). Yet this too did not warrant departing from a title linking Berlin and coffee. After all, Niko’s longing to obtain a cup of regular black coffee is the only thread running throughout the entire film. In a sense—especially in an ironic sense—it replaces a real plot. Therefore, the image of Niko drinking his black coffee represents the denouement of the film.

With or without coffee, the Berlin depicted in Gerster’s film may not have met the expectations of those who clamored to include Berlin in the film title, for it is unrelated to the widespread current hype on Berlin. The film includes no particularly modern architecture, no wild nightclubs, no breathtaking designs—whether as body art or showcase displays—no ravers, no new restaurants with astonishingly witty names, and no crowds of young internationals, almost all in command of at least serviceable English. This film does not even show any of the dozens of monuments, museums, and memorials drawing millions of visitors to Berlin each year (in 2014 almost twelve million). And it most certainly does not capitalize on the “*sei Berlin . . . be Berlin*” marketing campaign initiated by the Berlin Senate in 2008 and still marketed worldwide in different guises, mainly bland ones, such as the one labeling Berlin the “City of Opportunity.”

Rather than availing himself of Berlin’s upbeat marketing slogans to respond to the city, Niko’s friend Matze, an unemployed actor, goes to another source: Martin Scorsese’s *Taxi Driver* (1976). The citation he borrows compares “the city” with an open sewer “full of filth and scum” leading to headaches that never go away. Matze quotes it from memory, in a loud, resonant voice more suitable for a large theater than for Niko, the sole passenger in the car Matze is driving. But Niko is not fooled. He knows the source of the citation and that it pertains to New York City. Despite the miserable day he is having, he does not wish to place any blame on Berlin.

At times Gerster too diverts attention from Berlin. He stresses that he did not set out to do a Berlin film and that he feels uncomfortable marketing *Coffee in Berlin* as a film expressing a Berlin *Lebensgefühl* (roughly, an attitude toward life specific to Berlin, or a Berlin way of being). He had simply wanted to do a city film. Since he knows Berlin the best (he has been living in Berlin since 2000), he considered it natural to film in Berlin. But he wanted to deflect viewers from focusing entirely on Berlin. Thus he included only two easily identifiable Berlin locations: the TV

tower on the Alexanderplatz and the Friedrichstraße subway area, which was a famous border-crossing point during the days of the Berlin Wall. Associated with the official Berlin, these sites are so crowded with vehicles of all kinds that very little room seems to be left for pedestrians, who can, however, be found plentifully in residential neighborhoods.

The camera tends to envelop in a soft focus areas not foregrounded in a frame. In the resultant haziness, street names that could help identify neighborhoods are no longer legible. Only two residential street names, both in the Kreuzberg district of Berlin, do remain easily legible: Schönleinstraße and Oberbaumstraße. The first area, filmed at eye level, is packed with a multicultural crowd that seems unperturbed by the densely crowded spacious sidewalks (the crowdedness of the crawling traffic scenes—where barely any space can be detected between vehicles—appears replicated in the throngs of people). By contrast, the Oberbaumstraße, filmed from a high angle, shows strollers—mainly twosomes and lone individuals—in command of their spacious streets.

Despite stressing that he had aimed for so-called universal dimensions, Gerster readily concedes that most encounters in the film do reflect a certain Berlin mentality (Gerster and Schilling 2014). Berlin is still a place, he stresses, where free spirits congregate, even though they often change locations from one part of Berlin to another. Currently, for instance, they tend to migrate to the districts of Neukölln and Wedding rather than to Prenzlauer Berg, the magnet for the young in the 1990s. Prenzlauer Berg, where Niko lives (and also Tom Schilling, who plays the role of Niko), is now considered somewhat too gentrified, evident at the beginning of the film in the coffee place featuring a wide selection of exotic coffees but no non-doctored, regular coffee. The gentrification is also accentuated when the salesperson lapses into a Swabian dialect, inadvertently confirming the cliché that Swabians (people from the relatively well-off region of southwest Germany) are “taking over” Prenzlauer Berg. Her humorless, profit-obsessed boss is also indicative of unwelcome changes in Berlin. Nonetheless, for the time being, Gerster maintains, Berlin still has its unique *Eckkneipenmentalität*—the atmosphere of a small neighborhood bar in which people launch into revealing conversations soon after meeting each other.

