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Paul Cooke, Chris Homewood, eds.. *New Directions in German Cinema.* London: I.B. Tauris, 2011. xii + 308 pp. $29.50, paper, ISBN 978-1-84885-907-4.

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A decade after Eric Rentschler referred to Germany's 1990s star-driven mainstream cinema with his now iconic phrase "cinema of consensus," Paul Cooke and Chris Homewood's anthology *New Directions in German Cinema* undertakes a scholarly journey to discuss and reevaluate contemporary German filmmaking.[1] Although Rentschler's almost cynical polemic hit a nerve at the time, his assessment of German cinema focused primarily on the commercial entertainment movies of the *Spassgesellschaft* that had little ambition of being artistically challenging, or of provoking political or critical thought, unlike the endeavors of the New German Cinema a generation earlier. Rentschler only mentioned in passing filmmakers such as Fatih Akın, Monika Treut, Harun Farocki, or Alexander Kluge in his famous article on consensus filmmaking. These directors, together with Andreas Dresen or Angelina Maccarone, would most certainly fall outside of a "consensus" category.

The introduction of *New Directions* prepares its reader for a wide array of essays that critically address thematic, aesthetic, and economic achievements of contemporary German cinema. Acknowledging Rentschler's concerns, the authors invite the reader to see the diversity in German filmic productions in the new millennium. While the anthology offers discussions of films that could easily be categorized as "updated consensus films" with a global appeal today (p. 4), it also provides analyses of films that are shown to be aesthetically more challenging, stylistically more innovative, and thematically more complex than the so-called consensus films. The anthology is framed by two articles that discuss the work of Edgar Reitz and Alexander Kluge, two still active directors linked to the art cinema movement of the 1960s and 1970s, and who both predate the "cinema of consensus" and go beyond it, providing a continuity of non-consensus German filmmaking from the 1960s to today. John E. Davidson's engaging opening chapter discusses Kluge, one of Germany's most intellectual filmmakers and film philosophers, and Alasdair King's closing chapter analyzes Reitz's *Heimat 3* (2004), which

received mixed reviews in comparison to his previous *Heimat* films. The large selection of articles between Kluge's and Reitz's suggests that contemporary German cinema continues to have a thematic fascination with the German past. Generally speaking, the majority of films focusing on German history range from the Third Reich to the more recent East/West German histories, including reunification and the life after the *Wende*.

Aside from these, there are three articles dedicated to the artistically ambitious Berlin school and one article to the transnational film productions of Akın. The first seven to eight chapters could be subsumed under the category of "German Heritage films," a term coined by Lutz Köpnick in 2004, or variations thereof (p. 40). Christine Hase analyzes the first of three films dealing with the Third Reich that were commercially successful, yet thematically controversial. Her discussion of *Downfall* (2004), a film which epitomizes the definition of the heritage film genre as an "easy to digest" film about the past (p. 40), presents the problematic introduction of emotionality into the discourse of the nation's past by using realism as a mode of representation. Hase gives an overview of the central debates about the use of realism in dealing with questions of the Holocaust. The perceived realism in *Downfall* was the reason for its sharpest criticism in Germany, particularly its ostensible *Verharmlosung* of the Nazi past. Ultimately, the "representational dilemma" is the main filmic shortcoming. "In its unquestioned and unreflective realist approach, *Downfall* conceptually simplifies and streamlines a complex and largely inconceivable reality. It thus implies the existence of a logic, order and reason that belies the nature of the Nazi regime and its atrocities" (p. 53). Another Heritage film, though more positively reviewed by the press, is *Sophie Scholl: The Final Days* (2005). Owen Evans analyzes the strategies the film employs to humanize the figure of Sophie Scholl. Evans praises the film's realization of the innate drama inherent in the Gestapo tapes, after which the film was scripted, as well as the inclusion of the Gestapo interrogator and the importance of Scholl's faith (the latter two elements were either absent from or largely left out in previous films about the White Rose). The author is full of praise for Scholl and the actor Julia Jentsch as an incarnation of "resilience and grace under pressure" (p. 62). Brad Prager's enlightening piece on *The Counterfeiters* (2007), an acclaimed Austrian film made with German collaboration, discusses the functionalizing of music in this film about Jewish collaborators in concentration camps. The film raises uneasy questions about Jewish collaboration and depicts the "heavy burden associated with inhabiting the grey zone. It emphasizes both the connections between the prisoners as well as the limits placed on solidarity in the camp, a contradiction that is difficult" (p. 85). The "[m]usic is ... entangled with the attempt to cover over cosmetically what cannot be covered over; what is repressed will surely return" (p. 87). Prager further suggests that *The Counterfeiters* juxtaposes complicated historical aspects of Austria's troubled relationship with the National Socialist past, and contemporary representational questions of the Holocaust.

