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IN TRANSITION

GERMAN CINEMA IN THE AGE OF NEOLIBERALISM

HESTER BAER

Amsterdam University Press

German Cinema
in the Age of Neoliberalism

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Introduction: Making Neoliberalism Visible

Abstract
Christian Petzold's *Yella* (2007) helps to establish the parameters for reconsidering German film in the context of neoliberalism. *Yella* develops formal interventions into audiovisual language to make the structures and affects of neoliberalism visible; it exposes neoliberalism as a highly gendered cultural formation; and its ability to create images of the present is contingent not only on representational practices, but also on its mode of production. Following a brief analysis of *Yella* as an emblematic film, this introduction provides a critical overview of approaches to neoliberalism and offers a short history of neoliberalism in Germany. It concludes by outlining the contributions of the book and its feminist approach for making neoliberalism visible.

Keywords: Neoliberalism, film history, film production, Germany, Christian Petzold, gender

In a scene from the 2007 film *Yella*, the private equity analyst Philipp (Devid Striesow) inaugurates the title character Yella (Nina Hoss) into the world of venture capital. Philipp has hired Yella to assist him in an important business negotiation. As they drive to the meeting, he asks her, 'Are you familiar with broker posing?' He explains that the broker pose—hands folded behind the head, elbows raised—is a gesture of dominance and intimidation performed 'by young lawyers in crappy Grisham movies'. 'I don't really like sitting there that way in meetings', Philipp explains to Yella, 'but it has an effect'. Like an acting coach preparing a student for an audition, Philipp teaches Yella a series of physical cues and improvisations, developing a scenario that will give them the upper hand in negotiation. Phillip tells Yella to maintain 'three lines of sight' during the negotiation: one at the opposing party, especially the business manager Dr. Fritz, whom Yella should disarm by holding his gaze as long as possible; one at the computer screen, where she should make

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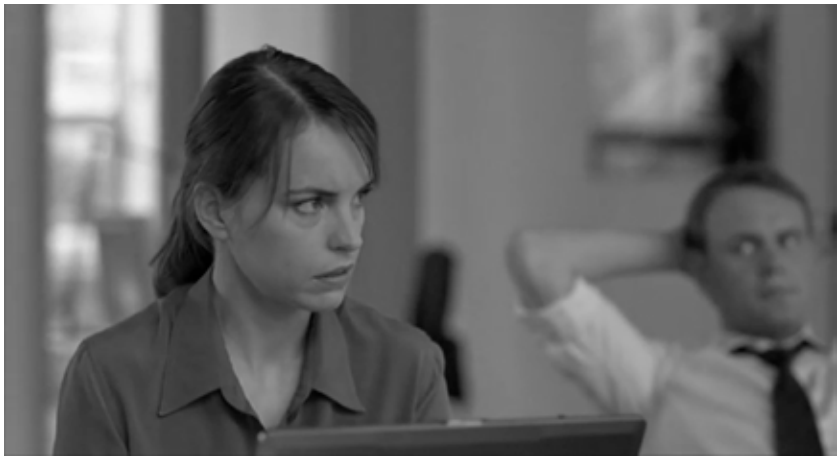

1. Imaging neoliberal capitalism in Christian Petzold's ***Yella*** (2007): Yella (Nina Hoss) performs business power while Phillipp (Devid Striesow) strikes the broker pose.

a point of scrutinizing the firm's questionable balance sheets; and one at Phillip himself, especially if he strikes the broker pose, at which point she should whisper something in his ear. His instructions indicate how Yella should tailor her body to the demands of immaterial labour, schooling her in the language of self-fashioning and personal empowerment. As it happens, Yella's performance of business power exceeds all of Phillip's expectations, and the two prevail in securing a favourable business deal (see Illustration 1). In its depiction of broker posing, this scene envisages the performative language of venture capitalism; like the film as a whole, it works to make otherwise imperceptible aspects of the neoliberal present visible.

Yella is a woman from eastern Germany who dreams of making it in the west. In *Yella*, she literally enters into a dream in which she masters the game of finance capitalism, a dream that turns out to be a nightmare and one that is exposed by the narrative structure of the film as impossible, a fantasy that is (quite literally) dead in the water. In her dream, Yella leaves the eastern hamlet of Wittenberge for the western city of Hannover, where she pursues opportunities for white-collar employment in a series of nondescript business parks and hotels. Despite signs that a job she has been offered is not quite legitimate—and implications that something is seriously askew in the world at large—Yella stubbornly persists in believing that if she works hard enough, she will achieve security and prosperity.

In this way, Yella embodies the notion that self-optimization, personal responsibility, and an entrepreneurial attitude will lead to success, an injunction that is at the heart of what Lauren Berlant identifies as 'cruel optimism', a

characteristic affect of neoliberalism that occurs 'when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing'.[1] While any optimistic relation may become cruel when the object you aim to attain actively impedes your well being, Berlant's emphasis is on the crumbling of optimistic fantasies of the good life under the sign of neoliberalism: 'The fantasies that are fraying include, particularly, upward mobility, job security, political and social equality, and lively, durable intimacy.'[2] Cruel optimism describes how the attachment to these fantasies does harm to those who subscribe to them.

Yella's stubborn attachment to the dream of hard work in business demonstrates her investment in such crumbling fantasies of the good life, and *Yella* charts the tenacity of 'aspirational normativity', which Berlant describes as 'the desire to feel normal, and to feel normalcy as the ground of a dependable life, a life that does not have to keep being reinvented'.[3] Just as the performance of a job as Phillip's assistant feels like participation in the economy, and thus engenders a sense of belonging for Yella, even proximity to the possibility of a 'normal life' animates her actions.

Yella is the only character in the film who exhibits mobility: she regularly crosses borders, not only between eastern and western Germany, but also between past, present, and future, between waking and sleeping, between intimacy and solitude, between life and death. However, this mobility does not lead upward; rather, mobility turns out to be both a dream and a nightmare for Yella, who seeks a resting place amidst the upheaval and precarity of the present. While she is always on the move, Yella is nonetheless trapped in a circuit defined by failed businesses and failed, abusive, and unscrupulous men. In Wittenberge, she leaves behind a father who is caught in the past and an abusive husband whose unsuccessful attempts to succeed in the new era of capitalism have led him down a path of violence. In Hannover, she apprentices herself first to a manager who hides the fact that he has been downsized, and later to Phillip, the venture capitalist whose success is predicated on an elaborate fraud.

Yella's successive discoveries of these failures and frauds are depicted in the generic terms of the horror film (abrupt cuts, discomfiting music, creepy Steadicam shots), which expose the precarious body of the female protagonist to haunting and violence. The aesthetics of horror collide with the otherwise understated language of *Yella*, which—like other Berlin School films—unspools slowly, with long takes, a static camera, and an emphasis

1 Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 1.
2 Berlant, *Cruel Optimism,* 3.
3 Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 170.

on ambient sound. This disorganized formal language, which resignifies the vocabulary of both popular genre movies and European art cinema, is crucial to the film's exposure of the cultural logic of neoliberalism.

Yella is an emblematic film for the cinema of neoliberalism in three key ways that inform my arguments throughout this book. First, it develops formal interventions into audiovisual language in order to make visible the structures and affects of neoliberalism. Second, through its narrative focus and in formal terms, it exposes neoliberalism as a highly gendered cultural formation. Finally, its ability to create images of the present is strongly linked not only to the representational choices on display in *Yella* but also to its mode of production.

The director of *Yella*, Christian Petzold, has described his deliberate efforts to find a new language to 'image' neoliberalism in his films, one that is able to portray our affective investment in capitalist structures despite the harm they do to us. As Petzold puts it in the pressbook for *Yella*, he aims to show 'the face of modern capitalism': 'Modern capitalism, there has to be something sexy about it. Years ago, racketeers hid themselves away in a temple. Like thieves, they were ugly, devious, conniving. These days they are breezy, charming, healthy, Buddhist. But we still portray this world in old pictures, caricatures. We don't have a picture of it, no story. These new pictures and new stories, that was what it was about for me.[4] This search for new pictures and new stories to represent advanced capitalism—in order to break with cinematic clichés and address the spectator in new ways—underpins not only Petzold's project but also that of a range of other contemporary German filmmakers discussed here.[5]

The filmic project of imaging modern capitalism resonates with Fredric Jameson's well-known notion of cognitive mapping. As Jameson points out, the structural coordinates of life in global capitalism are 'no longer accessible to immediate lived experience and are often not even conceptualizable for most people'.[6] Drawing an analogy between the individual's spatial mapping of the city and 'that mental map of the social and global totality we all carry around in our heads in variously garbled forms',[7] Jameson argues for an

4 'Yella Pressbook.'

5 Petzold and his former teacher, filmmaker Harun Farocki, who, before his death in 2014, co-wrote most of Petzold's films, draw on a range of sources to construct multivalent representations of neoliberalism. For example, much of the business dialogue in *Yella* is taken verbatim from actual business negotiations recorded in Farocki's documentary about venture capitalism *Nicht ohne Risiko* (*Nothing Ventured,* 2004, included as an extra on the U.S. DVD release of *Yella*).

6 Jameson, 'Cognitive Mapping', 349.

7 Jameson, 'Cognitive Mapping', 351.

aesthetic of cognitive mapping, whereby the artwork's task is to mediate, via formal strategies, the paradox of the present: 'There comes into being, then, a situation in which we can say that if the individual experience is authentic, then it cannot be true; and that if a scientific or cognitive model of the same content is true, then it escapes individual experience.'[8] As Jameson suggests, the search for a form to imaginatively represent the multinational networks, globalized spaces, and abstracted class relations of advanced capitalism is necessary for any resistant political project.

The situation described by Jameson, in which 'new and enormous global realities are inaccessible to any individual subject or consciousness', is perhaps exacerbated by the neoliberal turn.[9] Though it is increasingly ubiquitous, neoliberalism is rarely named, so that its policies and effects often appear imperceptible, even naturalized. As David Harvey has written, 'Neoliberalism has, in short, become hegemonic as a mode of discourse. It has pervasive effects on ways of thought to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world.'[10] The difficulty of comprehending the scale of transnational networks or the abstraction of the global financial system is compounded by the naturalization of neoliberal discourse, so that the contemporary world appears incomprehensible, even unfathomable. In this context, *Yella* and other recent German films—whether by design or through analysis—can help us to see and respond to aspects of contemporary life that often remain obscured from our view, thereby making neoliberalism visible.

Crucial to *Yella* and to the cinema of neoliberalism at large is an emphasis on the gendering of the neoliberal repertoire. One of the most significant aspects of neoliberalization since the 1970s has been the privatization of social reproduction, including caregiving provisions for youth, the elderly, and sick and disabled people as well as costs for education, health care, and social security. Now deemed a matter of personal responsibility rather than a state obligation, the burden of social reproduction has typically devolved onto women. Not least for this reason, as feminist critics have argued, in today's media culture 'women rather than men are constituted as ideal neoliberal subjects'.[11] Furthermore, Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff explain that, 'To a much greater extent than men, women are required to work on and transform the self, to regulate every aspect of their conduct,

8 Jameson, 'Cognitive Mapping', 349.
9 Jameson, 'Cognitive Mapping', 352.
10 Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 3.
11 Gill, *Gender and the Media*, 249.

and to present all their actions as freely chosen.'[12] The asymmetrical interpellation of women as the primary subjects of neoliberalism is reflected by the thematic and formal-aesthetic preoccupations of recent German films. Across the spectrum of popular and art film, these movies often engage with the aesthetic forms and tropes of both the woman's film and feminist cinema in their attention to gendered aspects of everyday life and the intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, citizenship, religious affiliation, and national identity. In *Yella* and in many of the other movies I discuss, female characters become explicit sites for 'imaging' the present, a key trait of contemporary German cinema.

Also significant for the cinema of neoliberalism is how changing production models underpin representational choices in the era of media conglomeration, proliferating digital formats, and the increased marketization of culture. For instance, much attention has been paid to the way *Yella* and other Berlin School films constitute 'the next new wave', or a kind of reboot of art cinema for the 21st century, an approach that suggests their autonomous status as 'counter-cinema'.[13] However, what this approach often overlooks is the transnational, postcinematic mode of production and reception reflected by Berlin School films. In an era when film production in Germany has been largely concentrated in the hands of a very few media conglomerates, Berlin School filmmakers like Petzold have created a successful independent production model. Relying like most German film productions on a combination of funding through international co-producers, regional film boards, private investment, distribution deals, and television financing, these low-budget films (costing on average approximately one to two million euros) have mostly played in cinemas only in limited release, where they have rarely drawn many viewers, not least due to low advertising budgets. However, on television they have done exceedingly well, often topping the charts for their time slots and drawing large market shares (8-15 percent, indicating well over a million and sometimes as many as several million viewers).[14] Mostly shot on 35mm film, these films are not 'made for television' in terms of their formal style or content. Nevertheless, television exhibition and reception are crucial to the films' production model and expand their viewership, as does their international circulation via subtitled releases

12 Gill and Scharff, *New Femininities*, 7.

13 See for example Roy et al., *The Berlin School: Films from the Berliner Schule*, especially the contribution by Lim, 'Moving On: The Next New Wave' (88-96); and Abel, *The Counter-Cinema of the Berlin School*, which provides a more nuanced assessment of the Berlin School as counter-cinema.

14 Gupta, 'Berliner Schule: Nouvelle Vague Allemande.'

first at festivals and later through home video formats and digital platforms, especially streaming services. As a consideration of production and reception suggests, *Yella* and other Berlin School films are firmly embedded in the same neoliberal mediascape that they also place on display, attesting to the changed context in which films operate today.[15]

This context, of course, informs not only the global art cinema of the Berlin School, but also the broader cinematic landscape, which encompasses the surprising persistence of local genres, the rise of global blockbusters, and the ongoing domestic success of popular commercial cinema. Attending to all of these forms, this book examines the neoliberalization of cinema in Germany, seeking to understand how film, as a privileged site for considering the saturation of culture by economy that is a hallmark of neoliberalism, has participated in and resisted the neoliberal project. Both an aesthetic form and one that requires considerable financial investment and access to technology, feature filmmaking 'can offer key insights into the nature and contradictions of the neoliberal project'.[16] By focusing on aesthetic innovations, technological developments, ideological strategies, and transformations in spectator address and reception, I demonstrate how recent German films manufacture consent for, but also contest, neoliberal agendas, sometimes encompassing both impulses at the same time.

Neoliberalism, Cinema, and Germany

Neoliberalism designates the notion that the free market should serve as the guiding force of all human activity. Originating as a theory of political economy, neoliberalism has come to identify a range of historical developments, emergent government practices, and discursive repertoires operating in conjunction to enhance corporate profit and delegitimate the social.[17]

15 On the independent production model pursued by Berlin School and other contemporary German filmmakers, see also Baer, 'The Berlin School and Women's Cinema.'

16 Kapur and Wagner, *Neoliberalism and Global Cinema*, 1.

17 As numerous critics have argued, neoliberalism is a conceptually messy term, which is often invoked in historically nonspecific and reductive ways. The distinction between classical liberalism and neoliberalism is a slippery one, which is conceived of in different ways by various theorists; neoliberalism also developed differently in distinct geopolitical contexts, a fact that is often glossed over. Significant for this project is the difference between the American neoliberal trajectory and the German one, with its roots in ordoliberalism and the Freiburg School, a difference that is key for Michel Foucault's influential exploration of neoliberalism, which I discuss in more detail below. Carolyn Hardin provides a useful distinction among three (often intersecting) deployments of neoliberalism in contemporary critical analysis: one drawing on

Some effects of neoliberalization include a collapse of distinctions between public and private, driven by new technologies; an emphasis on personal responsibility and individual self-fashioning; and the demise of collective social movements. Because neoliberalism favours corporations and seeks to boost profit at the expense of redistributive socioeconomic policies, neoliberalization has also resulted in the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few. By trumpeting the market above all else 'neoliberalism wages an incessant attack on democracy, public goods, and non-commodified values'.[18] Neoliberalism also emphasizes individual freedom and private property, dissolving modes of collectivity and solidarity and inaugurating a transformation of the culture and politics of everyday life.[19]

Economists and politicians advocated the doctrine of neoliberalism throughout the second half of the 20th Century. Though its development has been uneven, taking shape differently in various national and local contexts, the year 1980 marks a watershed for the consolidation of neoliberalism in Western democracies and a trend toward economic liberalization worldwide.[20] Neoliberalism ultimately came to prevail around the turn of the millennium, when the New Economy of technologically-driven global capitalism replaced other forms of socioeconomic and political organization throughout much of the world. While the economic doctrine of neoliberalism suffered a blow in the aftermath of the financial crisis of 2008 and the global recession that followed, in the years since, rising inequality has gone hand in hand with an intensification of neoliberal discourse, prompting critics to speak of 'a redoubling of its intensity and reach'.[21]

Neoliberalism's financialization of all spheres of life has led to the erosion of traditional social formations, especially in the realms of family and

Foucault's ideas about the historical development of neoliberalism and its theory of human capital; one drawing on Marxist political economy that emphasizes neoliberalism as today's dominant capitalist ideology, opposing it to democracy; and one of 'epochalists' who invoke neoliberalism conceptually to describe recent economic developments. See Hardin, 'Finding the "Neo" in Neoliberalism.'

