

Matthias Stickler. *'Ostdeutsch heißt Gesamtdeutsch': Organisation, Selbstverständnis und heimatpolitische Zielsetzung der deutschen Vertriebenenverbände 1949 - 1972.* Düsseldorf: Droste, c2004. 511 pp. ISBN 978-3-7700-1896-3.



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Published on H-Soz-u-Kult (February, 2006)

The study of German cinema has by and large been framed by two paradigms that date back to the institutionalization of film studies as a discipline in the 1970s: first, critics and scholars have generally viewed German film as a distinctly “national cinema,” and second, there is a long-standing emphasis on the role of the director as auteur, anchoring both the aesthetics and exegesis of individual films and the historiography of the country’s cinema more generally. While a number of recent studies have begun to question the reach of these paradigms and demonstrated their limits, few have gone as far as Tim Bergfelder in developing and testing alternative models for the study of German cinema. This book clearly fills a historical gap by “liberating’ the popular cinema of the [1960s] from the critical limbo in which it has been placed” (p. 10); but Bergfelder’s main contribution arguably lies in his resolute commitment to replacing the paradigm of the nation with European and global perspectives, and in his challenge to auteurist readings through an emphasis on material contexts of production and reception.

The book is organized in two parts. Part I, entitled “Historical and Cultural Contexts,” charts a materialist history of West German cinema from 1945 to the 1960s. Here, Bergfelder deftly dislodges some commonly held conceptions of post-war German cinema as an especially parochial industry with a central role in the (re)construction of German national identity. Instead, what emerges from the review of production practices, audience research, and marketing strategies is a trend towards global consumerism, and towards internationalization. Reframing German cinema in its broader European contexts, this part charts the 1960s as a decade in its own right – not just as the herald of things to come (i.e. the international successes of the “New German Cinema”) or as the aftermath of crisis, but as a decade defined by European co-productions with an emphasis on genre over auteurs. Moreover, Bergfelder demonstrates that, for the better part of the period, Hollywood played a surprisingly muted role. He is able to show that the American major companies’ aim to dominate the West German market met with a far more selective response from West German exhibitors and audiences than is normally acknowl-

edged. In Bergfelder's account, the decade was dominated instead by the machinations of German production companies and their European partners, and by the role of television – a role that Bergfelder interestingly defines in terms of conversion as much as competition with cinema.

Part II puts these broad arguments to the test by offering a number of intriguing case studies. In keeping with the material, production-centered approach, the first of these is devoted to the work of Artur Brauner's CCC production company. Based on his methodical study of the extensive Artur Brauner archive, Bergfelder reconstructs the diverse activities of Brauner to demonstrate once more how even the work of a single producer exceeds and explodes the category of "national cinema." What we find instead are numerous collaborations with remigrant directors (Sidomak and Lang being only the most famous), an emphasis on popular genres that are anything but indigenous, and wide-ranging international aspirations in terms of co-productions and collaborations. The same holds for the far less "respectable" producers whom Bergfelder studies in the final chapter. Mapping the trends in B-Film production onto new consumerist identities and lifestyles, Bergfelder literally uncovers new terrain for German cinema studies by following the internationalism of the country's film industry as far afield as Thailand, South Africa, and Hong Kong.

This emphasis on production is maintained even in the two most "textually" oriented chapters, the case studies of the Edgar Wallace and Karl May series, respectively. With the exception of an unpublished dissertation by Tassilo Schneider, these two series have hardly received any sustained scholarly consideration to date. And yet, they stand as the most important popular successes of the 1960s, with institutional and cultural ramifications that reach into the present. Bergfelder places the two series in relation to their respective literary sources and analyzes them in the context of contemporary cultural

trends and modes of reception (cf. p. 139). He is able to show how both the crime and horror templates of the Edgar Wallace series and the Western templates of the Karl May series amounted to "extraterritorial genres." Although Karl May especially, who infamously numbered Hitler among his many ardent fans, has often been seen as a quintessential incarnation of (orientalist) Germanness, Bergfelder carefully parses the production histories and the reception horizons of these series to demonstrate their function as "extraterritorial genres" (p. 139) that cannot be grasped through nation-centered interpretive frameworks such as those derived from Siegfried Kracauer's *From Caligari to Hitler*. Instead, Bergfelder argues, for example, that "the German reception of Wallace's work always had more to do with democratizing and progressive aspirations of his readers than with the potentially reactionary textual features of the novels themselves" (p. 141). Correspondingly, the films, which Bergfelder reads as "the cinematic equivalent of a 'House of Horrors' theme-park ride" (p. 165), do not provide evidence of Germany as an Angst-ridden society or of the conservative political consensus of the time; rather, as Bergfelder's forceful, and all too brief, reading of the opening of one installment of the Edgar Wallace cycle reveals, these films manifested a "strange form of progressive nostalgia," an obsession with a pre-Nazi past coupled with forward-looking aspirations (p. 167).

If the study leaves one thing to be desired it is the relative dearth of such textual insights, compared to the abundant material on institutional contexts of production, distribution, and exhibition. This is, of course, a principled decision resulting from Bergfelder's methodological commitment to a new kind of history of German cinema, modeled on the new American film history of the past decades (to which Bergfelder adds an emphasis on reception). Rather than ask for more film analysis, one should be grateful that Bergfelder did not overreach and write a cinema history without films altogether – a proposition that has

been advanced in all seriousness by practitioners of the new film history. However, given the wealth of material that Bergfelder has amassed, one occasionally wonders whether he might not have made more extensive use of the appendix as a means of shifting some of the factual detail away from the body of the text, thus giving himself more room for excursions into textual analysis (incidentally, this might have benefited the layout as well, which overburdens the page with close line-spacing and small fonts).

This is by no means to detract from either the methodological innovativeness or the more traditional textual analysis that the book does offer. On this sound basis, Bergfelder comes to some strikingly fresh conclusions. For in the end, he does have something to say about the relationship between film and nation, but not what we always expect. Rather than repeat the argument about the postwar cinema's complicity with the Germans "inability to mourn," Bergfelder offers the radical suggestion that the "temporary suspension of national introspection actually helped the redemocratisation of West Germany after the war and aided its reintegration into the wider international community" (p. 248). Given the way in which the study has carefully shored up its evidence in support of such a claim over the preceding 200 pages, future scholars of postwar German cinema should be prepared to engage seriously with such a proposition, let alone with the contribution of Bergfelder's book as a whole.

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Citation: Johannes von Moltke. Review of Stickler, Matthias. *'Ostdeutsch heißt Gesamtdeutsch': Organisation, Selbstverständnis und heimatpolitische Zielsetzung der deutschen Vertriebenenverbände 1949 - 1972*. H-Soz-u-Kult, H-Net Reviews. February, 2006.

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