Regardless of the special atmosphere of Berlin and his own affinity for it, Gerster continues to insist that the significance of his first feature film cannot be restricted to one city. To combat another widespread impression, he emphasizes that the film is not meant to provide a generational portrait of a certain age group. In fact, he was “trying to do the opposite”—that is, he wanted to create a “timeless atmosphere” for the film. Every decision on a location or visual style was based on whether or not it would help convey the timeless aura that he had envisioned. In the interests of timelessness, he rejected electronic music, blatantly modern architecture, and also color (Gerster 2014b). To depict the extent of Niko’s distance from the contemporary world he was living in, he needed to film in black and white.

In addition to rendering Niko’s alienation credible—far more so than color would have—filming in black and white changed Gerster’s own approach and ultimately the nature of viewer responses. Since the film draws on his personal life, Gerster too had needed more distance from the material. Through black and white,

the personal became more abstract, more distant. It freed up space, enabling him to be more courageous and creative (Gerster and Schilling 2014), also with the Berlin scenes that follow or precede most episodes of the film. In addition, black and white influenced the jazz compositions in the film: the Major Minors contributed the Berlin aspects, and Cherilyn MacNeil contributed the aspects pertaining to Niko's moods. Viewers in turn also benefit from the distancing promoted by black and white: they gain additional space for observation and reflection; they receive the space needed for further exploration.

Both Gerster and Schilling, who have been friends for a long time, credit many sources for helping them create the atmosphere and the pacing so many critics have praised so unconditionally. The alienated Holden Caulfield of J. D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* (1951) served as the most important model for the alienated Niko. To underpin their aspirations for "universality" and "timelessness," Gerster and Schilling watched a large number of films from several countries and time periods. The following from the United States represent only a small sample: *Slacker* (Richard Linklater, 1991); *Five Easy Pieces* (Bob Rafelson, 1970); *Coffee and Cigarettes* (Jim Jarmusch, 2003); *Who's That Knocking at My Door?* (Martin Scorsese, 1967); *Frances Ha* (Noah Baumbach, 2013); and *The Graduate* (Mike Nichols, 1967). The films were chosen either for their unusual filming of locations or for their alienated characters. In all instances Gerster and Schilling were more interested in the particular feeling the films conveyed than in their specific plots.

Somewhat surprisingly, the American list does not include a film by Woody Allen. But his *Manhattan*, often cited in film reviews as possibly having influenced *A Coffee in Berlin*—because of its spectacular black-and-white filming of New York City—was apparently not a film to which Gerster and Schilling referred. Instead, the most important preparatory film for *A Coffee in Berlin* was a French one: François Truffaut's *Les quatre cents coups* (*The 400 Blows*, 1959). Both its protagonist Antoine Doinel and its innovative filmic language turned it into a film that never failed to inspire Gerster and Schilling.

EVALUATION

Because of its episodic structure—a series of episodes tied together by virtue of the film's protagonist appearing in all of them—the success of *A Coffee in Berlin* very much depends on how convincing Tom Schilling is in the role of Niko Fischer. Regardless of whether one likes or dislikes Niko as Jan Ole Gerster conceived him (Gerster authored the screenplay and directed the film), the consensus prevails that Schilling played him as close to perfection as possible. Torn by guilt for trying to sneak away from his girlfriend and for his inability, after she wakes up, to commit to a cup of coffee with her much less to plans of any sort other than the vague "I'll call you," Niko is nothing but a pitiful, hunched up silhouette at the end of the first scene. It was not his words that had convinced the girlfriend that everything was over but his contorted face revealing that he is at a total loss for words to express his diffuse feelings. His attempts at excuses (e.g., that he has "lots and lots of appointments") had come across as the shallow protestations that they indeed were.

And he had no recourse to another kind of language. Left alone and forlorn at the edge of a bed, the silhouette of Niko is soon replaced with the words "*oh BOY*" flashing across a blank screen—words that comment laconically not only on the difficulties that had just been shown but predict further complications in the life of the non-committal Niko Fischer. For purposes of the film, these are compressed into a single day.

Gerster chooses the people with whom Niko interacts very carefully. In almost all instances, they are strong personalities who express themselves forcefully. As Schilling too has emphasized, the actors who play them deserve a lot of credit for the success of the Niko figure, who in his passivity is their complete opposite. Niko pales as a personality (though in a good sense) when compared with his upstairs neighbor who barges into his apartment with inedible meat balls and pours his heart out to him (he has immense back pains and, after his wife's breast cancer surgery, he no longer finds her attractive; she, in turn, spends her days furiously cooking food that no one eats). To cope with the ugly turns his life has taken, the neighbor plays vigorously, even violently, at a foosball table he had installed in the basement. When Niko passes through the courtyard, he sees him through a basement window but is by no means tempted to join him.