18 Giroux, 'The Terror of Neoliberalism', 2.

19 See Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality?: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy*.

20 In the U.S., 1980 saw not only the election of Ronald Reagan to office, following closely on the heels of Margaret Thatcher's election in the U.K. the year before, but also the ascension of Paul Volcker, a key architect of neoliberal monetary policy, to head of the Federal Reserve. The liberalization of the economy in China also began in the late 1970s, and experiments with neoliberalization proliferated in Latin America. See Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 1.

21 Peck, 'Explaining (with) Neoliberalism', 132.

employment.[22] This erosion has resulted in both enhanced mobility and deepening insecurity, a paradox that exemplifies the neoliberal repertoire. Flexibilization of identity and work, together with an emphasis on self-fashioning and choice, offer novel opportunities for the individual-consumer, who is empowered to adopt new roles outside of conventional structures. At the same time, the loosening of conventions, the diminishing role of public and collective institutions, and the dismantling of redistributive social policies create a situation in which provisions for caregiving, networks of support, and mechanisms for sustaining life become matters of personal responsibility. Because these transformations of everyday life and the material world take place in the name of individual liberty, which goes hand in hand with the freedom of the market, they often seem to transpire invisibly, making them appear as common sense.

The consequences of neoliberalization for cinema have been particularly profound, underscoring 'how the transformation of the business of cinema was a central feature of the reorganization of neoliberal cultural production'.[23] Perhaps most evident are the rapid technological changes affecting film production, distribution, and exhibition since 1980, especially the impact of new media, but also the emergence of digital effects and computer-generated imagery, the proliferation of home video formats, and the rise of the multiplex. At the same time as new technologies were reshaping cinema, neoliberal agendas of deregulation, privatization, and marketization (especially as they affect broadcasting and media conglomerates) diminished the state's role as a primary sponsor and facilitator of film culture, leading to a further restructuring of film and media industries worldwide.

One result of this restructuring was to strengthen Hollywood's global hegemony over the world film market beginning in the 1980s; by the turn of the millennium, Hollywood owned from 40 to 90 percent of films shown worldwide each year.[24] As Toby Miller argues, 'Shifts toward a neo-liberal, multinational investment climate have reinforced global Hollywood's strategic power [...] through the privatization of media ownership, a unified Western European market, openings in the former Soviet Bloc, and the spread of satellite tv, the Web, and [home video], combined with the deregulation of national broadcasting in Europe and Latin America.'[25] These

22 On the erosion of traditional family and gender roles in neoliberalism, see Woltersdorff, 'Paradoxes of Precarious Sexualities'; and Bourdieu, 'Job Insecurity Is Everywhere Now.'

23 Kapur and Wagner, *Neoliberalism and Global Cinema*, 3-4.

24 See Miller, *Global Hollywood*, 3.

25 Miller, 4.

shifts hold particularly profound implications for smaller national cinemas worldwide, including German cinema.

Indeed, while the globalization of media networks that is a key facet of the neoliberal era has rightly led to a scholarly focus on the transnational connections that shape global cinema, national cinema remains a crucial category for mapping the neoliberal turn.[26] Not only does the nation continue to serve as a central figure for conceptualizing belonging and heritage in the present, with ramifications for film production and preservation as well as language and form, but funding regimes also continue to be connected to national discourses. Moreover, the nation has formed a recurrent focus of protectionism, not least in Europe, where national cinema has been on the front lines of debates about how to defend the contours of a meaningfully different indigenous culture against the homogenizing forces of global capitalism. These factors make a focus on national cinema necessary. In line with developments in the field, however, I view German cinema 'not as a determinate entity with fixed borders and a linear historical trajectory, but as a mobile formation that is perpetually made and remade in a network of relations across national, local, regional, transnational, and global spaces and entanglements', relations that help us to conceptualize the transformation of cinema in the neoliberal age.[27]

One of today's strongest global economies, Germany has always been home to a vital film industry, despite the vicissitudes of its history since the birth of film. Producing domestically popular films alongside internationally successful art cinema throughout most of its history, Germany presents a particularly interesting case study for examining the impact on contemporary cinema of increased globalization, the restructuring of the world economy, geopolitical realignment, technological change, shifting conceptions of gender and national identity, and the homogenizing influence of Hollywood.

However, as I argue throughout this book, German cinema ultimately constitutes more than just a case study for understanding the transformation of film in the contemporary period—in many ways, it might be conceptualized as the cinema of neoliberalism par excellence. Indeed, German cinema provides a particularly stark example of cinematic neoliberalization and a key site for analysing the shifts it entailed not least because of the unique social, political, and economic context that underpinned filmmaking in divided Germany. Cinema in both East and West Germany was largely

26 See especially Halle, *German Film after Germany*.

27 Carter et al, 'Introduction', *The German Cinema Book*.

exempt from market mechanisms throughout the postwar period, when state sponsorship promoted a culture of cinema that took precedence over economic concerns (albeit with different ideological objectives and consequences in the Federal Republic and the German Democratic Republic). The abrupt reversal of this hierarchy that took place in the early 1980s in both Germanies, following the economic crisis of the 1970s and the concomitant erosion of autonomous spheres of cultural production, brings the emergent German cinema of neoliberalism into sharp focus.

Already in the 1970s, West Germany served as a key ground for Michel Foucault's theorization of neoliberal governmentality, whose roots lie in a critique of the historical variant of German neoliberalism known as ordoliberalism.[28] Foucault emphasizes the novelty of West Germany as a state whose legitimacy was grounded on the exercise of economic freedom, a corrective to the anti-liberalism of National Socialism. As subsequent commentators have noted, the market orientation of German reunification under the leadership of Chancellor Helmut Kohl sped processes of privatization and corporatization, placing Germany—and especially the territory of the former GDR—at the forefront of neoliberalization in Europe. Thus, the peculiar history of West Germany as a 'ground zero' of neoliberal ideas at mid-century was followed by the exceptional experience of East Germany as the vanguard of global neoliberalism at the turn of the new millennium, a historical conjuncture that is crucial to considering the transformations of cinema during this period.

Since reunification, Germany has assumed a central role in the economic and political life of Europe, another reason to consider its cinema as emblematic for the age of neoliberalism. Debates over the idea, meaning, and worth of cinema in Germany during the last four decades function as a seismograph of cultural neoliberalization. Notably, the domestic market share of German cinema has been on the rise during this period, but it has generally remained far below the worldwide average 35 percent market share for domestic productions, reflecting an internally divided cinema that has struggled to hold its ground, particularly against Hollywood. The case of Germany diverges sharply from that of France, for example, which 'defied Hollywood's new world order' and staved off the shrivelling of its domestic film industry in the age of neoliberalism with protectionist policy initiatives, international lobbying on behalf of cultural sovereignty, and a spirited defence of national cinema.[29]

28 See Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*.

29 See Buchsbaum, *Exception Taken*.

In Germany, by contrast, government and industry commentators have defined the worth of a film largely by its capacity to make money, reshaping cultural policy to reflect this commercial imperative.[30] In this context, other functions of cinema—for example, as a site of cultural representation and aesthetic experimentation—remain relevant only insofar as they can be monetized and are measurable as components of a film's profit motive (though cultural representation and aesthetic form still remain central to the aspirations of filmmakers and to the reception context of audiences). As Christian Petzold somewhat polemically describes it, the policy-driven 'television- and subvention-economy' that stands in for a real film economy in Germany has led to a situation in which 'economic conditions are trying to annihilate films. There is still a call for cinema and for the passions that attach to it. But to make films that are against the status quo, and to do it in a such a way that they don't look like countercinema, is difficult.'[31] Despite its unquestionable difficulty, this precarious balancing act that Petzold describes has driven German filmmakers to find a formal language to counter the status quo while still operating within the parameters of dominant media production in the era of global capitalism.

Finally, German cinema's status as the preeminent cinema of neoliberalism derives from Germany's unique social, political, and economic history in the 20th Century. The history of partition and unification, which is also the history of the failed mass utopias of capitalism and communism, paved the way for processes of accelerated neoliberalization in Germany, while also making those processes distinctly visible, not least to the camera eye.

A Short History of Neoliberalism in Germany

This section provides a brief overview of the intertwining of neoliberal ideas with German history over the past 100 years, a period characterized by social, political, and economic upheaval and the regular redrawing of borders. Because of the specificity of German history during this turbulent century, and the uneven development of neoliberalism in general, the following

30 For a helpful overview of these developments, see Cooke, *Contemporary German Cinema*, especially Chapter 1, 'Financing Cinema in Germany.'

31 Fröhlich, '"Uns fehlt eine Filmwirtschaft"', 31. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from the German are my own.

outline lays the groundwork for considering the stakes of neoliberalization for German cinema.

The programme of neoliberalism began as an attempt to revive the classical liberal idea of the self-regulating market during the worldwide economic crisis that took hold in the aftermath of the stock market crash of 1929.[32] Advocates of neoliberal thought remained a minority throughout the 1930s and 1940s, but the doctrine gained traction during the second half of the 20th Century, when Western economists and politicians began to promote neoliberalism as a pathway out of postwar economic stagnation and toward a unified global market.[33] Around 1980, the adoption of neoliberal ideas accelerated with the implementation of policies and treaties that promoted privatization of state enterprise, deregulation of industry, liberalization of financial markets, and free trade throughout Asia, Europe, and the Americas. In subsequent decades, a series of social, economic, and political transformations took hold worldwide, including increased globalization, a fundamental restructuring of the world economy, geopolitical realignment, and technological change. During this period, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc greatly accelerated the global reach of neoliberalism.

Though Germany was a key site for the initial development of neoliberal thought in the 1930s and 1940s, there is some disagreement among scholars about the impact and spread of neoliberalism in German-speaking Europe. To be sure, the reconstruction of the German economy after World War II and the collapse of National Socialism, as well as the subsequent partition of Germany, make it a special case within postwar Europe. The strength of (West) Germany's economy underpinned a commitment to social welfare that contradicts central tenets of neoliberalism, and trade unions have long remained stronger in Germany than elsewhere. This leads David Harvey, for example, to describe the Federal Republic as an exception, a country that maintained economic growth while resisting neoliberal reforms until the

32 For a historical overview of the development of neoliberal ideas, see Mirowski and Plehwe, eds., *The Road from Mont Pèlerin*. For a helpful discussion of the development of neoliberalism in the German context, see Butterwegge, Lösch, and Ptak, *Kritik des Neoliberalismus*. On neoliberalism in Germany, see also Urban, *ABC zum Neoliberalismus*.

33 Mirowski and Plehwe argue that neoliberalism must be understood as emerging from the concerted efforts of a 'neoliberal thought collective', an international group of intellectuals who first assembled in the Swiss village of Mont Pèlerin in 1947 to create an organized movement to spread neoliberal ideas. The Mont Pèlerin Society (which ultimately numbered around 1000 members) and related neoliberal think tanks exerted a huge influence on economic and political developments worldwide throughout the second half of the 20th century. See Mirowski and Plehwe, eds., *The Road from Mont Pèlerin*.

1990s.[34] While it is certainly true that the collapse of the GDR paved the way for increased neoliberalization since unification, it is crucial to recognize that the implementation of neoliberalism in Germany—and its effects on everyday life—began well before 1989.

Economist Ralf Ptak has argued that the postwar Federal Republic was in fact the ground zero of neoliberalism's ascent, which began in the 1950s.[35] Ptak describes how the Federal Republic's first Minister of Economics Ludwig Erhard, who championed the German variant of neoliberal thought known as ordoliberalism, guided the nascent FRG through economic and social reforms leading to the Economic Miracle, 'which German neoliberalism still counts among its own legendary policy successes'.[36] Ordoliberalism was developed by a group of theorists around Walter Eucken, who later rose to prominence as the leading economist of the Freiburg School. Ordoliberal ideas became influential not only in West Germany, but also in the Anglo-American context, where they achieved purchase through the influence of the Austro-British economist Friedrich von Hayek, who had studied at Freiburg and went on to play a crucial role in the worldwide dissemination of neoliberal doctrine.

While not fundamentally different from other streams of neoliberal thought, ordoliberalism is unique for its emphasis on the social dimension of the economy, as well as for its historical ties to German exceptionalism, including its endorsement of a strong state, of 'conservative patriarchal ideas of society', and of antimodernism.[37] First theorized in the 1930s, ordoliberalism developed as a response to the social and economic crisis of the interwar years in Germany, including the worldwide economic collapse of 1929, the failure of the Weimar Republic, and the spiritual and moral dilemmas brought about by the emergence of mass society.[38] Like other forms of liberal

34 Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 89-90. Harvey argues that neoliberalization began in Germany in the 1990s, due to the stresses on Germany's technological advantage brought about by unification as well as the declining role of banks and the rising role of stock exchanges in the world economy.

35 Ptak argues that '[t]he 1950s in West Germany must be viewed, without a doubt, as the first triumphal era of neoliberalism' (Butterwegge, Lösch, and Ptak, *Kritik des Neoliberalismus*, 81).

36 Butterwegge, Lösch, and Ptak, 82.

37 Ptak, 'Neoliberalism in Germany', 100.

38 The term ordoliberalism derives from the medieval notion of Ordo, a metaphysical conception of a hierarchically structured society that reflects the 'natural order' of things: 'The basic Ordo mind-set served not only as an ideological backdrop for a hierarchical social model, but also as a way of providing legitimacy for its supposedly irrevocable character' (Ptak, 'Neoliberalism in Germany', 104). Eucken's *Ordnungspolitik* (policy of order) aimed to fulfill the promise of this quasi-mystical natural order by emphasizing the hierarchical arrangement and interdependence

thought, ordoliberalism seeks to resolve the tension between individual freedoms and the common good in order to heighten personal liberties without sacrificing social order. Ordoliberalism thus responds to the liberal paradox (the fact that the individual freedom of some—the pursuit of personal liberty, private property, and material resources—poses a threat to the collective freedom and right to live of all) by granting the state a strong role in securing market capitalism and ensuring a competitive order.

While some ordoliberals collaborated with the Nazis and some were exiled, ordoliberal thinkers generally concurred that National Socialism resulted from anti-liberal interventions, which they sought to reverse.[39] Ordoliberals began planning for the postwar period already in the early 1940s, and during the period of occupation they emerged as a strong influence in the design of the emergent Federal Republic, 'producing a constructive draft to combine society and economy in terms of a third way between capitalism (as a historically outdated order) and socialism (as a current threat), which finally materialized in the social market economy'.[40] The social market economy implemented by Erhard was something of a hybrid, adapted to the peculiar circumstances of reconstruction Germany.[41] Nonetheless, it exemplified neoliberal principles, first and foremost among them an understanding of freedom as economic freedom and the market as a site of truth. Under the auspices of the social market economy, the emergent Federal Republic was grounded in market capitalism and gained legitimacy as a state on the principle of economic freedom.

Foucault argues that West Germany was 'a radically economic state, taking the word "radically" in the strict sense, that is to say, its root is precisely

of the economic, social, and political orders, culminating in the motto 'State planning of the forms [of order] – yes; state planning and guidance of the economic process – no.' Qtd. by Ptak, 'Freiburger Schule', in Urban, *ABC zum Neoliberalismus*, 84.

39 Alongside Eucken, the economists Wilhelm Röpke and Walter Rüstow were both instrumental in the development of ordoliberal thought in the early 1930s. Röpke and Rüstow were both refugees from the Nazis, while Eucken remained in Germany during the Nazi period as a professor at the University of Freiburg. All three economists developed ordoliberal ideas throughout the 1930s and 1940s, helping to lay the groundwork for the postwar adoption of ordoliberal doctrine. For a discussion of ordoliberalism and Nazism, see Ptak, 'Neoliberalism in Germany', esp. 117-119.