Nick Hodgin offers the first of two articles about the GDR. *Good Bye, Lenin!* (2003), a commercially successful and, for the most part, critically acclaimed film addresses the recent German history of reunification. Hodgin contextualizes the film about the "forgotten year" (p. 108), as a product of Generation X Filme, a production company that has an interest in producing challenging films with a "distinct contemporary sensibility" (p. 100). Hodgin discusses the "emphasis on authenticity" in the film, and stresses that great care was taken not to glamorize the state or to reproduce a "GDR chic" while, at the same time, no overt criticism of the state was expressed (p. 103). Ultimately, according to Hodgin, the film, which is not so much about the GDR as about the present and its relationship to the past, acknowledges both the failings and the achievements of the GDR. Next, Cooke discusses a much more contro-

versial film about the GDR, *The Lives of Others* (2006). While the German Agency for Political Education praised the film's authenticity and attention to detail, it was repeatedly condemned as a consensus film, as a politically and aesthetically conservative film that "trivialize[ed] the misdeeds of the State Security System" (p. 115). Director Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck sees *The Lives* as a response to the *Ostalgie* films of the previous years. Cooke asserts that the *Ostalgie* films of Leander Hausmann et al. were in fact created as a response to early Stasi/Dictatorship representation films that made it seem as if all of GDR everyday life was under heavy surveillance of the Stasi. And comparing *Sun Alley* to *The Lives*, the author stresses that while the former film highlights its own artificiality through its décor, street scenes, etc., *The Lives* makes everything look very "real," "in order to present a perfect re-enactment" (p. 120). Unfortunately though, it is precisely this claim for authenticity that makes *The Lives* problematic. The author observes that this "chilling authenticity" (p. 120) was paired with a story that presented Stasi member Wiesler as a humanized figure who changes his ways through art. Wiesler's conversion becomes an apologetic narrative about the Stasi crimes. Cooke concludes by stressing that the opening of the Stasi files were important, but that they cannot be "seen as closure or as the final word on the reality of life in the GDR" (p. 129).

Moving from *Ostalgie* to *Westalgie* films, Chris Homewood analyzes the Bernd Eichinger production *Baader Meinhof Complex* (2008) in chapter 7. Claimed to be Germany's most expensive production to date, the film depicts urban terrorism in Germany, and was promoted as a film that would "'change the debate on German terrorism'" (p. 133). Yet, Homewood reminds us that while the filmic engagement of the New German Cinema with this topic tried to "elucidate the mysterious links between the terrorist violence of 1977, the post-war response to National Socialism and the perceived authoritarianism of state institutions" (p. 130), this kind of analysis of left-wing terrorism that encouraged the audiences to reflect about its past seems to be completely absent from this "visually lavish" adaptation of Stefan Aust's accounts. The film is instead a production that caters directly to an audience used to the commodification of the RAF (Red Army Faction) in popular culture with "Andy-Warhol-styled pop-art prints" and stylish photographs in lifestyle and fashion magazines of its members (p. 131). This "uninhibited popularization and glorification of Baader and his comrades is problematic because it is informed by a very selective process of remembering and forgetting, which threatens to decontextualize and depoliticizes the RAF" (pp. 132, 133). David Clarke discusses *Requiem* (2006) in chapter 8. Here, the director recreates a 1970s provincial town in West Germany, in which generational struggles and the dichotomy between city and country are played out. Clarke categorizes the film as a type of *Heimatfilm*, with "an invocation of *Heimat* motifs which actually points to the dissolution of *Heimat* in the traditional sense" (p. 156).

Rachel Palfreyman's chapter discusses *The Edukators* (2004) as one of many post-unification films that reflect upon the actions and concerns of the '68 generation. Like many other films about this generation it tries to "present the key historical conflict in the FRG as a family or generational clash" (p. 167). Leaving out the actual violence of the 1970s, the film evaluates the values of the '68 generation. The author suggests that *The Edukators* engages with a different aspect of countercultural activism of 1968 by "offering a situationist response " (p. 167). "Established in 1957, the Situationist International was a grouping of European avant-garde artists and thinkers influenced by Dada and surrealism" (p. 167). The Edukators begin their action in the tradition of this grouping, whose ideas were "underpinned by a critical reading of a capitalism rooted in Marxist philosophy" (p. 167). "Weingartner tests the validity of the ideas and values of the 60s in the new German

Republic which seeks to understand its new identity via an examination of its capitalist imperialism in an age of globalization" (p. 168).