On the other hand, Niko has no chance of coming away unscathed from his appointment with a psychologist of the city's traffic department. To make certain that he retains the upper hand, the psychologist blames Niko's traffic violations on complexes he must have owing to his short height. Niko can of course do nothing to change his height. Therefore his defeat in the traffic office is unavoidable. The psychologist may claim to be only a psychologist instead of a "word acrobat," but his words indicate that he is more of a "word acrobat" than a psychologist.

The difference between Niko and his father is also enormous. The fact that the two meet at a golf course, not normally Niko's venue, already assures that the father, a passionate golfer, will call the shots, so to speak. Once he has reduced Niko to a bundle of insecurities, his father launches into him, gloatingly informing him that he knows of Niko's two-year absence from law school classes. The older Fischer, moreover, completely ignores Niko's half-hearted attempt at a real conversation: Niko's statement that he has spent the last two years thinking about himself, his father, and everything else. Rather than pick up on "the everything else" or on the thoughts Niko had about himself, the father hears only that he too was the object of Niko's thoughts. And he is not about to give Niko additional money to enable Niko to think about him even more! Niko accepts his father's decision without protest. It is doubtful, though, that his father could have induced Niko to return to law studies. The fact that his father's assistant, one year younger than Niko, had already completed law school fails to ignite Niko's enthusiasm, since Niko certainly does not admire him for the position his law degree had netted him: caddy for his father.

The dramatic antics and loud voice of his friend Matze, as well as the histrionics of Matze's friend Philipp at the film set, also contrast sharply with Niko's quiet and polite "I would prefer not to"-Bartleby attitude, which he tends to express with the sentence "I don't think it's a good idea." Yet the film stresses that Niko is by no means defenseless in the urban jungles of Berlin. He can be roused to action:

he knows how to argue with and escape from subway ticket inspectors and how to deal with intoxicated rowdies (still, both of these instances also underscore Niko's talents for retreat).

Was Niko always the way he is now? The father, who lists several activities that Niko once started and then quit—for example, trumpet lessons, piano lessons, fencing lessons, and most recently law studies—speaks for this view. But his former classmate Julika paints another picture. She recalls Niko as one of her worst tormentors during her childhood. By no means passive, he readily fell in with the others who ridiculed her for her excessive weight, regularly hurling phrases such as “Elephant Girl” and “Roly Poly Julie” at her. At first, Niko doesn't remember Julika, much less the phrases that obviously still hurt her, and it is not certain that he really recognizes her when he tries to find her in an old class photo. But then Niko does not even seem to remember the Niko Julika describes in response to his request to tell him what he used to be like. When Niko praises her courage in revealing her attitudes to her body in the stage performance, adding that he himself would not have the same kind of courage, Julika claims he was by no means so cautious in the past (presumably when he expressed his low opinion of her). In the past, moreover, he always gave the impression of knowing exactly what he wanted.

Why and when Niko changed into the alienated, distanced, passive person he had become—though still retaining his politeness—remains unclear. And during the one day depicted in the film, he certainly does not metamorphose back into his former self. But, several of his encounters with others do affect him and bring him out of the shell he had created for himself. He responds with concern and warmth to the woes of his upstairs neighbor. He relates almost immediately to the grandmother of Marcel, Matze's drug-dealer friend, and hugs her warmly before departing from her apartment. Unlike Matze, Niko does not laugh at Julika's anti-mainstream “body culture” performance. He is in fact visibly affected by what he sees on stage, especially by her willingness to bare emotions. After the performance, he utters the first revelatory sentence about himself, the one when he asks Julika whether she knows the feeling of thinking that everyone is a bit strange but discovering, upon reflection, that not the others but you yourself are strange. That Niko is thinking of himself in relation to other people rather than only apart from them represents a positive step.

The last episode of the film goes even further, and it exemplifies the larger dimensions that Gerster had wished to give his film. Rather than relating Niko's alienation from the contemporary world to an ongoing search for a personal identity, Gerster embeds it into the search for a national identity that continues to be unfinished business in Germany. Much as Niko was contrasted with several characters to determine his difference from them, the significance of the last episode becomes clearer when contrasted with the other episode focused on the Nazi period, the filming of a movie taking place in the Nazi era. There “coming to terms with the past” does not involve the present.