40 Ptak, 'Neoliberalism in Germany', 120.

41 Ordoliberals such as Hayek objected to the use of the term 'social', with its connotations of social welfare, in the term 'social market economy'. However, they ultimately understood the adoption of this term as a political necessity in the context of the emergent Federal Republic, since it helped to mediate the concerns of Social Democrats and trade unions, and helped to mitigate fears about authoritarian approaches to social integration in the aftermath of Nazism. See Ptak, 'Neoliberalism in Germany', 107.

economic'.[42] As Wendy Brown has pointed out, Foucault was among the first thinkers to consider, in his 1978-1979 Collège de France lectures, how the 'reprogramming of liberal governmentality' begun in postwar Germany was starting to take hold elsewhere in Europe, where many countries combined neoliberal principles with welfare state policies from the 1960s onwards.[43] Foucault presciently emphasizes the importance of the German variant of neoliberalism for understanding the neoliberal project as a whole; for him, 'this idea of a legitimizing foundation of the state on the guaranteed exercise of an economic freedom'[44] is something historically novel and thereby crucial for his theorization of (neoliberal) governmentality.[45]

Foucault understands neoliberalism as a normative order of governing reason, rather than as a stage of capitalism per se. As Brown explains, 'the norms and principles of neoliberal rationality do not dictate precise economic policy, but rather set out novel ways of conceiving and relating state, society, economy, and subject and also inaugurate a new "economization" of heretofore noneconomic spheres and endeavors'.[46] In the context of Germany, Foucault describes a circuit between economic institutions and the state, which 'produces a permanent consensus of all those who may appear as agents within these economic processes, as investors, workers, employers, and trade unions'.[47] As he suggests, participation in the economy and acceptance of the 'economic game of freedom' produces political consent; the economy's 'guarantee' of well-being produces the population's willing adherence to its regime. The responsibilization and active self-regulation of the individual that ensues is characteristic of neoliberal forms of governmentality, summarized by Foucault's invocation of *homo oeconomicus* as 'an entrepreneur of himself' rather than a partner of exchange.[48] Foucault's theory of neoliberal governmentality, with its roots in a critique of German ordoliberalism, provides an important basis for my analysis of neoliberalism and German cinema.

42 Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 86.

43 Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 50.

44 Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 83.

45 For Foucault, governmentality describes the distribution of power across the population through knowledge, the economy, and forms of social control; it is an 'ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculations, and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific, albeit very complex, power that has the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge, and apparatuses as its essential technical instrument'. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 108.

46 Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 50.

47 Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 84.

48 Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 226.

Given its ordoliberal foundations, the Federal Republic saw less a neoliberal revolution per se in the 1980s than an intensification of neoliberal governmentality brought about by the worldwide economic failure of the 1970s, which put an end to the Economic Miracle of the postwar years, and by the subsequent globalization of neoliberal doctrine. During the early 1970s, the oil crisis had instigated a cultural shift in West Germany known as the *Tendenzwende* (tendential turn). This sea change in politics and society indicates a general turn away from the leftist *Zeitgeist* and toward a new conservatism, which was cemented by the return to power of the CDU in 1982 and the subsequent election victory of Helmut Kohl. The shift to the right was consolidated on an ideological level by the so-called *geistig-moralische Wende* (intellectual-moral turn), which describes the rise of neo-conservativism during the early Kohl era.

Promising a 'historical new beginning' for the Federal Republic, Kohl promoted a cultural renewal centred on the 'leistungsbereiten Normalbürger' (competitive average citizen).[49] Kohl's notion of renewal emphasized affirmative cultural values and the 'normality of bourgeois life'[50]; the cultural turn he promised was predicated on the notion that the social-democratic/liberal coalition holding power since 1966 had promoted minorities and alternative lifestyles, which Kohl now sought to marginalize. At the same time, the new conservative government initiated sweeping changes in economic policy 'away from more state, toward more market; away from collective burdens, toward more personal achievement [*Leistung*]; away from encrusted structures, toward more mobility, individual initiative, and increased competitiveness'.[51] Taken together, the *Tendenzwende* and the *geistig-moralische Wende* signalled a profound turn in West Germany around 1980 comparable to (and inspired by) the Reagan and Thatcher revolutions in the U.S. and U.K.[52]

While it is impossible to speak of neoliberalization per se in the GDR, the neoliberal turn taking place globally around 1980 likewise had a significant impact on the East German economy and society.[53] The oil

49 Görtemaker, *Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, 688.

50 Görtemaker, *Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, 688.

51 Qtd. in Ther, *Die neue Ordnung auf dem alten Kontinent*, 49.

52 For a useful discourse analysis of the rise of these two terms, see Hoeres, 'Von der "Tendenzwende" zur "geistig-moralischen Wende."'

53 For an extended discussion of the impact of the worldwide economic crisis of the 1970s and the transformation that ensued in the GDR see Maier, *Dissolution*. As Maier argues, 'This was an epochal transformation that challenged all industrial societies. But the capitalist and socialist economies responded in different ways, and they paid a different price' (81).

crisis and the subsequent rise in the cost of raw materials, together with the worldwide increase in interest rates during the 1970s, profoundly affected the GDR's economy, ultimately leading the country into a debt crisis.[54] In the 1980s, globalization continued to create external pressure on East Germany, which relied on the world market for access to goods from outside the Eastern Bloc, while the desire among citizens for an increased standard of living exerted pressure on the system from within.[55] In order to maintain its welfare provisions and continue to supply consumer goods, the GDR increasingly relied on 'credits' from West Germany, in the form of huge loans whose service fees quickly outstripped the GDR's limited export earnings.[56] At the same time, under the guidance of Soviet economic policy, East Germany borrowed from the West to shore up its large-scale ventures rather than enacting reform or investing in the production of exportable goods. This indebtedness to the West and failure to enact reforms in response to the changing world economy are two key factors in the eventual collapse of the socialist economies.

The unique relationship between the FRG and the GDR also contributed to the fall of the Wall and the demise of socialism by creating a 'mirror society' that brought the flaws of the latter into sharp relief, and by providing a back-door economy that fuelled the drive to consumerism. These same factors made the GDR ripe for neoliberalization after 1989, since the economization of everyday life under socialism could be rather seamlessly co-opted into the marketization of everyday life in neoliberalism. After unification, the 'new German states' formed a kind of tabula rasa for the development of a socioeconomic order characterized by geographic and social mobility, 'flexible' or insecure modes of employment, individualization and social fragmentation, heightened use of technology, and the centrality of consumption for social legitimation: 'Thanks to the shock therapy of unification, eastern Germans not only had to adjust quickly but they did so to a late modern capitalist consumer society in its almost pure form of ruthless international economic competition, of shrinking social welfare protection, and of ubiquitous shopping malls, cellular phones, and auto dealerships.'[57] As Laurence McFalls argues, due to uneven historical developments in the aftermath of unification, eastern Germans actually had to adapt to this

54 See Steiner, *The Plans That Failed*, 161-165.

55 See Kopstein, *The Politics of Economic Decline in East Germany*.

56 Maier, *Dissolution*, 60-61.

57 McFalls, 'Eastern Germany Transformed', 2.

new socioeconomic order before western Germans did, placing them in the vanguard of a new German identity, 'on their common path to a neoliberal global society'.[58]

Indeed, the march down this common path sped up during the 1990s, when Germany witnessed a further intensification of economic processes of neoliberalization enabled by the opening of the GDR and the demands of reunification. As Harvey writes, 'The hasty reunification of Germany created stresses, and the technological advantage that the Germans had earlier commanded dissipated, making it necessary to challenge more deeply its social democratic tradition in order to survive.'[59] This period saw a redistribution of resources towards the rebuilding of infrastructure in the new German states. However, reunification also proceeded through deliberate privatization and corporatization of public assets, flexibilization of employment, and heightened commodification and financialization. The market orientation of the reunification process was signalled metaphorically by Helmut Kohl's infamous vision of the 'blühende Landschaften' (blossoming landscapes) that would emerge through the economic transformation of the ex-GDR states.

The election of Gerhard Schröder to the office of chancellor in 1998 paved the way not only for the formation of a centre-left coalition and a concomitant shift away from the conservative politics that had dominated during the sixteen-year reign of Helmut Kohl, but also for a new phase in the transformation of the sociopolitical landscape of reunified Germany. Influenced by Bill Clinton's new democrats and Tony Blair's new labour, Schröder's *Neue Mitte* articulated a third-way political agenda that sought to reconcile neoliberal capitalism with German social democratic tradition. In 1999, Schröder and Blair together released a policy paper, 'Der Weg nach vorne für Europas Sozialdemokraten' (English title: 'Europe: The Third Way'), which outlined a modernization plan for European social democracies in the age of globalization. The so-called 'Schröder-Blair-Papier', which emphasized reform of the social welfare system and flexibilization of the labour market (both hallmarks of neoliberalization) was a key step in the formulation of Schröder's signature policy, Agenda 2010, which was introduced in 2003. Designed to revitalize the German economy, Agenda 2010 introduced a series of stimulus measures, not least a wide-ranging dismantling of social-welfare provisions, intended to enhance competitiveness and combat the pressures of globalization.

58 McFalls, 'Eastern Germany Transformed', 3.

59 Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 90.

Under the auspices of Agenda 2010, Schröder ordered a series of reforms aimed at reducing unemployment and making the labour market more efficient and competitive. The so-called Hartz laws took effect in the period between 2003-2005; the most well-known of these laws, Hartz IV, which combined social welfare and long-term unemployment policies to reduce overall benefits, became the byword for neoliberal reform in the Berlin Republic.[60] As critics have noted, the outcome of this reform is a marked individualization and privatization of social risk, which subjects basic human rights to market forces, including the rights to education, health, work, and an adequate standard of living.[61] In this way, the implementation of Agenda 2010 and the Hartz laws aligned the policy reforms in Germany with those of other capitalist democracies, bringing about an intensification of neoliberal governmentality in the Berlin Republic.

As this short history demonstrates, neoliberalism's local trajectory in the German context intersects with and responds to the rise of the neoliberal repertoire transnationally, while also developing in ways specific to the exceptional situation of National Socialist rule, reconstruction, partition, and reunification in the 20th century. This situation, in turn, shaped the unique course of German cinema, which played a significant role in the cultural legitimation of both the Federal Republic and the GDR prior to the 1980s, when the changing economy and disputes over the discursive status of cinema led to a transformation in the German film industry and in the aesthetic and political stakes of German film on both sides of the Wall. For it is not only via industrial transformations but precisely in its formal and aesthetic characteristics, its archiving of change, and its imaging of transformations in subjectivity and ordinary life that German cinema exemplifies and represents the neoliberal turn.

Theoretical frameworks and contributions

Throughout this book, my aim is to think through the social and cultural formations of neoliberalism as they have become manifest in cinema, a crucial site for considering these formations precisely because of its dual

60 Schröder tasked the *Kommission für moderne Dienstleistungen am Arbeitsmarkt* (Commission for Modern Services in the Labour Market) with the development of these reforms. Under the guidance of its head, the Volkswagen personnel director Peter Hartz, the commission recommended thirteen 'innovation modules', which were ultimately implemented in the laws Hartz I-IV.

61 Urban, *ABC zum Neoliberalismus*, 15.

nature as an industrial and aesthetic form. While I attend to the significant economic changes taking place from 1980-2010 as a key component of the paradigm shift I trace in German film, the account I offer does not take a deterministic view of neoliberalism, in which culture is determined by economy or conceived of as the superstructural reflection of changes to the economic base. Nor do I consider neoliberalism to be a unitary, teleological project. Rather, I understand neoliberalism as an assemblage that can help us to name, describe, and contest dominant repertoires of the present, repertoires that often impede our ability to survive let alone to flourish.

Conceptualizing neoliberalism as an assemblage (in the sense developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari for understanding the dynamic relations comprising social complexity) emphasizes its fluidity and openness, or what Harvey refers to as the way its different 'activity spheres' co-evolve distinctively.[62] As Stuart Hall has described it, neoliberalism is a process with many variants; 'It borrows, evolves, and diversifies', translating liberal principles into different discursive formations with relevance to different historical moments: 'It can do its dis-articulating and re-articulating work because these ideas have long been inscribed in social practices and institutions and sedimented into the "habitus" of everyday life, common sense, and popular consciousness.'[63] Hall emphasizes the fact that the term neoliberalism is itself unsatisfactory because it is conceptually vague, lumping together a diverse range of phenomena under one messy signifier, and because it is often used in a reductive and totalizing fashion, without due attention to historical specificity. However, as he goes on to argue, 'naming neo-liberalism is *politically* necessary', in order to enable resistance and critique.[64]

My analysis identifies the messiness of neoliberalism as heuristically advantageous for understanding the complexity of contemporary cultural formations, including German films, whose political investments are hard to pin down, and which often resist categorization within conventional binaries (high/low, cinema/media, art/commerce, intellectual/popular, international/national, resistance/complicity, oppositional/hegemonic) that continue to inform our apprehension of contemporary culture. As a heuristic, neoliberalism helps to describe the suturing of contradictory tendencies that characterizes ideology in the present.

62 See Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*. Harvey also suggests viewing late-stage capitalism as an assemblage in *The Enigma of Capital*, 128.

63 Hall, 'The Neo-Liberal Revolution', 711.

64 Hall, 'The Neo-Liberal Revolution', 706.

However, in contradistinction to the new ideology critique, which calls for the revival of a critical trajectory in media and cultural studies that 'exposes' the way dominant culture constructs consent for projects of inequality and austerity,[65] I take a cue from recent queer and feminist thought that seeks to conceptualize theory in ways that supplement paradigms of exposure, paranoia, and the 'hermeneutics of suspicion'.[66] Rather than simply 'uncovering' the ideological projects at stake in the films I analyse, I attend to the way they function as repositories for what is disappearing and to the places where they, in Elizabeth Freeman's words, 'collect and remobilize archaic or futuristic debris as signs that things have been and could be otherwise'.[67] For this reason, I have not chosen a strictly chronological approach to organize this book. Rather, each chapter examines a constellation of interwoven thematic and formal-aesthetic phenomena by considering a range of films from different historical and cultural moments 'after the neoliberal turn'. As in *Yella*, nonsequential forms of time (for example haunting, reverie, afterlives) are endemic to the narrative construction and focus of recent German films as well as to understanding the relationships among West German, East German, and post-unification films. A nonchronological approach to non-normative forms of time is thus crucial to my reconsideration not only of German film but also of German film history since 1980.

Berlant's *Cruel Optimism* has provided a particularly significant framework for my analysis. The formulation of cruel optimism helps to explain the psychosocial impact of the historical developments explored in this book, illuminating how neoliberalism contributes to the recasting of subjectivities, fantasies, and identities in the contemporary era. Cruel optimism also describes a relation at the heart of neoliberal cultural practices, which foster self-care and self-improvement, lionize wealth and celebrity, and promote the 'necessary fiction' that ordinary people may become rich and famous through extraordinary or unconventional paths.[68] At the same time, Berlant suggests how the rise of neoliberalism is not only recorded by cinema and other media forms that 'archive what is being lost', but is also accompanied by the emergence of new aesthetic forms that attend to the pervasive precariousness and crisis that characterize the present.[69] The multiple and often contradictory valences of

65 See Downey, Titley, and Toynbee, 'Ideology Critique: The Challenge for Media Studies.'

66 See for example Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*.

67 Freeman, *Time Binds*, xvi.

68 See Hall, 'The Neo-Liberal Revolution', 723.

69 Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 7. For example, Berlant considers new genres such as the 'situation tragedy' and the 'cinema of precarity'.

contemporary culture—recording, manufacturing consent for, and contesting neoliberalism—form the nexus of my analysis of recent German cinema.

In this regard, I contend that recent German films are emphatically political, albeit in ways that are markedly different from the politics of previous eras of film production. Neoliberalism characterizes itself via an illusion of political neutrality, and it co-opts resistance and difference, cannibalizes oppositional aesthetics, and depoliticizes movements for social change. Consequently, understanding cinema in the age of neoliberalism necessitates rethinking the relationship between aesthetics and politics today. While renewed attention to German cinema, especially in the context of the Berlin School, has often led to a doubling down on received critical categories like art cinema, I argue that such categories are no longer fully adequate for understanding this cinema's aesthetic or political affinities. To describe how German film productions navigate the neoliberal mediascape, traversing conventional categories and exhibiting seemingly opposed qualities simultaneously, I develop the trope of 'disorganization'.

Focusing on formal-aesthetic, generic, and thematic continuities across diverse modes of filmmaking, I examine the way German films since 1980 chart the subtle shifts effected by neoliberal restructuring, including transformations in the endeavour of filmmaking itself as well as in the production and marketing of films. Harvey has emphasized 'how much the world changed, depending on where one was, [...] between 1980 and 2010', due to neoliberalism's remapping of urban geographies and space relations as well as its 'wide-ranging state-sponsored changes to daily life'.[70] Arguing that these changes were particularly evident in the context of late 20th- and early 21st-century German history, I focus especially on how German films archive the reshaping of ordinary life, including the transformation of cities, especially Berlin; modifications in gender politics, family life, and provisions for caregiving; changes in labour and employment; as well as shifting conceptions of race, ethnicity, and nation, driven by globalization, transnationalism, and increased migration.