The next three chapters discuss directors Christian Petzold, Valeska Griesbach, and Andreas Dresen, all of whom are associated with the artistically ambitious Berlin school. Praised as the Nouvelle Vague *Allemande*, the Berlin school is hailed as a return to the intellectual and aesthetic engagements of prior German cinema. In chapter 10, Jaimey Fisher analyzes Petzold's *Yella* (2007) under the light of Hollywood's horror genre. Although the strict borders between so-called art and popular cinema have been blurred in recent (European) cinema scholarship, Fisher states that current analyses "re-establish the conventional dichotomy of art versus popular cinema" (p. 189). Fisher provides an enlightening analysis of *Yella*, in which Petzold refunctions the horror genre for his purposes. In chapter 11, Marco Abel analyzes Valeska Griesbach's aesthetic employment of realism and reads her film(s) as a "counter program to the aesthetics of the 'state films'" (p. 207). Using convincing camera and sound examples, Abel provides insights about Griesbach's employment of realism, her "aesthetic modalities of representational realism and *malerisch tableaux vivants*," which he reads as opposed to the authenticity claims and "reality as it is" presentations of history in "state films" (pp. 214, 207). Lastly, Laura G. McGee informs us that not only aesthetically, but also through content, Berlin school director Dresen brings serious and neglected topics to the screen, including that of geriatric romance. The author stresses that despite the growing demographics of elderly citizens, desire and passion among them have for the longest time not been treated seriously in film. Geriatric romance has appeared as "ridiculous to younger people, who are supposed to have the monopoly on love and sex" (p. 227). McGee suggests that Dresen's *Cloud 9* (2008) might be the initiation of a "realistic, dynamic and differentiated portrayal of the lives of senior citizens," an artistic initiative which she hopes might grow in the near future (p. 238).

Moving to transnational cinema, chapter 13 is dedicated to Akın. Daniela Berghahn reads Akın as an exemplary director of diasporic filmmaking in Europe. By analyzing Akın's breakthrough film *Head-On* (2004) and its "warehouse of cultural image" (p. 250), the author discusses the distinctive aesthetics of migrant and diasporic filmmaking, "which reflects the 'diasporic optic'" (p. 242). Further, Berghahn addresses the diverse, multiple layers of filmic references in the film that engage different (national) audiences. The last chapter closes the anthology with a circular movement. Recalling the discussion of Kluge at the beginning of the book, Alasdair King discusses Edgar Reitz, a director whose filmic output stretches from the 1960s to the present. King discusses *Heimat 3* (2004) and suggests, on the one hand, that most criticism on the film might be right. While his earlier Heimat films were more in the lines of Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Kluge, and Helma Sanders-Brahms (in terms of their mode of interrogating German history), *Heimat 3* might seem to have moved more into the realm of a "cinema of consensus" (p. 260). On the other hand, through an in-depth analysis of the mediascapes, local landscapes, and the film's discussion of *Heimat* as a locale, King suggests that thematically, the film is more ambitious than it was given credit for. *Heimat 3* has an "element of cultural pessimism about the ongoing possibility of a contemporary spatial *Heimat*" (p. 274). Although it might be less innovative than its earlier installments, *Heimat 3* still "shows difficulties of creating a sense of community and is skeptical about the consensus in the present," (p. 274) and therefore provides a critical tone.

In conclusion, this anthology lends itself perfectly to teaching German cinema. Providing a discussion and an extension of Rentschler's critical assessment of 1990s German cinema in the new millennium, and introducing categories such

as New Heritage films, *Westalgie* and *Ostalgie* films, diasporic film, the Berlin school, and so forth, *New Directions* is a great resource for critical discussions of contemporary German film, in particular when scrutinizing contemporary narratives and popular discourses about the German past in German film. The recurring discussions of the trivializations of the German past or the authenticity claims of individual history films serve as enlightening readings for critical assessments of contemporary German cinema. In combination with other texts, this anthology would significantly enrich any course dedicated to German cultural productions.

Note

[1]. Eric Rentschler, "From New German Cinema to the Post-Wall Cinema of Consensus," in *Cinema and Nation*, ed. Mette Hjort and Scott MacKenzie (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 260-277.