In the last episode, however, the old, intoxicated man's memory of the *Reichskristallnacht* (Night of Broken Glass) reaches directly into the present, directly into Niko's life. The man (Niko is informed later that his name is Friedrich) had been a child when his father and other Germans had willfully destroyed the property of

Jews, including the building that had been in the very spot of the pub where Niko and he were now drinking. And yet as a child he couldn't have cared less about the victims; he suffered only because he couldn't ride his new bicycle on the shattered glass all around him. In the more than sixty intervening years, he has been unable to shake the memory of his callousness. The Nazi movie, on the other hand, focuses on a good Nazi named Heinrich, who had saved the life of a Jewish woman he loved. Despite Philipp's histrionic recounting of Heinrich's dilemmas, neither Matze nor Niko become interested in the artificial plot and its hackneyed characters. Matze wonders about who thought up the nonsense. With a great sense of irony, Niko says it must have been a true story.

But when Niko does encounter a true story from the Nazi era in the pub, he no longer needs irony. He becomes completely involved; he sheds all his customary alienation. Though able to predict the next step of the plot of the Nazi movie when asked for his opinion on what happens next, he cannot answer the question of why the old man had suddenly cried at his memory of the Night of Broken Glass. Completely involved in Friedrich's tale, life had suddenly become unpredictable for Niko. He is no longer blasé about any number of things, among them the pain of others and his identity as a German. Friedrich indeed represents the moral anchor he had needed (Buck 2012). In fact, he turns into a man of action. Niko is the one who rushes to Friedrich when he falls on the sidewalk, the one who requests an ambulance, the one who stays at the hospital until the bitter end—when he finds out that Friedrich has died. Perhaps the thinking he pursues as he finally sits with a cup of black coffee (film viewers can literally hear him slurping it) will now no longer lead to dead ends. (MS)

QUESTIONS

1. Choose three instances in the film that show Niko's alienation. Why is he feeling alienated? How is his alienation depicted visually?
2. Pretend you have written the script for the movie. Explain in detail why you juxtaposed Julika and Niko with each other. What did you hope to attain with this juxtaposition? If you could make adjustments to the screenplay, would you change their encounter in any way?
3. Discuss Niko's relationship to authority by focusing on his encounters with the following:
 - a. the traffic department's psychiatrist
 - b. his father
 - c. the subway ticket inspectors
4. When meeting Niko in the American restaurant, Julika asks him to tell her about himself. Niko does not know what to say and throws the question back to Julika, asking her to talk about herself. Borrowing

- Julika's confessional mode of explanations, what could Niko have said about himself?
5. Discuss the image in the film that you find most memorable.
 6. What are the reasons given for Niko not being able to obtain regular black coffee until the end of the film? On a deeper level, why is finding black coffee so important for Niko? Or, what is the meaning behind his search for coffee?
 7. Why does Niko never have a lighter? How does this fact add to or detract from the meaning(s) of the film?
 8. Discuss the Berlin images shown as Niko is sleeping in the hospital. How are they filmed? Compare them to one other instance that highlights the city of Berlin (in general, the film's focus turns to Berlin at the end of an episode involving Niko).
 9. Viewers are presented with several images of Niko thinking: twice at the window ledge of his apartment, once on the left side, once on the right; in the forest after leaving the golf course; with a cup of coffee at the end of the film. In a stream-of-consciousness mode, recreate Niko's thinking in two of these instances. How was the director able or not able to make these thinking episodes interesting in a medium predicated on physical movement?

RELATED FILMS

Berlin: Ecke Schönhauser (*Berlin: Schönhauser Corner*, Gerhard Klein, 1957). Filmed in black and white in both the eastern and western parts of Berlin, frequently in non attractive locations, this film from the German Democratic Republic (GDR), controversial in its day, shows that youth alienation existed also in the GDR, even though the Socialist system itself was not questioned.

Les quatre cents coups (*The 400 Blows*, German title: *Sie küßten und sie schlugen ihn*, François Truffaut, 1959). Tom Schilling, who wrote "Fischer's Song" (i.e., Niko Fischer's song) for *Oh Boy*, was so moved by Antoine Doinel, the young outcast in Truffaut's film, that he included his name in the theme song of the movie (its final song). Both Gerster and Schilling stress that this film was the one that inspired them the most for their own film.

Der Wald vor lauter Bäumen (*The Forest for the Trees*, Maren Ade, 2003). Both Gerster and Schilling also have the highest praise for this film, particularly its unforgettable way of depicting the growing alienation of a young teacher who moved to an urban environment from a provincial German town.

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