In addition to charting the neoliberal turn in German cinema, this book contributes to rethinking a number of commonplaces in German film studies, including a tendency toward conventional historical periodization that follows national political developments, a focus on directors at the expense of attention to the film industry, a narrowly defined conception of national cinema, and a recentring of the field away from theoretical approaches. Most histories of recent German film have foregrounded the

70 Harvey, *The Enigma of Capital*, 132; 197.

caesura of 1989 and the fall of the Berlin Wall, viewing the 1980s as a dead decade for both East and West German filmmaking and emphasizing the trope of reunification in postwall cinema.[71] By contrast, I shift the focus to 1980—which Harvey has termed a 'revolutionary turning-point in the world's social and economic history'—as the key year of transition. Thus my analysis suggests, first of all, that the transformation of the world economy is in many ways more significant than German reunification for understanding recent German film history.[72] Indeed, I demonstrate that the commercial renewal of German cinema that is usually attributed to the post-unification period was already firmly in place in the Federal Republic during the 1980s.

Second, by highlighting commercial, financial, and intermedial dimensions of German cinema, I move away from the influential paradigm of the *Autorenfilm* (auteur film), which continues to define scholarly approaches to New German Cinema, DEFA film, and post-unification German movies, especially after the emergence of the Berlin School. Third, by reading East German and West German films from the 1980s and 1990s side by side, and by considering the transnational production context of 'German' films, I also highlight the breakdown of conventional designations of national cinema in global capitalism. In so doing, I demonstrate how recent German cinema 'is the localized expression of a globalized imagination', but also how it increasingly aims to market national culture worldwide by inhabiting globally familiar aesthetic forms (especially genres) with markers of Germanness.[73] My examination of the interrelationship of contemporary German cinema with globalizing social and media structures and economic neoliberalization ultimately aims to expand our understanding of how film production and spectatorship operate within today's changed world.

Finally, a feminist approach to the cinema of neoliberalism is crucial for developing a stronger account of the way the political agendas attached to German cinema dovetail with economic transformations. Approaching recent German films from a feminist perspective helps me to attend to the ways in which they reinforce and contest neoliberalism's co-optation and depoliticization of feminism, antiracism and multiculturalism, LGBTQ movements, and class-based struggle. By emphasizing a feminist approach, I underscore not only the necessity of analysing neoliberalism as a gendered

71 See Rentschler, 'From New German Cinema to the Post-Wall Cinema of Consensus'; Hake, *German National Cinema*; Clarke, *German Cinema since Unification*; O'Brien, *Post-Wall German Cinema and National History*; Hodgin, *Screening the East*; and Fuchs, Cosgrove, and Grote, eds., *German Memory Contests*.

72 Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 1.

73 Kapur and Wagner, *Neoliberalism and Global Cinema*, 6.

cultural formation, but also the renewed significance of feminist theory for cinema and media studies in the 21st century.

The Chapters

This book draws on diverse theoretical frameworks in order to develop a methodology that seeks to do justice to the complexity of neoliberalism and to apprehend the myriad ways in which it intersects with German cinema, while also attending to a broad range of thematic concerns germane to neoliberal culture. In her influential critique of the cultural politics of neoliberalism, *The Twilight of Equality?*, Lisa Duggan proposes that

> Developing analyses of neoliberalism must ask how the many local alliances, cultural projects, nationalist agendas, and economic policies work together, unevenly and often unpredictably, rife with conflict and contradiction, to redistribute the world's resources upward—money, security, healthcare, and mobility; knowledge and access to communication technologies; leisure, recreation, and pleasure; freedom—to procreate or not, to be sexually expressive or not, to work or not; political power; participatory access to democratic public life, and more…in short, resources of all kinds.[74]

Taking a cue from Duggan's analytical framework, I examine the conjunctions of local, national, and transnational, cultural, economic, and aesthetic projects at stake in the German cinema of neoliberalism.

Each of my six chapters deliberately pairs films across geopolitical and/or temporal divides in order to establish sometimes unexpected forms of relationality and to bring into focus how the context of neoliberalism opens up new perspectives on German film history, production, and aesthetics. Rather than offering an exhaustive account of the German film landscape from 1980-2010, I have chosen to zoom in on selected emblematic films that best exemplify particular traits of cinematic neoliberalism. Close reading and detailed formal analysis are integral to my approach to these films, which I also situate within the overlapping (film historical, socioeconomic, formal-aesthetic) frames of their production and reception. Careful textual analysis is essential because it allows me to unpack how films respond to, enact, and/or make visible neoliberal imperatives in variable and often

74 Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality?*, 70-71.

contradictory ways. Just as important, close reading allows me to demonstrate how each film is contingent upon, but not wholly determined by, the neoliberal repertoire.

Chapter 1, 'German Cinema and the Neoliberal Turn: The End of the National-Cultural Film Project', brings together two exemplary films about the transitional status of cinema around 1980, Wim Wenders's *Der Stand der Dinge* (*The State of Things,* FRG, 1982), and Iris Gusner's *Alle meine Mädchen* (*All My Girls*, GDR, 1980). Situating these films in relation to Gilles Deleuze's influential *Cinema* books, which were written in the early 1980s in response to the crisis of cinema that both films also narrate, I analyse *Der Stand der Dinge* and *Alle meine Mädchen* as exemplifications of Deleuze's crystal-image, a figure that helps explicate the way these films make visible the cinematic confrontation between time and money. I argue that both films discursively anticipate signal events of the neoliberal turn in the Federal Republic and the GDR, demonstrating the impending triumph of market principles over the national-cultural film project represented by the New German Cinema in the West and DEFA in the East. At the same time, my feminist-queer reading of the way both films disrupt normative timelines facilitates attention to the alternative imaginaries opened up by both *Der Stand der Dinge* and *Alle meine Mädchen*.

Itself forming a kind of crystal-image with Chapter 1, Chapter 2 extends my consideration of the relevance of Deleuze's account of cinema to neoliberal films. Whereas Chapter 1 addresses films about films that narrativize the end of postwar art cinema and the project of socialist realism, respectively, Chapter 2, 'Producing German Cinema for the World: Global Blockbusters from Location Germany', focuses on German films about German film history, which instantiate the neoliberal co-optation of Germany's film tradition. This chapter focuses on three films created for international audiences that neutralize the critical, political and aesthetic forces figured by Deleuze's notion of the crystal-image, forces whose critical power also characterized a certain legacy of German cinema beginning in the Weimar era: Wolfgang Petersen's *Das Boot* (FRG, 1981); Tom Tykwer's *Lola rennt* (*Run Lola Run*, 1998); and Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's *Das Leben der Anderen* (*The Lives of Others*, 2006). Building on influential critical approaches to recent German film, including Eric Rentschler's notion of 'cinema of consensus'; Randall Halle's attention to transnational ensembles; and Lutz Koepnick's theorization of the German heritage film, I examine the particular strategies employed by German blockbusters to address global audiences while affirming the victory of global capitalist imperatives over local film traditions, including especially Brechtian defamiliarization. My

feminist analysis of these three films emphasizes how their affirmative vision is based on an ambiguous and often misogynist gender politics. Ultimately, my examination of global blockbusters from location Germany demonstrates how the predominance of commercial imperatives underpins the emergence of particular formal, aesthetic, and generic traits in the German cinema of neoliberalism, which aims to subsume and diffuse the heterogeneity and variety of Germany's legacy of counter-hegemonic filmmaking.

Chapters 1 and 2 together consider the emergence of new constellations of German cinema after the neoliberal turn in connection with attention to Deleuze's *Cinema*. Similarly, Chapters 3 and 4 are united by a focus on films that chart the transformation of ordinary life across the period of neoliberal intensification in East and West Germany respectively. Both chapters investigate pairs of films whose deliberate intertextual relation helps to index the neoliberal transition while also signalling a shift away from the *Alltagsfilm* (film about everyday life) in order to portray the endemic precarity of the 'crisis ordinary'. These chapters thus continue to describe the transition away from the traditions of socialist realism and postwar art cinema and toward new aesthetic and generic forms that characterize the German cinema of neoliberalism. Chapters 3 and 4 attend to the affective dimensions of the neoliberal turn, drawing on a common feminist/queer theoretical framework, especially the work of Lauren Berlant and Sara Ahmed, to analyse how these four films make neoliberalism visible in narratives about affect aliens and feminist killjoys which refuse a future-oriented model of political consciousness. As I argue, all four films employ women characters as seismographs of political and cultural re-orientation, breaking with conventional forms of representation to signal disaffection with prevailing circumstances. This disaffection becomes retrospectively legible in the earlier films through the pointed critique of neoliberalism developed by their later intertexts.

Chapter 3, 'From Everyday Life to the Crisis Ordinary: Films of Ordinary Life and the Resonance of DEFA', examines Konrad Wolf's *Solo Sunny* (GDR, 1980) and Andreas Dresen's *Sommer vorm Balkon* (*Summer in Berlin,* 2005) in order to bring into focus the enduring influence of DEFA on contemporary German cinema. Both films were written by renowned screenwriter Wolfgang Kohlhaase, and both films trace their inspiration to the same historical figures and Berlin neighbourhoods, a connection that facilitates attention to the continuities and ruptures in the two films' depiction of the historical present. Chapter 4, 'Future Feminism: Political Filmmaking and the Resonance of the West German Feminist Film Movement', analyses

Ulrike Ottinger's *Bildnis einer Trinkerin* (*Ticket of No Return,* FRG, 1979) and Tatjana Turanskyj's *Eine flexible Frau* (*The Drifter,* 2010), examining the imprint of West German feminist filmmaking on contemporary cinema, despite the significant undermining and obscuring of its legacy via processes of privatization and media conglomeration. Focusing on women protagonists in Berlin who exhibit gender, sexual, and class mobility and refuse to accede to regimes of normativity, both films investigate how responsibilization, flexibilization, and professionalization emerge as 'solutions' to problems of agency and sovereignty in neoliberal capitalism.

While Chapters 3 and 4 focus on the specific trajectories of German art cinema, Chapter 5, 'The Failing Family: Changing Constellations of Gender, Intimacy, and Genre', examines a boundary-crossing archive of popular and countercinematic West, East, and post-unification German films: Doris Dörrie's *Männer* (*Men,* FRG, 1985); Sönke Wortmann's *Der bewegte Mann* (*Maybe...Maybe Not,* 1994); Heiner Carow's *Coming Out* (GDR, 1989); and Valeska Grisebach's *Sehnsucht* (*Longing,* 2006). These films all constitute cinematic landmarks in both film historical and political terms. A sleeper hit, the neoliberal fairy tale *Männer* laid the groundwork for the subsequent success of the German relationship comedy, paving the way for *Der bewegte Mann*, the top domestic box office draw of the 1990s. I argue that both of these popular films intervene into the comedy genre in ways that enable their imaging of precarious genders and sexualities. I read them in connection with two films that differ from the relationship comedy in terms of form, but that also archive neoliberal transformations of gender, sexuality, and intimacy through interrogations of genre: *Coming Out*, the first East German feature film about homosexuality, and *Sehnsucht*, a crucial contribution to the emergent Berlin School of filmmaking. Chapter 5 shifts the terms of my analysis from a focus on the depiction of women to a consideration of men and masculinity in the postfeminist era. I examine specifically how genre forms an important ground on which these films subject the heteropatriarchal family to scrutiny, often exploring homosocial bonds and queer intimacies in the process. In addition to making visible changing modes of affect and intimacy, this chapter sheds new light on the much vaunted 'return to genre' in the German cinema of neoliberalism.

Chapter 6, 'Refiguring National Cinema in Films about Labour, Money, and Debt', brings into focus the theme of precarity, a red thread throughout this book, by analysing four films about labour, money, and debt that train a lens on precarious, racialized bodies made disposable in and by global neoliberalism: Thomas Arslan's *Dealer* (1998); Angelina Maccarone's

Fremde Haut (*Unveiled,* 2005); Fatih Akın's *Auf der anderen Seite* (*The Edge of Heaven,* 2007); and Christian Petzold's *Jerichow* (2008). Labour, money, and debt have long posed difficult subjects for cinematic representation, a problem exacerbated by the era of immaterial labour and financialization. In considering how these films find a form for the depiction of labour, money, and debt, I develop the figure of indebtedness as a central trope that binds together their narrative and aesthetic language. All four films contribute to the reconfiguration of German national cinema by centring migrant characters, reflecting on their perspectives and experiences, and making visible their subaltern status, while also configuring the terms of their representation via an explicit engagement with German film history. On the diegetic level, they form deliberate intertextual relationships with specific films (especially the oeuvre of Rainer Werner Fassbinder), genres (including the Berlin film and the *Heimatfilm*), and traditions (particularly the New German Cinema), often disorganizing the tropes and forms associated with these. However, unlike the global blockbusters discussed in Chapter 2, which co-opt and neutralize the legacy of German cinema while affirming neoliberal agendas, the films discussed here seek to resignify this legacy for resistant aesthetic and political projects. This chapter therefore also probes the extradiegetic frames that have shaped the critical reception of these films, including global art cinema (all four films), transnational queer cinema (*Fremde Haut* and *Auf der anderen Seite*), the Berlin School (*Dealer* and *Jerichow*), and the cinema of migration (all four films). In dialogue with these critical frames, this chapter culminates in a broader consideration of the category of (German) national cinema after neoliberalism, paving the way for a brief conclusion that summarizes the key contributions of the book for understanding the changed context of German cinema after the neoliberal turn.

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1. German Cinema and the Neoliberal Turn: The End of the National-Cultural Film Project

Abstract
This chapter examines two films about the transitional status of cinema around 1980, Wenders's *The State of Things* (1982), and Gusner's *All My Girls* (1980). Situating these films in relation to Deleuze's influential *Cinema* books, written in response to the crisis of cinema that both films narrate, I analyse these films as exemplifications of Deleuze's crystal-image, a figure that helps explicate the way they make visible the cinematic confrontation between time and money. Both films discursively anticipate events of the neoliberal turn, demonstrating the impending triumph of market principles over the national-cultural film project represented by the New German Cinema and DEFA. This chapter offers a feminist-queer reading of how both films disrupt normative timelines to open up alternative imaginaries.

Keywords: Wim Wenders, Iris Gusner, Gilles Deleuze, New German Cinema, DEFA, crisis of cinema

'The taxpayer does not want to be provoked, he wants to be entertained.'
– Friedrich Zimmermann, West Germany's Minister of the Interior[1]

'Cinema is not about life going by. People don't want to see that.'
– Gordon, Hollywood film producer in Wim Wenders's *Der Stand der Dinge*

'The people don't want to see themselves…they'll turn the channel!'
– Ralf Päschke, East German film student in Iris Gusner's *Alle meine Mädchen*[2]

1 See Böhme, Jenny, and Lersch, 'Spiegel Gespräch.'
2 Creech also uses this quote as an epigraph for her chapter on Gusner's film. Creech, *Mothers, Comrades, and Outcasts in East German Women's Films*, 141.

Baer, H., *German Cinema in the Age of Neoliberalism*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021. DOI: 10.5117/9789463727334_CH01

In the concluding episode of *Der Stand der Dinge* (*The State of Things*, FRG/Portugal, 1982), the German film director Friedrich Munro tracks down the Hollywood producer Gordon, who is hiding out from loan sharks in a mobile home parked on the Sunset Strip. Munro has travelled to L.A. from Portugal to find the absent producer in the hopes that he will restore financing to Munro's bankrupt film. With its story about a German director shooting a Hollywood-financed picture with an international cast on location in Portugal, *Der Stand der Dinge* weaves a tale of trans/national cinema, in which conflicts between art and commerce and between authorial vision and the mandate to entertain play out in protracted negotiations over production and financing. At stake is Munro's choice to shoot his film in black and white (as his cinematographer explains, 'Life is in colour, but black and white is more realistic'); the film's fragmentary, elliptical narrative; and its slow pacing, all qualities associated with European art cinema. As the mobile home careens around the streets of night-time Los Angeles, Gordon summarizes the conflicts that underpin Wenders's film: 'If I would have shot that same film with an American director and an American cast in colour, I'm sittin' on top of the world in six months. […] All you had to do is just—you've got to have a story, Friedrich. […] Fuck reality. Cinema is not about life going by. People don't want to see that.' Alluding to the rise of 'Global Hollywood' and the concomitant imperative to create films with the broadest possible commercial appeal, Gordon's statement points to the increasing saturation of culture by economy in the early 1980s and its direct implications for German cinema.[3]

With its staging of opposed conceptions of what cinema is 'about', *Der Stand der Dinge* narrativizes the significant debates taking place in the Federal Republic at this time around the role of cinema in the promotion and legitimation of national culture, and the place of state support in underwriting filmmaking. Wenders's film situates these local debates in the context of transformations at stake for cinema at large, including the possibilities for cinematic representation posed by the emergence of new technologies and the globalization of media industries. Exhibiting the circuit of exchange (both financial and cultural) between Europe and Hollywood, *Der Stand der Dinge* has been received as a narrative about the demise of the auteur-driven New German Cinema, but it is also, more broadly construed, a key parable of cinema's neoliberal turn.

Gordon's exhortation that people don't want to see the reality of 'life going by' in the cinema echoes a similar statement made by the East German film

3 See Miller, *Global Hollywood*.

student Ralf Päschke in Iris Gusner's DEFA film *Alle meine Mädchen* (*All My Girls*, GDR, 1980). When he first learns of the film school thesis project he has been assigned—a television documentary about an all-female work brigade in a Berlin lightbulb factory—Ralf is outraged: 'The people don't want to see themselves [...] They'll turn the channel! My god, brigades! What do I know about them?! And even worse: They're women!' Ralf's statement alludes to the widespread fatigue among GDR audiences at the project of socialist realism—with its depictions on screen of collective solidarity, the worker as hero, and the experience of everyday life—which led viewers to turn away from East German film and television in the 1980s. Like Wenders, Gusner employs the self-reflexive device of a film-within-a-film to stage a narrative about cinema's transitional status around 1980. While *Der Stand der Dinge* foreshadows the marketization of cinema beginning to take hold in the Federal Republic, *Alle meine Mädchen* foregrounds the shifting terrain of representation at DEFA during a period of increased economic pressure, due to the conflict between state-mandated ideological and aesthetic principles, on the one hand, and the project of popular filmmaking, on the other. As Ralf Päschke's proclamation 'And even worse: They're women!' emphasizes, *Alle meine Mädchen* specifically underscores the implication of gender (including male authorship and the representation of women) in the ideological, formal, and economic transformation of cinema, developing a systematic focus on 'the state of stories and the relation of women to narrative' that also underpins Wenders's film.[4]

This chapter considers the specific contexts that shaped the transformation of German cinema on both sides of the Wall, mapping the particular trajectory of encroaching neoliberalization in Germany (East and West)—home to a significant national cinema tradition that came under new pressure and scrutiny beginning in the early 1980s. With reference to Gilles Deleuze's account of the 'death of cinema' and the figure of the crystal-image, I demonstrate how the metacinematic narratives of *Der Stand der Dinge* and *Alle meine Mädchen* discursively anticipate significant events signalling the end of the national-cultural film project in both Germanies: the change in film subsidy laws initiated by Minister of the Interior Friedrich Zimmerman in West Germany beginning in 1983; and the so-called 'Father' Letter, a much-discussed 1981 letter to the editor of the newspaper *Neues Deutschland* that criticized DEFA films for failing to give adequate representation to East Germany's achievements. These emblematic events help to trace the contours of the neoliberal turn in

4 Gemünden, 'Oedi-Pal Travels', 211.

German cinema, demonstrating the interrelationship of globalizing media structures, economic change, and national constellations.

I use the term 'neoliberal turn' to describe an amalgam of changes in regimes of film production and consumption that began around 1980 and continue to unfold in the present day, including the increasing predominance of corporations and commercial considerations, a mandate toward privatization, and the erosion of autonomous spheres of cultural production. As this chapter shows, German cinema provides a key site for analysing cinematic neoliberalization because of the specific social, political, and economic context of filmmaking in divided Germany during the postwar period. Thomas Elsaesser has observed that 'West Germany was the first capitalist country where the State, directly via its Ministry of the Interior, indirectly via grant-awarding bodies, assumed for film-making the role of patron traditionally associated more with education and performing arts than with cinema.'[5] As a consequence, many aspects of the West German filmmaking enterprise were largely exempt from market mechanisms during the postwar years.

Indeed, as John Davidson has demonstrated, the New German Cinema (NGC) emerged via the efforts of politicians, filmmakers, and (largely foreign) audiences in the postwar period to achieve the renewal of an internationally accepted West German cinema. Although these groups were by no means unified, and indeed they pursued disparate goals, nonetheless their efforts ultimately created

> space in the market for a cultural product that [would] serve two distinct functions: first, this new cinema should be a site of cultural resistance, both a sanctioned and contained space, yet one in which serious aesthetic and political opposition to dominant policy could be expressed and processed; second, this new cinema should act as a kind of filmic Olympic team, winning international recognition for individual filmmakers and the nation. At first glance, these functions seem incompatible, but over the course of the 1960s and 1970s they evolve as complementary characteristics of NGC.[6]

5 Elsaesser, *New German Cinema*, 28.

6 Davidson, 'Hegemony and Cinematic Strategy', 52. As Davidson further argues, even in an age of increasing globalization, national cultural production and reception continued to play a significant role such that 'the genre of NGC helps negotiate the precarious balance between the international and national in the identity of the West' (62).

Davidson emphasizes the 'cultural-diplomatic function' of NGC in the project of representing and legitimating the West German state, a function that was underwritten by that state's economic support of film production.

Likewise, the state-controlled cinema of the GDR was produced outside of a commercial context, with fixed subsidies flowing directly to DEFA from the Ministry of Culture, ensuring film's key role in representing and promoting socialism. Only in the last decade of its existence did financial pressures begin to take a serious toll on feature filmmaking in East Germany. As Hans-Joachim Meurer explains, 'Particularly from the late seventies onwards, cultural officials were strongly committed to increasing the efficiency of the DEFA studios and rationalising the film production process in an attempt to come to terms with the rising cost of feature film production.'[7] At the same time, however, 'The political instrumentalization of audio-visual production by the East German state was gradually tightened from the early eighties onwards'[8]—due to both internal opposition in the GDR and escalating pressure from the West, leading to a paradoxical and simultaneous movement of doubling down on state censorship while opening up to new forms of internationalization at DEFA.[9]

In both Germanies, the *culture* of cinema took precedence over economic concerns in the postwar period, so that the abrupt reversal of this hierarchy in the early 1980s brings the emergent cinema of neoliberalism into sharp focus. In the atmosphere of heightened competition that followed the economic downturn of the 1970s, profitability, marketing, and the principle of *Wirtschaftlichkeit* (economic efficiency) increasingly shaped German film production, distribution, and reception. In the FRG, official film policy changed in the 1980s to regard economic criteria as crucial in establishing eligibility for subvention through national funding structures. Producing a film in the Federal Republic required (as it still does) assembling a complex funding package drawn from regional, federal, and (often) international sources, with a significant contribution coming from television, which now became the de facto sponsor of German cinema.[10] In the GDR, concerns about the viability of East German cinema (as a part of the failing economy at large) led to, on the one hand, the increased suppression of the variety of both DEFA films and imports, in the effort to exert new forms of control on both filmmakers and audiences,

7 Meurer, *Cinema and National Identity in a Divided Germany*, 91.

8 Meurer, *Cinema and National Identity in a Divided Germany*, 97.

9 See Wedel et al., eds., *DEFA international*.

10 Elsaesser, *New German Cinema*, 35.

and on the other hand, the turn to new types of financing deals—including international co-production deals and key deals with West German television—in a last-ditch effort to secure foreign investment.[11] After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the demise of DEFA, economic criteria continued to define the landscape of filmmaking in post-unification Germany, contributing to the boom in domestically popular genre cinema and the rise of internationally successful prestige pictures since the 1980s, as well as to the heightened role of television in underpinning a fundamentally intermedial German film production.

Under the sign of neoliberalism, the increased marketization of German cinema since 1980 has led to the resurgence of popular filmmaking with immense audience appeal, to a wave of global blockbusters, and even to the rebirth of the German art film in the 21st century. As Pierre Gras has argued, 'Consistently finding new filmic forms to depict this constant constellation of problems in Western societies is certainly among the key strengths of contemporary German cinema', and Gras highlights how German films' emphasis on local conditions allows them to represent universal connections.[12] At the same time, though, marketization has also fundamentally altered the production and reception contexts of German cinema, transforming the range of stories and genres, formal languages and aesthetic styles, and ideological affinities and political agendas available to German filmmakers and audiences. The move away from a national-cultural film project toward the embrace of a transnational, commercial model is evident both in the changing formal and generic modes and in the narratives of German films, which archive the late 20th-century 'crisis of cinema'.

Cinema in Crisis

During the early 1980s, forms of production, distribution, exhibition, and reception that had characterized the medium of cinema were revolutionized by the epochal transformations taking place worldwide, including globalization, technological innovation, and rapid changes in space, time, and society that can be understood through the lens of neoliberalization.

11 See Schieber, 'Anfang vom Ende oder Kontinuität des Argwohns'; Wedel et al., eds., *DEFA international*; and Heiduschke, *East German Cinema*.

12 Gras, *Good bye, Fassbinder!*, 117.

These transformations affected the cinema in ways that were perceived and described through a discourse of crisis.[13]

While film industries everywhere recalibrated in response to factors like deregulation, privatization, and the emergence of digital technologies, the case of Germany (both East and West) provides an especially stark example of these structural, institutional, and aesthetic changes, culminating in the marginalization of auteur cinema, the dismantling of DEFA, and the consolidation of new forms of internationally legible popular filmmaking, among other developments that characterize recent German film history. The German case is especially illustrative because, in contrast to countries like France, Germany responded to the emergence of the New Economy and the competition of Global Hollywood not by doubling down on protectionist policies and developing rhetorical strategies to defend national cinema, but by ushering in a new era of deregulation of the media industries, including film and television. As Jonathan Buchsbaum demonstrates, the market share of domestic productions plummeted throughout Europe in the early 1980s, while the market share of Hollywood productions rose dramatically; audiovisual policies set in motion to respond to neoliberalization varied dramatically. French policies designed to protect French cinema succeeded to the extent that, by 2012, French cinema held a domestic market share of 41 percent vs. the U.S. market share of 46 percent. By contrast, in Germany, which eschewed such protectionism, the market share of German cinema in 2012 was seven percent vs. a whopping 81 percent U.S. market share.[14]

While the deregulation and privatization of media industries in Germany and elsewhere took place under the sign of free market ideology, by the 1990s these processes had paved the way for media conglomeration, as the outlets and venues for diverse forms of film and media production and consumption eroded and consolidated. Deregulation opened up the broadcasting sector to private television, undermining the longstanding West German consensus that broadcasting should provide a public good and serve as a vital factor in the functioning of democracy: 'The public broadcasters' explicit remit was to deliver a quality service providing more than mainly mass-entertainment', a remit that now began to deteriorate.[15] Deregulation specifically facilitated the expansion of two dominant German media conglomerates, Bertelsmann

13 Wedel underscores the reflexive tendency to conceptualize film history in general—and German film history in particular—through the metaphor of permanent crisis; he identifies 1982 as a watershed year for one such crisis in German cinema. See Wedel, *Filmgeschichte als Krisengeschichte*.

14 See Buchsbaum, *Exception Taken,* 166-167.

15 Humphreys, 'Germany's "Dual" Broadcasting System', 24.

and the Kirch Group (the latter operating in tandem with the Springer Concern)[16]; and favoured a new producer-driven cinema, exemplified by the massively successful Bernd Eichinger, whose filmmaking practice sustained itself through ties to global capital (see Chapter 2).[17]

However, it is crucial to underscore that, although the criteria and stakes of financing changed, the neoliberal turn did not put an end to the public subvention of film in Germany. Like other small national cinemas, German cinema has always relied on state subsidies and continues to do so today. Albeit with different aims and goals, state subvention of the film industry has been a constant in Germany since the founding of Ufa in 1917. As Oliver Castendyk puts it, 'The vision that economic liberals like to conjure up of the good old days when the film industry survived solely through crowd-pleasing films and without the "sweet poison of subvention" existed only for very short periods, if at all.'[18] In the course of the 20th century, different regimes pursued various forms of economic subsidy with the aims of diversifying and expanding the German film industry, improving German cinema's viability on the global market, and, often, of consolidating state power over the filmmaking enterprise. Because of the high cost of filmmaking and the relatively small domestic audience, subvention has proved crucial for improving infrastructure and contributing to the competitiveness of German film; while German film policy has always been economically driven, the cultural prestige of German cinema also played a key role. Deliberations regarding film subvention in Germany have therefore always revolved around the question: 'Should the economic success or the cultural reputation of German film be improved?'[19] Indeed, the issue of film subvention has been taken up largely within the context of the many cinema debates that have punctuated German film history since the early 20th century, debates revolving around the question of whether cinema should promote art or commerce, educational and moral guidance or mass entertainment.

These debates reached their apotheosis during the early 1980s. In West Germany, the spectacular flourishing of the New German Cinema—whose success was made possible by a film policy favouring cultural subvention—was followed by the *Filmkrise*, characterized by the rise of new media and

16 Humphreys notes that, by 1994, the 'television oligopoly' that emerged accounted for 80 percent of total television advertising revenue (and 90 percent of private television advertising revenue). Humphreys, 33.

17 The Kirch Group later declared bankruptcy. On Eichinger and the emergence of a German producer's cinema see Baer, 'Producing Adaptations.'

18 Castendyk, *Die deutsche Filmförderung*, 25.

19 Castendyk, *Die deutsche Filmförderung*, 24.

home video formats, external competition, decreasing market shares for German cinema, plummeting attendance at movie theatres, and a general consensus that the quality of German films was in decline. As Eric Rentschler describes it:

> The crisis of film production in the 1980s was ultimately not a specifically German phenomenon, but rather part of a widespread international crisis. Crowded out and displaced by expensive American productions, filmmakers worldwide responded with uncertainty and resignation. The crisis was less one of film than one of the cinema itself, an indication of the structural transformation of society and a symptom of the functional transformation of the fantasy-ware film. No longer dependent on a special place and a fixed time, films increasingly circulated in the form of video cassettes and laser discs as readily available consumer articles.[20]

As Rentschler suggests, the West German *Filmkrise* reflected the global crisis of cinema in the 1980s, but it is crucial not to lose sight of the tensions between the broader global context and the specific local contours that defined its emergence in the FRG. As I describe in more detail below, the reorientation of film policy toward market principles in the early 1980s signalled the intersecting failure of both the New German Cinema and the social market economy as representational projects.

Driven by a related but slightly different set of factors, the East German *Filmkrise* or *Kinosterben* (death of cinema) arose in response to a similar constellation of competition from imported films (now increasingly from the U.S.) and (West German) television, waning interest in and attendance at the movies, conflicts between ideological mandates and artistic practices, and the perceived failure of DEFA to create a cinema that would reflect the achievements of state socialism in the GDR. Within DEFA, the combination of financial problems and political uncertainty led to representational conflicts and a concerted bracketing out of contemporary issues since 'one didn't know what the requisite films were supposed to look like now'.[21] These conflicts were encapsulated in the 'Father' letter, whose indictment of DEFA pointed to the failure of socialist realism as a representational project—and socialism as a mass utopia—signaling the 'beginning of the end' and foreshadowing the collapse of the GDR.

20 Rentschler, 'Film der Achtziger Jahre', 281.

21 Qtd. in Poss and Warnecke, *Spur der Filme*, 343.

The End of the National-Cultural Film Project and German Cinema's Neoliberal Turn

The crisis of cinema in East Germany entered widespread public awareness just one year after the debut of Gusner's *Alle meine Mädchen*, whose narrative about appropriate forms of representation at DEFA anticipated the events of 1981. That year, the official party newspaper *Neues Deutschland* published a letter in its commentary section signed by Hubert Vater, a head mechanic at the VEB Kraftverkehr Erfurt [people's enterprise transportation firm in Erfurt].[22] Entitled 'What I wish for from our filmmakers', the letter enjoined DEFA to develop stronger representations of the accomplishments of socialism on screen:

> In terms of both theme and artistic expression, I find hardly a single one of our recent films noteworthy. [...] I sense in them too little pride in the great things accomplished by the working class and its party in alliance with all working people in our country during the decades up until today. Where are the art works that make visible the—as I call it—titanic achievement that is evident in the establishment, development, and growth of our stable and blossoming Workers' and Farmers' State? [...] Problems arise that move every one of us. How does one solve them with an eye toward the future? What accumulated experience from the life of the people, what political and moral decision-making support—if one may describe it thus—do our films offer?[23]

As Elke Schieber has documented, the letter's paternalistic tone and the symbolic name of its signatory, 'Vater', led to the widespread speculation that the 'Landesvater' [father of the state] Erich Honecker himself had actually penned it. The blanket indictment of DEFA's recent production roster articulated by the letter shocked artists and critics alike. At a point when cultural officials in the GDR were attempting to increase the efficiency of the DEFA studio due to the rising costs of feature filmmaking, an attempt that led to diversification in style and genre as well as a concerted effort to internationalize, the 'Father' letter inaugurated a period of increased censorship and self-censorship, as studio leaders and filmmakers alike tried to find an appropriate idiom for contemporary film.

22 Poss and Warnecke, *Spur der Filme*, 342-343.

23 Qtd. in Schieber, 'Anfang vom Ende oder Kontinuität des Argwohns', 267.

Meurer provides a detailed description of the paradoxical situation that emerged, giving rise to an era of incoherent film policies that continued through the end of the GDR. On the one hand, the unstable political circumstances in East Germany led officials to focus on instrumentalizing film for state purposes. On the other hand, given the GDR's catastrophic financial situation, DEFA increasingly turned to international co-productions, but due to the political isolation of the GDR, ironically 'producers from the FRG, the officially declared enemy of East Germany, emerged as the only co-production partners who were prepared to contribute capital investment' to DEFA-conceived projects such as Rainer Simon's *Die Besteigung des Chimborazo* (Climbing the Chimborazo, FRG/GDR, 1989).[24] Though the 'Father' letter ostensibly called for a renewal of socialist filmmaking, its effect was less to offer a path forward than to signal the overall failure of the thirty-five year-old DEFA studio to achieve its remit of creating an East German national cinema that would both represent and legitimate socialist culture. In this regard, the letter portends the unravelling of socialist cinema—and of the GDR itself—that culminated in the fall of the Wall and the dismantling of DEFA less than a decade later.

The termination of state-sponsored national cinema as a project of cultural legitimation took a different but parallel path in West Germany. If Fassbinder's death of exhaustion and drug use in 1982 exemplifies the end of the New German Cinema, Wenders's *Der Stand der Dinge* represents the narrative and aesthetic culmination of NGC as movement and discourse; its metacinematic focus on Global Hollywood and commercial financing anticipates the symbolic interventions of Friedrich Zimmermann, West Germany's conservative Minister of the Interior, into filmmaking in the FRG.

Just six months after *Der Stand der Dinge* premiered at the Hof Film Festival in 1983, Zimmermann announced his decision to revoke a film subsidy payment to director Herbert Achternbusch, whose film *Das Gespenst* (The Ghost, 1982) had recently debuted in theatres. Achternbusch's tragicomedy, which imagines Jesus climbing down from the cross to take a walk in present-day Munich, was initially well received by critics.[25] However, after a publicity campaign hit the tabloids accusing the film of blasphemy, *Das Gespenst* became the subject of a short-lived public controversy.[26]

24 Meurer, *Cinema and National Identity in a Divided Germany*, 105.

25 In fact, a protestant organization, the *Jury der evangelischen Filmarbeit*, named *Das Gespenst* its film of the month in April 1983. See 'Film Widerwärtig, Säuisch.'

26 The campaign was organized by the Springer press, and included numerous articles in *Bild, Bild am Sonntag,* and *Welt am Sonntag.* See 'Filmschaffende, Rechtsum, Rückwärts Marsch!'

Seizing on this opportunity, Zimmermann denied Achternbusch the final instalment of a DM 300,000 subvention.[27]

The first film in the 33-year history of the Federal Republic's film subsidy programme to have its funding rescinded, *Das Gespenst* quickly came to symbolize the marked shift in West German cultural policy taking shape at the dawn of the Kohl era.[28] Zimmermann justified his decision to retract federal funding from *Das Gespenst* by invoking a little-known legal clause allowing the withdrawal of subvention payments to films that 'are injurious to moral or religious sentiments'.[29] However, in speeches and interviews he made clear that his real aim was the transformation of a federal subsidy system that rewarded artistic quality rather than profitability and mass appeal: 'Film [...] is there for the many, not for the few. Subventions should therefore be given with the goal of creating films that interest, speak to, and move a large share of the population.'[30] Pairing a rhetorical emphasis on conservative values with a call for market-driven policy reforms, Zimmermann's decision to revoke funding from *Das Gespenst* signalled the conservative government's intention to consider chiefly commercial measures in its evaluation of subsidy-worthy films.

In a 1983 speech held in the aftermath of the *Gespenst* controversy, Zimmermann announced changes to film subsidy policy designed to promote films with mass appeal, not least comedies, while also underscoring the fact that West German 'film is not a state cinema and shouldn't become one, but rather it operates as a private enterprise and therefore, in principle, it should also be responsible for its own cost effectiveness'.[31] This speech

27 Zimmermann's decision followed the election of Helmut Kohl to Chancellor, in October 1982, and came shortly after the March 1983 federal elections which solidified the power of the newly formed coalition government (CDU/CSU and FDP). The decision was the subject of a decade-long court case, which Achternbusch ultimately won.

28 Decrying Zimmermann's decision as censorship, filmmakers gathered at the first annual Munich Film Festival on 21 June 1983, to formulate a protest declaration. Despite its reminder that 'the political evaluation of art has a tradition in our country, it touches the darkest chapters of our history', and its proclamation that 'an attack on [the New German Film] is an attack on imagination and creativity', the 'Munich Declaration' rings anemic in comparison with previous film manifestos, since it fails to formulate any collective goals or strategies of resistance. In fact, it would prove to be the last document of its kind, a swan song of the cooperative spirit that had characterized the filmmaking enterprise of the New German Cinema in the post-Oberhausen era. See 'The Munich Declaration (1983).'

29 'Filmschaffende, Rechtsum, Rückwärts Marsch!'

30 Qtd. in Blumenberg, 'Am Ende der Schonzeit.'

31 Excerpt from Zimmermann's speech on the occasion of the presentation of the German *Filmpreise*, 25 June 1983, in Berlin, rpt. in 'Dokumentation zur Auseinandersetzung um Herbert Achternbuschs *Das Gespenst* und um Bundesinnenminister Zimmermanns Förderungskonzept.'

proved remarkably prophetic, suggesting a change in the course of German filmmaking that would become evident in subsequent decades.

Zimmermann's speech and the 'Father' letter signalled the death knell of the national-cultural film project that had followed ideologically specific but parallel trajectories in the FRG and the GDR; together these signal events heralded on a symbolic level the neoliberal turn in German cinema. Released shortly before these overt public proclamations of the failure of NGC and DEFA, Wenders's *Der Stand der Dinge* and Gusner's *Alle meine Mädchen* narrativize the end of these respective representational projects, at the same time that they exemplify key tendencies of them. Symptomatic texts for the moment of crisis, both films hold in tension competing conceptions of what cinema is and should be.

Deleuze and the 'death of cinema'

In the 1980s, the perception of a film crisis was taken up directly by filmmakers such as Wenders and Gusner as well as by film historians and theorists, driving a prolific aesthetic and theoretical investigation of cinema's status and potential at the moment of its ostensible demise. Notable among these is Gilles Deleuze's wide-ranging study of film history, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* (1983) and *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (1985), conceived and written during the period of neoliberal intensification. Indeed, as Deleuze suggests in the concluding chapter of the second volume, in *Cinema* he was thinking through—and writing against—the implications of the end of art cinema, the so-called 'death of cinema', along with the rise of television and digital media, developments that must be understood in relation to global finance capitalism.

Deleuze argues that World War II brought about a break in narrative cinema: 'The movement-image of the so-called classical cinema gave way, in the post-war period, to a direct time-image.'[32] Postwar films in particular reveal that 'time is out of joint'; they display the coexistence of multiple nonchronological layers of time. Significant to this break between the movement-image and the time-image is the betrayal by National Socialism and Stalinism of film's potential as an art of the masses: 'The revolutionary courtship of the movement-image and an art of the masses become subject was broken off, giving way to the masses subjected as psychological

32 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, xi.

automaton.'[33] *Cinema* traces a reversal, then, from the medium's attempt to extend representation to the masses to its instrumentalization for the domination of the masses (so that the project of 'the movement-image' culminates in the films of Leni Riefenstahl). Deleuze delineates how, after the betrayal of its revolutionary ideal (the crisis of the action-image), cinema turned inward on itself: '[H]aving no more stories to tell, [cinema] would take itself as object, and would be able to tell only its own story (Wenders).'[34] As his citation of Wenders suggests, the New German Cinema constitutes a central focus for Deleuze's exploration of the time-image, for in addition to exhibiting direct representations of time, the films of Wenders, Straub/Huillet, Fassbinder, Schroeter, and others also emphasize the 'missing people' who no longer comprise the political subject of cinema, turning their focus instead toward the exchange relation that conditions cinema from within, the camera/money exchange.

In this regard, one of the most well-known contributions of Deleuze's *Cinema* is the central metaphor of the crystal-image. Among other things, the crystal-image describes how cinema makes images of time directly visible by indiscernibly combining the bygone moment indexed by the preserved image and the present experience of its viewing. Among the so-called *chronosigns* through which cinema reveals time, the crystal-image makes visible 'the hidden ground of time, that is, its differentiation into two flows, that of presents which pass and that of pasts which are preserved'.[35] Bearing two distinct sides, the crystal-image is innately double. Like a mirror, it functions as a site of reversal or exchange between the visible and the invisible, the virtual and the actual, the performative and the hidden. The crystal-image is a figure whose

> indiscernibility constitutes an objective illusion; it does not suppress the distinction between the two sides, but makes it unattributable, each side taking the other's role in a relation which we must describe as reciprocal presupposition, or reversibility. The indiscernibility of the real and the imaginary, or of the present and the past, of the actual and the virtual, is definitely not produced in the head or the mind, it is the objective characteristic of certain existing images which are by nature double.[36]

33 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 264.
34 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 76.
35 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 98.
36 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 69.

As a figure marked by indiscernibility, reversibility, and ambivalence, the crystal-image helps to conceptualize the double-edged quality of neoliberal cinema. Fundamentally ambivalent, neoliberal cinema develops new formal and generic interventions into audiovisual language to make visible the structures and affects of the present, even as its worth is defined increasingly by commercial appeal and potential.

Indeed, it is no coincidence that, when discussing the crystal-image, Deleuze turns to the topic of money as a central facet of filmmaking for the first time in *Cinema*: 'The cinema as art itself lives in a direct relation with a permanent plot [*complot*], an international conspiracy which conditions it from within, as the most intimate and most indispensable enemy. This conspiracy is that of money; what defines industrial art is not mechanical reproduction but the internalized relation with money.'[37] Equating the double-sided crystal-image with time ('the transparent side') and money ('the opaque side'), Deleuze emphasizes that in the postwar period '*the cinema confronts its most internal presupposition: money, and the movement-image makes way for the time-image in one and the same operation*'.[38] Here, Deleuze implies that the shift from movement-image to time-image came about not only because of the reversal of cinema's political project in the aftermath of World War II, but also due to the seismic economic shifts emerging in its wake.

A number of metacinematic films that bear diegetic traces of cinema's confrontation with money form the nexus for Deleuze's analysis. He argues that metacinematic films, which introduce a film within a film as mirror-image or in seed-form (or both), uniquely express the relationship between the movement-image and the time-image ('The film is movement, but the film within the film is money, is time'), ultimately emphasizing the primacy of the latter over the former.[39] The key instance for Deleuze is Wenders's *Der Stand der Dinge*, whose film within a film exemplifies the crystal-image by demonstrating 'a constitutive relation between the film in process of being made and money as the totality of the film'.[40] As Deleuze's emblematic deployment of *Der Stand der Dinge* in *Cinema 2* suggests, and as the following analysis of Wenders's and Gusner's films attests, German film marks the confrontation of cinema with its 'internal presupposition'—money—in a uniquely visible way around 1980.

37 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 77.
38 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 78.
39 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 78.
40 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 77.

Der Stand der Dinge: Time is Money

Staging a dialectical conflict between American and European styles of filmmaking, embodied by the characters of Hollywood producer Gordon (Allen Goorwitz) and suggestively named German director Friedrich 'Fritz' Munro (Patrick Bauchau),[41] *Der Stand der Dinge* reflects the financialization of European filmmaking in an era marked by the rise of a *Produzentenkino*, or producer's cinema, and the decline of autonomy for auteur-directors. In fact, the production conditions of Wenders's film—which determined both its formal-aesthetic language and its story line to a great degree—derived precisely from the changing circumstances for filmmaking around 1980, which exacerbated longstanding conflicts between Hollywood and world cinema.

Shot without a script, *Der Stand der Dinge* was, in Wenders's terms, a 'found film',[42] which offered the director an unexpected opportunity to ruminate on his own aesthetic vision, directorial career, and ambivalent relationship to Hollywood. On his way from Berlin to New York in 1981, Wenders stopped over in Portugal to deliver some unused canisters of film to the set of *The Territory*, where Chilean director Raúl Ruiz had run out of film stock, stranding his cast and crew (which included Wenders's girlfriend at the time, actress Isabelle Weingarten) on the shut-down set. Wenders was on hiatus from his vexed Hollywood directorial debut, the film *Hammett*, which he was shooting at the invitation of producer Francis Ford Coppola. Unhappy with the shape of the film, Coppola had interrupted production to demand a full script rewrite. When Wenders arrived on Ruiz's set in Portugal, he found an apparently idyllic situation—a small group collaborating closely on a shoestring—that contrasted sharply with the big-budget producer-driven Hollywood set of *Hammett*. Wenders asked Ruiz's cast and crew to stick around, and two weeks later he returned from New York to shoot *Der Stand der Dinge*. An international (German-Portuguese) co-production filmed in Portugal and the United States with post-production taking place in Germany, shot in English and French and featuring an international cast, *Der Stand der Dinge* arose from and reflects the transnationalization of German film production that would increasingly predominate in the 1980s and beyond.

41 The name is a portmanteau of Friedrich Murnau and Fritz Lang, both European-born, German-speaking directors who made successful careers in Hollywood.

42 Interview with Wim Wenders.

While it ultimately follows a rather closely conceived three-act structure[43], the film begins abruptly in what appears to be a post-apocalyptic setting as we follow characters dressed in metallic suits navigating their way through an irradiated landscape that threatens to melt their skin on contact. It is only about fourteen minutes in, when the camera pulls back to reveal a film crew shooting what seems to be a science fiction movie about a nuclear catastrophe, that we realize we are watching a film within a film; as the director yells, 'Cut!', the title sequence of *Der Stand der Dinge* begins. Shortly thereafter, the cinematographer Joe Corby (Samuel Fuller) informs Munro that the film is all used up and he can no longer shoot the picture.

The second act of *Der Stand der Dinge* unspools slowly and episodically, as the cast and crew shift their attention from work on the movie to a range of unhurried creative and interpersonal pursuits: painting, photographing, making music, reading, bathing, having sex. Interspersed with these leisurely, markedly 'non-productive' (unmonetized) activities, we witness Munro's attempts to track down the producer Gordon, to arrange delivery of the necessary film stock, and to ensure that his film, *The Survivors*, does not fall apart. To the extent that events happen during this middle stretch of the film, they are presented in an unspectacular and anticlimactic way, as when an especially strong wind hurls a large piece of driftwood through the glass window of Munro's hotel room, smashing the glass, or when Joe Corby learns that his wife has died back in Los Angeles, so that he must hastily depart for Lisbon to catch a flight home. These events constitute narrative touchstones, but their enigmatic and elliptical representation—accentuated by Jürgen Knieper's slow-paced and eerie score—suggests a rejection of Hollywood standards, including plot development, characterization, and entertainment value. This rejection is underscored by the phrase 'Stories only exist in stories, whereas life goes on in the course of time without the need to turn out stories,' spoken by Munro and preserved on a scrap of paper by the actress Anna (Weingarten), a motto that punctuates this sequence of the film.

43 Kathe Geist has persuasively argued that the film's three-act structure can be viewed in dialectical terms. *Der Stand der Dinge* begins with a self-reflexive synthesis of Wenders's own aesthetic practice, combining qualities of Hollywood and European filmmaking in the film-within-the-film, *The Survivors* (a film idea that Wenders—in his endlessly self-reflexive fashion—later developed into the feature *Bis ans Ende der Welt/Until the End of the World* (1991)). This synthesis is followed by segments that distinctively isolate and contrast the elliptical narrative style and slow pacing of European art cinema with the action-driven mode of mainstream Hollywood, culminating in the violent deaths of both the German auteur and the Hollywood producer. Geist, *The Cinema of Wim Wenders*, 90-100.

However, the tone and pacing of *Der Stand der Dinge* shift again in the third act, when Munro flies to L.A. An abrupt transition takes us from the abandoned landscape of the Portuguese coast to an airport parking garage at LAX; replacing Knieper's spectral electronic music, the punk band X's anthemic 'Los Angeles' ushers in a quick succession of images—big cars, highways, and oil derricks—that crystallize the European view of America. After visiting landmarks like a downtown skyscraper (prominently displaying a Bank of America sign), the corner of Hollywood and Vine, Fritz Lang's star on Hollywood Boulevard, and Joe's modernist glass house in the Hollywood Hills, Munro happens upon his producer Gordon, who is hiding out from loan sharks in a mobile home parked at Tiny Naylor's drive-in on the Sunset Strip.

The marked emphasis on mobility in the editing and mise-en-scène of this third act returns us for a moment to the mode of the movement-image, but only to accentuate the broader magnitude of the time-image, and the dialogue of the film's penultimate sequence underscores the imbrication of time and money in *Der Stand der Dinge*. This conversation between Gordon and Munro, which takes place as the mobile home careens around night-time L.A., condenses the broader themes of Wenders's film, including the problem of financing art cinema, the relevance of black and white cinematography, European-American relations, as well as the question of storytelling. As Gordon tells Munro of his financiers, 'They're looking for a fucking story. They're not looking to kill me. They wanted a fucking story. They had a hundred thousand dollars they were willing to shell out, if I only had a story. Without a story you're dead. You can't build a movie without a story. You ever try building a house without walls?' Gordon's analogy, which likens the walls of a house to the supporting framework of a story in crafting a film, directly contradicts Munro's earlier statement that 'A film isn't a prefab house. It has a life of its own', a life that the straitjacket of Hollywood genre convention threatens to drain out of the cinema.

While Gordon ultimately expresses sympathy with Munro's style of filmmaking, including his choice to film in black and white ('I absolutely loved it!'), he is unable to convince the loan sharks—predatory lenders who represent the violence of capitalism—that *The Survivors* makes a profitable investment, and he therefore fails to secure completion financing for the film. In the end, as Gordon and Munro exit the mobile home at sunrise, they are gunned down, an event that Munro films with a handheld camera (see Illustration 2)—and it is this perspective that structures the final, tilting, subjective shots of the film. As Munro has told Gordon, 'All stories are about death,' the one thing both producer and director can agree on.

2. A symbolic death to male cinema in all its forms: Director Friedrich Munro (Patrick Bauchau) shoots his own death in Wim Wenders's *Der Stand der Dinge* (*The State of Things*, 1982).

In Deleuze's recurrent phrase, 'And the film will be finished when there is no more money left…,' a precept of the time-image that *Der Stand der Dinge* makes patently visible.[44]

The film's contrast between European and Hollywood styles of film-making notably counterposes two forms of temporality: the slow time of the characters who are on hiatus from their jobs on the film, with their desultory waiting; and Friedrich's race against time to secure the funding for his film. As Deleuze puts it:

> Wenders […] shows the deserted, run-down hotel, and the film crew, each of whom returns to his solitude, victim of a plot whose key is elsewhere; and this key is revealed in the second half of the film as the other side, the mobile home of the producer on the run who is going to get himself murdered, causing the death of the film-maker, in such a way as to make plain that there is not, and there never will be, equivalence or equality in the mutual camera-money exchange. This is the old curse which undermines the cinema: time is money.[45]

Itself a form of the crystal-image that constellates with Wenders's failed Hollywood film *Hammett*, *Der Stand der Dinge* figures the cinematic confrontation with money through its distinctive foregrounding of time along

44 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 78.
45 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 77.

multiple vectors. The film's contrasting temporalities (the slow pacing and emphasis on ordinary life when the production stops vs. the fast tempo and action of the sequences in Hollywood) open up questions of historicity raised by the threat of (art) cinema's demise.

Indeed, *Der Stand der Dinge* carefully and obsessively documents the moment of its own making in a mise-en-abyme of self-reflexivity that makes an aesthetic virtue of its 'found' production context. Specifically, the film repeatedly counterposes imagery of the emergent digital age with the swiftly vanishing remnants of the analogue world. The digital is represented most poignantly by an Apple IIe computer in Gordon's abandoned house, which scrolls through secret financial data about Munro's production, and a dot matrix printer, which spews out pixelated stills from his film. In contrast to these spectral images that associate the emergent digital with finance capitalism, Wenders's camera dwells on the analogue culture represented by the telephone, typewriter, Polaroid camera, metronome, globe, and ticking clock that occupy the attention of the film's creative personnel during their unexpected reprieve from filming.

By calling attention to the way the labour of filmmaking is disrupted, deferred, and delayed when the money runs out, the film's overt contrast of temporalities associated with Europe and the U.S., the analogue and the digital, leisure and work, foreground what Elizabeth Freeman has referred to as '*chrononormativity*, or the use of time to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity'.[46] Freeman's analysis emphasizes how temporal and sexual dissonance are often intertwined, demonstrating how queer and feminist artistic practices foreground narrative ruptures and gaps in time in order to put the past into 'meaningful and transformative relation with the present'.[47] Freeman argues that dissonant temporalities queer conventional or linear modes of narrative time, juxtaposing them with archaic or futuristic traces in order to defy the 24/7 timelines of neoliberalism and open up alternative imaginaries.

My aim here is not to make a case for *Der Stand der Dinge* as a queer or feminist film, but attention to the ways Wenders deploys temporalities does suggest a disruption of totalizing narratives that resonates with Freeman's critique of chrononormativity. As Gerd Gemünden has argued, *Der Stand der Dinge* more than any other of Wenders's films displays a self-critical rigor with regard to the aporias of the director's filmmaking practice that extends specifically to the intertwined problems of the exclusion of women and the

46 Freeman, *Time Binds*, 3.

47 Freeman, *Time Binds,* xvi.

refusal to tell stories. As with all of Wenders's films, Gemünden detects in *Der Stand der Dinge* a search for the (cinematic) father, evident in the recurrence to a range of father figures within the diegesis and metatextually (Gordon, John Ford, Fritz Lang, F.W. Murnau), as well as a narrative focus that in general revolves around men (rather than women), foregrounds male protagonists who are uncomfortable with women, and displays failed attempts at heterosexual interaction. As Gemünden argues, 'Although Wenders's cinema (like Hollywood) does not avail the female viewer a position, it still deviates from dominant cinema because it renders forms of masculine identification problematic.'[48] Although women play a limited role in *Der Stand der Dinge*, the narrative exclusion of women is overtly questioned by Friedrich's girlfriend Kate (played by the actress Viva). In an extended audiovisual meditation, we view Kate sifting through a stack of Polaroids taken by her daughter and hear the feminist critique of the photos that she records into her Dictaphone:

> What's really interesting are these Polaroids that Julia made. Here Friedrich is perfectly framed and I am only half in the picture. Here is a beautiful framing job of Friedrich, looking very dapper, and I'm not visible at all. And Mark right in the middle of the picture with Anna totally out of the shot, just her head remains. Dennis and Robert couldn't be more beautifully framed—they have plenty of space all around, even the curtains look good here. Whereas Joan only seems to have her entire body in the photograph because Dennis is on one side of her and Joe is on the other side of her; and of course Julia had to get both of these men, so Joan wins by default.[49]

Kate comments on the fact that Julia's photographs reflect the patriarchal aesthetic practices of Friedrich's (and in turn Wenders's) masculinist cinema, centring men, especially the father, and marginalizing women, not least the mother. An artist herself, Kate becomes the diegetic spokesperson for a critique of male aesthetics on several occasions throughout the film, including when she paints a landscape in India ink and subsequently offers an explanation to her daughter of the mimetic effects of black and white. Notably, Kate's character is abandoned when Friedrich departs Portugal for L.A. in the film's third act, leaving his family behind. However, while Wenders kills off both the German auteur director Friedrich and the Hollywood

48 Gemünden, 'Oedi-Pal Travels', 211.

49 Cited in Gemünden, 'Oedi-Pal Travels', 212-213.

producer Gordon at the end of *Der Stand der Dinge*, serving up a symbolic death to male cinema in all its forms, the fate of the film's female image-makers is left wide open. A meditation on the key crystal-image of time/money that makes visible art cinema's confrontation with its own impending financialization, *Der Stand der Dinge* negotiates the relation between past and present by holding in tension a series of interrelated binaries (Europe/US; analogue/digital; leisure/work; male/female) whose asymmetricity, mutual co-constitution, and instability the film thereby evokes. Wenders's prescient attention to changing (cinematic) timelines simultaneously archives what is being lost in the neoliberal turn and signals the potential for new aesthetic constellations to emerge in its wake.

Alle meine Mädchen: Watching Women Work

If *Der Stand der Dinge* ultimately equates the 'death of cinema' with the symbolic demise of the male filmmaker, the self-reflexive take on female authorship in Iris Gusner's *Alle meine Mädchen* presents a less Oedipal account of the transformation of filmmaking around 1980, albeit one that also emphasizes the gendered components of this turn. One of only a handful of East German feature films ever directed by a woman, *Alle meine Mädchen* stages a metacinematic story that visualizes and interrogates the patriarchal cinematic practices memorably summarized by Laura Mulvey's dictum 'woman as image, man as bearer of the look'.[50] With its plot about a male film student assigned to make a documentary about an all-female work brigade at the NARVA lightbulb factory in East Berlin, *Alle meine Mädchen* calls attention to the gendering of the gaze in dominant cinema.

Intervening in the state-sponsored cinematic depiction of collective labour and the worker as hero that had been the hallmark of socialist realism, Gusner's film narrativizes the changes taking place at DEFA and in the GDR more broadly during this period of ideological ambivalence. Its metacritical focus on the depiction of women signals a transition away from the tendency to foreground female characters as embodiments of socialism, instead showing women's lives as key sites for emergent neoliberal restructuring in the realms of individualism, subjectivity, and work. In its metacinematic attention to both the representation of labour and film's confrontation with money, *Alle meine Mädchen*, like *Der Stand der Dinge*, archives the neoliberal transition.

50 Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', 62.

The film's opening shot already signals its self-reflexivity and focus on the politics of representation: a close-up frames an image of Charlie Chaplin hanging askew on the wall of a professor's office at the Film Academy. As the camera pulls back to a medium shot, we see the professor hanging posters of Federico Fellini and Mikhail Romm beside the image of Chaplin. Together, the three directors comprise a triumvirate of influences on DEFA cinema in general and Gusner in particular: Chaplin was revered as a genius in the art of conveying social criticism through comedic form; Fellini, and Italian neorealism more broadly, inspired DEFA filmmakers aesthetically and politically; and Mikhail Romm, Gusner's own advisor at the Moscow Film School, served as a model for the DEFA *Alltagsfilm* of the 1970s by attending to ordinary life and the complexity of the individual in his late films.[51]

Gusner's opening sequence thus pays homage to these influential directors, but it also juxtaposes their work with the contemporary task of filmmaking in East Germany, exemplified here by would-be director Ralf Päschke, who complains about his assignment to depict women's collective labour. As Jennifer Creech has argued, the choice to cast a male actor as the diegetic filmmaker in *Alle meine Mädchen* allowed Gusner to foreground power relations in the GDR: 'As a member of the intellectual class, Ralf embodies the discursive and political power of art, and his gender difference from his filmic object overtly marks his social and political difference from them.'[52] Gusner's film exposes the gender and class hierarchies that structured social relations in East Germany despite claims of universal social equality; at the same time, as Creech points out, this gendered critique in a woman-directed film developed by the largely female production group *Gruppe Berlin* suggests 'a metacommentary on the practical absence of a female vision at DEFA'.[53] As a diegetic stand-in for the women filmmakers behind *Alle meine Mädchen* (including, in addition to Gusner, artistic advisor Tamara Trampe and screenwriter Gabrielle Kotte), Ralf thus underscores the film's gendered critique of representation, while also signalling the distance of the artist-intellectual from the everyday reality of East German workers.

From the outset, *Alle meine Mädchen* contrasts the artistic labour of filmmaking with forms of productive manual labour, as in the opening sequence when Ralf complains to his professor about his thesis assignment just as a team of cleaners arrives and begins to laboriously wash the office

51 Creech, *Mothers, Comrades, and Outcasts in East German Women's Films*, 150.
52 Creech, *Mothers, Comrades, and Outcasts in East German Women's Films*, 158.
53 Creech, *Mothers, Comrades, and Outcasts in East German Women's Films*, 159.

windows. As Ralf departs for the lightbulb factory, he encounters a group of fellow students on their way to the pub, calling out to them, 'You slackers! The Republic is working and you're partying.' When he arrives at NARVA, one of the women in the brigade remarks, 'Man, you've got it good: standing around watching while other people work!' Later, Ralf asks the brigade leader Marie if he can take a place at the assembly line in order to ground his documentary in experience, but she flatly refuses ('We make 10,000 units per shift!'), underscoring the adverse effect his lack of manual skills would have on the brigade's productivity.

However, while Ralf is ostensibly assigned to observe the women's brigade, in fact it is the women who regularly observe him. Throughout the opening sequence and beyond, the five female workers (Susi, Anita, Gertrud, Ella, and Kerstin) turn the tables on Ralf, reversing conventional looking relations in ways that overtly objectify, diagnose, and construct knowledge about the male director. Their look is tracked by a camera that pans swiftly from one woman to the next, figuring a collective female gaze that is the formal hallmark of Gusner's metacommentary. The opening scene in the lightbulb factory concludes with a humorous acknowledgement of this unconventional structure of looking in which women control the gaze when Susi (Madeleine Lierck), puffing on a cigarette, winks at Ralf. In a reverse shot, which shows Ralf tightly framed within the metal fixture of a machine, he blushes and winks back.

The reversal of the gaze—so that women become the subject rather than the object of looking relations—figures the increasing role the brigade takes on throughout the narrative of *Alle meine Mädchen* in mediating Ralf's representation of them. The women intervene both discursively and physically into Ralf's direction, cinematography, and editing, forcing him (and the audience) to evaluate critically conventional forms of depicting women and work in GDR cinema. The formally and generically disjunctive film that Ralf ends up completing—which we view together with a diegetic audience comprised of the women's brigade and Ralf's film school professors late in the film—is deemed a failure for the way it departs from the expectations of a documentary about collective labour. It is precisely through its formal and generic incongruity that Ralf's diegetic film forms a crystal-image with Gusner's film, which itself asserts a changed form of representing women that is contingent on a deferral of normative time, a point I will discuss in more detail below.

Gusner's metacommentary on gender, labour, and representation is developed not only through the character of the diegetic filmmaker, but also via a narrative focus on the conflicts involving Marie (Lissy Tempelhof), who repeatedly experiences a lack of autonomy in decision-making, although she

is tasked as brigade leader both with ensuring a higher production quota at the lightbulb factory and with fostering collective solidarity among the women working on the assembly line. Marie's authority is undermined by the (male) managers and union representatives who fail to consult with her about long-term plans, at the same time that her leadership methods are challenged by the younger generation of (female) workers in her brigade, who demand a more equitable and transparent work environment. As Gusner has explained, 'Beginning in the early 1980s I made women the focus of my films and narrated the stories from their perspectives. Through my own example, I had recognized that the condition of a society is expressed much more clearly in the way it treats women than men; social problems generally affect women much more bluntly.'[54] Indeed, by focusing on the representation of women, Gusner brings into sharp relief the double jeopardy faced by women in late socialism (and emergent neoliberalism). As a female leader, Marie experiences the inequities of the GDR's social hierarchies, and especially the contradiction between the ideology of workers' emancipation and the reality of a state run from the top-down by (male) managerial technocrats, in a particularly blunt fashion. Marie's situation also serves as a catalyst for the emergent feminist camaraderie of her brigade, who recognize that solidarity among women across class and power differences is the only way to combat the oppressive forces that have crushed Marie (even if, tellingly, this solidarity is ultimately realized only through private forms of resistance and pleasure).

Early in *Alle meine Mädchen*, Ralf is privy to a conversation in which Marie learns that she has not been consulted about a managerial decision to break up the brigade and send the women to work elsewhere during a six-month period when the factory will be retrofitted with modern equipment. Though Marie has protested the decision, the workers are infuriated to find out that they are the last to learn about the fate of their brigade—even the outsider Ralf knew before they did. When they challenge Marie about her hesitation to inform them, she counters by questioning the women's commitment to their work, bringing out the notebook in which she has painstakingly recorded over a period of several years every missed shift and extended bathroom break in order to quantify to the minute the brigade's losses in productivity. Flabbergasted by her surveillance of their labour, the women experience Marie's fixation on chrononormativity (in Freeman's sense of organizing bodies toward maximum productivity) as the ultimate betrayal of both their trust and their commitment to the brigade. This constellation

54 Gusner and Sander, *Fantasie und Arbeit*, 182.

of worker surveillance, optimization, and responsibilization points to an overlap in the discursive frames of late socialism and neoliberalism; this convergence—manifest in the erosion of collectivity and solidarity among workers and a concomitant emphasis on the economization of social relations—is underscored by the factory supervisor's response when the women complain to him about the decision to break up their brigade: 'Die Ökonomie diktiert das' ['The economy dictates it']. Ultimately, Gusner's film exposes the cruel optimism common to both state socialism and neoliberalism: the fantasy that hard work will be rewarded with a better life.[55]

The driving conflict of the film, the confrontation between the workers and their brigade leader results in Marie's nervous breakdown and institutionalization; it is also strongly implicated in the eventual failure of Ralf's documentary. Although Ralf and his cameraman have captured the entire conflict on film—and both the fact of the film crew's presence and Ralf's revelation about the break up of the brigade have played a central (and perhaps intentional) role in inciting the conflict to begin with—Ralf eventually chooses not to include this footage in his documentary. His choice is driven by the mediations of the women, especially Kerstin (Viola Schweizer), who overtly challenges how Ralf's conception of filmmaking is informed by patriarchal conventions, an emphasis on sensationalism, and a narcissistic notion of authorship.

At several junctures in *Alle meine Mädchen*, Kerstin places her hand directly over the lens of Ralf's camera, foreclosing upon the images he is shooting; she also visits the editing suite, taking hold of a strip of film and insisting that Ralf exclude it from the documentary. In a pivotal scene for the film's metacommentary on representation, Kerstin directly accuses Ralf of pursuing an exploitative and self-interested form of filmmaking when she asks whether, if given the opportunity, he would have filmed Marie's nervous breakdown. Ralf replies affirmatively, citing as a model for his own film practice the documentary genre of direct cinema, with its unflinching representation of the war in Vietnam, and rather perversely comparing himself to the Argentine-Swedish cameraman Leonardo Henrichsen, who filmed his own murder during the failed 1973 coup against Salvador Allende in Chile. As Ralf puts it, his aim is 'to show what's happening here'; in a phrase that resonates with Erich Honecker's 1971 proclamation about socialist art in the GDR, Ralf exclaims, 'There are no taboos!' Like Fritz Munro in *Der Stand der Dinge*, Ralf presents himself as an aspirational practitioner of cinema as a tool for capturing action and exposing violence, an aspiration

55 For a more thorough elaboration of a similar argument, see Stewart, 'Women of DEFA.'

that is challenged by the women in the brigade and explicitly contrasted to Gusner's own very different experiment with formal language. At a moment characterized by the crisis of cinema, *Alle meine Mädchen* reflects on the urgent question of filmic representation and its imbrication with gendered authorship, suggesting—like *Der Stand der Dinge*—that the crisis is not so much one of cinema itself as one of male aesthetics.

When their assembly line is shut down to be retrofitted, deferring both their work and the documentary shoot, the women travel together with Ralf to the sanatorium in the country where Marie is recuperating. Like the diegetic cast and crew in *Der Stand der Dinge* after their production runs out of money, the brigade in *Alle meine Mädchen* experiences the delay at the factory as an opportunity to escape the persistent demand for labour productivity in favour of non-productive pursuits like dancing, drinking, and debating that culminate in a formally and representationally remarkable sex scene. After the evening spent at the bar during which Kerstin has challenged Ralf's filmmaking practice, all six characters end up in a hotel room together in a sequence that counterposes the more overtly political forms of representation favoured by Ralf in the preceding conversation with a new way of depicting pleasure, affect, and bodily sensation. Characterized by an elliptical editing style, a mobile camera, and almost no dialogue, the sequence departs from the dominant form of the film's narrative, literally creating a 'time out' within the film, similar to a dream sequence, in which normative conventions and practices are suspended.

The scene begins when Ralf returns to his hotel room to fetch a jacket for Kerstin and discovers Susi and Anita (Barbara Schnitzler) in his bed, with only their giggling faces and naked feet sticking out from under the comforter. Ralf makes as if to leave, but then changes his mind and steps into the room, shutting the door behind him. Departing from the shot/reverse shot editing that has predominated up until now, the camera pans away from Ralf as he enters the room, making a wide sweep to the left and coming to rest on a large mirror set in the wardrobe door. Ralf re-enters the frame, and we now see him reflected in the looking glass. Demonstrative of the various forms of reversal (of the gaze, of the economy, of representation) explored by Gusner's film, this shot also marks the temporal and sexual dissonance of the subsequent sequence. We watch Ralf strip down to his underwear and pull the comforter off the bed to expose the two women lying beneath. As he does so, the camera makes a 270-degree pan away from the mirror, sweeping around the room to present Susi and Anita in full view (and fully clothed), laughing hysterically at having pulled one over on Ralf by making him believe they were naked under the blanket. Ralf exhorts

them to take off their clothes, and as they begin to undress Kerstin walks into the room, followed by Ella and Gertrud. Wearing only undergarments, Ralf, Susi, and Anita collapse laughing in a pile on the bed. Ella turns on the radio, and the song that is playing replaces the diegetic soundtrack, so that we no longer hear the sounds made by the characters, who now pass around a goblet of wine and begin to touch, kiss, and caress one another as they roll around the big hotel bed. We see close-ups of nipples under see-through bras, bra straps falling down to reveal supple shoulders, satin underwear over bare bottoms, and fingers stroking breasts and thighs. As Creech notes, *Alle meine Mädchen* is one of only a handful of DEFA films to represent same-sex desire and intimacy among women: 'Privileging the female point of view and female desire for the female body, the camera constructs the spectator's voyeuristic look within a lesbian continuum by positioning the women simultaneously as subjects and objects of desire. The camera emphasizes, through close-ups, the women's delight in each other's bodies,' developing a unique filmic vocabulary to convey female pleasure.[56]

Non-normative sexuality is paired with dissonant time in this sequence, not only in the way temporality is marked across multiple registers as suspended and deferred, but also in the way the scene juxtaposes archaic and contemporary forms of representing women on screen, opening up, in Freeman's sense, onto alternative imaginaries. In the final shots of the scene, Anita picks up a long, sheer scarf and, as the music changes to a faster paced disco beat, she begins to dance, draping the scarf over the camera lens, and then snaking it around herself and twirling its long ends. Anita's performance recalls the serpentine dances that were a popular subject of early cinema, for example in the Skladanowsky Brothers' renowned Wintergarten programme, where the short *Serpentinentanz Mlle. Ancion* (*Mademoiselle Ancion's Serpentine Dance*, 1895) debuted alongside other sensational subjects in early Bioscope exhibitions.

As Tom Gunning has famously argued, the 'cinema of attraction' represented by early variety show films solicited the attention of the spectator with spectacular displays of visibility, exerting a power to show things and make images be seen, and thereby demanding a form of viewing very different from the absorption created by later forms of standardized narrative cinema. As Gunning argues, early cinema shares with later avant-garde filmmaking a particular relation to the spectator—'that of exhibitionist confrontation rather than diegetic absorption'—and its common practices, such as the recurrent look of the actor at the camera, rupture the cinematic

56 Creech, *Mothers, Comrades, and Outcasts in East German Women's Films*, 175-176.

3. Alternative cinematic imaginaries: Iris Gusner's *Alle meine Mädchen* (*All My Girls*, 1980) departs from conventions of narrative and realism as Anita (Barbara Schnitzler) performs a serpentine dance.

illusion of reality.[57] For Gunning, the cinema of attraction represents an alternative cinematic trajectory that does not disappear with the hegemony of narrative cinema, but rather 'goes underground', resurfacing in certain genres (e.g. the musical) as well as in oppositional filmmaking practices that foreground cinematic spectacle and disrupt storytelling conventions.

Harkening back to this cinema of attraction, Anita's serpentine dance disrupts the linear narrative of *Alle meine Mädchen,* and the affinity between this scene and silent cinema is further underscored by the absence of any diegetic sound. In the final shot of the sequence, which departs from realism entirely, a floral painting hanging above the bed in the hotel room expands to fill the entire screen, as Anita's dancing figure floats in the air, superimposed onto the floral backdrop (see Illustration 3). Recalling Heide Schlüpmann's description of the 'secret complicity' between cinematography and women's emancipation in the era before World War I, this noteworthy shot – like the sequence as a whole – imagines a history of film form and spectatorship that might have opened onto a different future.[58]

A hard cut accompanied by the sound of a rooster crowing brings us back to reality, and we see Ralf and Kerstin lying in bed the next morning, leaving us to wonder whether the orgy was a dream after all. Suspended outside the hetero- and chrononormativity that otherwise characterizes *Alle*

57 Gunning, 'The Cinema of Attraction', 66.
58 Schlüpmann, *The Uncanny Gaze*, 1.

meine Mädchen, the orgy scene demonstrates women's collective resistance to the conflicts animating both Gusner's narrative and the late GDR more broadly, including failing productivity, rising inequality, vanishing solidarity, and the rule of managerial technocracy. In the liminal space of the hotel, the women find solidarity through mutual pleasure, but this is a private and provisional form of unity that notably does not take place within the managed collectivity of the factory or the East German public sphere, and it is also short-lived.

For soon after their return to the factory, a longstanding conflict between Kerstin and the other women resurfaces, forcing a confrontation with money that supersedes their tentative camaraderie. Already at the outset of the film, Anita has informed Ralf that he shouldn't bother talking to Kerstin, because she is not an official member of the women's brigade. Anita's comment constructs Kerstin as an outsider; as we soon learn, Kerstin has graduated from secondary school and should be studying at university but has instead been delegated to work on the assembly line as a form of punishment (she is on probation, but we are not informed of her infraction). Kerstin's presence in the narrative attests to the paradoxical (de-)valuation of productive manual labour in the GDR as a site of ostensible emancipation that is also inflicted as a punishment.

Kerstin also facilitates Gusner's focus on the complexity of GDR class distinctions, and she later becomes the catalyst for the film's metadiscursive attention to money and debt (for a further discussion of labour, money, and debt in the German cinema of neoliberalism, see Chapter 6). Kerstin's background as a member of the educated bourgeoisie is the source of repeated conflicts in *Alle meine Mädchen*, ranging from arguments over punctuation and grammar to an accusation of robbery, when Anita suspects Kerstin of theft from the brigade's till. Discovering a large sum of money missing from her locker, Anita immediately assumes that Kerstin is the culprit, because of her outsider status, her lower pay grade, and her apparent criminal past. Anita soon finds the missing money in an apron pocket and realizes that her accusation was a mistake, but Kerstin has already left the brigade and the factory. When Ralf also fails to believe Kerstin's account of events, she leaves with a suitcase, disappearing from the narrative for good.

The brigade's inability to integrate Kerstin (except for in the orgy scene) signals the failure of collective labour and social solidarity as political projects in the GDR, just as Ralf's film reflects the failure of state socialism as a representational project. Toward the end of *Alle meine Mädchen*, Ralf's advisor castigates him for not taking advantage of the opportunity to screen his film on television, since he didn't finish it on time. Ralf explains that the

brigade's problems made it impossible to stick to his timeline and emphasizes his empathy for the women: 'They are more important to me now than any deadlines!' Subsequently, his advisor defends Ralf to another professor for demonstrating empathy for his subjects rather than careerism. In a pointed critique of the general withdrawal from public life in the late GDR, Ralf's advisor contrasts his commitment to the brigade with the pervasive loneliness and drinking in private that characterized the *Nischengesellschaft* (niche society).[59] The professor's comment emphasizes the privatization of collective social life that characterized East German society in the 1970s and 1980s, pointing once more to the failure of state socialism's dominant narratives.

In the penultimate scene of *Alle meine Mädchen*, the women from the brigade sit in a screening room and view Ralf's film. Formally and generically heterogeneous, the film combines slapstick scenes shot in the factory with documentary-style close-ups of Anita speaking earnestly about gender and labour, punctuated by repeated jump cuts. Obviously straying from dominant expectations of a documentary about socialist labour, Ralf's film develops a changed formal language influenced both by the cinematic icons Chaplin, Romm, and Fellini and by the women themselves, not least the absent Kerstin, who have forced Ralf to reckon with his ideas about filmic representation. As Creech points out, the self-reflexive film within the film unmasks film's transparency, instead portraying 'film as a medium in which narrative is constructed and power is negotiated'.[60] Notably, women are centred as the agents, subjects, and viewers of this metacinematic representation. While reaction shots show the women in the diegetic audience laughing and smiling at their own representation, however, the ambiguous responses of the film school faculty leave open the question of whether Ralf's film will ever find another audience.

Der Stand der Dinge and *Alle meine Mädchen* dramatize the transition away from auteur cinema, the end of filmmaking as a project of national-cultural legitimation, and the increasing centrality of commercial considerations in both West and East Germany. At the same time, these films archive the changing modes of ordinary life and the speeding up of time in narratives that take place on the cusp of neoliberalization.

Despite their markedly different production contexts, both films make visible cinema's increasing turn away from the project of representing the

59 The term *Nischengesellschaft* was coined by journalist Günter Gaus. See Gaus, *Wo Deutschland liegt*.

60 Creech, *Mothers, Comrades, and Outcasts in East German Women's Films*, 189.

people in favour of attention to the exchange relation as the principle of both cinema and capitalism itself, in Deleuze's sense: 'The only rejoinder to the harsh law of cinema—a minute of which costs a day of collective work—is Fellini's: "When there is no more money left, the film will be finished."'[61] The projects of postwar art cinema and especially of socialist cinema still represented by *Der Stand der Dinge* and *Alle meine Mädchen* were ultimately made impossible by the ascension of market forces.

The *Filmkrise* at the outset of the 1980s arose from and responded to pronounced economic and political changes, initiating a transitional phase for filmmaking on both sides of the Wall. Ultimately, the neoliberal turn in German cinema resolved not only the *Filmkrise* itself, but also the underlying contradiction between the commercial and cultural functions of film that had driven cinema debates throughout the 20th century. It did so by appropriating the cultural *for* the commercial, by aestheticizing market-driven consumer society, and by co-opting artistic and political resistance and difference. The resultant German cinema of neoliberalism, memorably labelled by Rentschler as a 'cinema of consensus', has proved remarkably resilient on both the domestic and world markets, as we will see in Chapter 2.

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61 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 77.

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2. Producing German Cinema for the World: Global Blockbusters from Location Germany

Abstract
Extending attention to the relevance of Deleuze's film theory for the German cinema of neoliberalism, this chapter builds on influential approaches to recent German film in analyzing *Das Boot* (1981); *Run Lola Run* (1998); and *The Lives of Others* (2006). The chapter focuses on strategies employed by German blockbusters to address international audiences while affirming the victory of global capitalist imperatives over local film traditions; it demonstrates how the predominance of commercial imperatives underpins the emergence of particular formal, aesthetic, and generic traits, which aim to subsume and diffuse the heterogeneity and variety of Germany's legacy of counter-hegemonic filmmaking. A feminist analysis of the films emphasizes how their affirmative vision is based on an ambiguous and often misogynist gender politics.

Keywords: Wolfgang Petersen, Tom Tykwer, Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, Gilles Deleuze, affirmative politics, gender

In 1979, shortly after taking over as the CEO of Neue Constantin, the only remaining film production and distribution company still entirely under German ownership, Bernd Eichinger offered DM 2 million of completion funding to the Bavaria Studios production *Das Boot* in exchange for its German distribution rights. Eichinger's canny investment in *Das Boot*—at that time the most expensive German film ever made—underscored his vision for the transformation of German cinema away from the nationally specific *Autorenfilm* and toward a more flexible, national-global hybrid film, a fundamentally new form of popular, market-oriented filmmaking whose emergence Eichinger played a crucial role in facilitating through

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his long career as Germany's most significant producer and film mogul of the contemporary era.[1]

As discussed in Chapter 1, the 'film crisis' of the early 1980s initiated a period of changes to the German film landscape. These included the revision of film subvention laws to reward commercial films; the founding of regional film boards with the express purpose of improving the quality of German films and strengthening the economy of Germany as a film location; and the renewal of genre cinema. This period also saw a massive increase both in the number of (West) German films produced (from 49 in 1980 to 68 in 1989) and in the domestic market share of German films (from 9.3 percent in 1980 to 23.4 percent in 1988).[2] Though these numbers would eventually shrink again—demonstrating the long-term consequences of the liberalization of German film policy, which ultimately led to German cinema's very low average domestic market share—they underscore the fact that the commercial renewal of German cinema usually attributed to the 1990s was already firmly grounded in the West German film culture of the 1980s. Indeed, already by the mid-1980s, (West) German cinema rebounded from the ostensible film crisis, not least due to the market-oriented strategies initiated by Eichinger.

Offering a new model of German cinema with international appeal, Eichinger's producer-driven genre films supplanted German art cinema by performing as art films in the context of their international distribution, while simultaneously creating new expectations at home for a highly commercialized cinema that could compete with the best the global film industries have to offer. Characterized by its origins in and responses to the New Economy and the social, political, and ideological changes occasioned by neoliberalism, this new commercial cinema transforms national culture into market culture. In representing German history and society, such films exemplify 'a rhetorical commitment to diversity, and to a narrow, formal, nonredistributive form of "equality" politics for the new millennium'.[3] Rather than countering the difference and oppositional qualities historically represented by art cinema (particularly the New German Cinema), the cinema of neoliberalism patented by Eichinger co-opts its aesthetic styles and progressive politics, including feminism, antiracism, LGBTQ justice, and class-based struggle, for an ultimately affirmative world view. These

1 On Eichinger's role in facilitating the emergence of market-oriented filmmaking in Germany, see also Baer, 'Producing Adaptations.'

2 Uka, 'Der deutsche Film "schiebt den Blues"', 110-111.

3 Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality?*, 44.

ideologically promiscuous films allow viewers to indulge in the thrills offered by countercinema, alternative lifestyles, or leftist politics, while ultimately foreclosing on the critiques they offer and channelling them for the agendas of advanced capitalism.

Walter Uka has described the early 1980s as a 'moment when two different film cultures collided: the American producer's cinema and the European auteur cinema'.[4] Over the course of his career, Eichinger in many ways succeeded in reconciling these two models by serving as an auteur producer who both facilitated and profited from a paradigm shift in German filmmaking whose long-term effects are still in play in the German cinema of today. Eleven of the twenty top-grossing German films in the domestic market during the period between 1980-2010 were produced by Neue Constantin, almost all of them by Eichinger himself.[5] Eichinger's global success is evident in both the profitability and the prestige of his films around the world, including his multiple Oscar nominations.

By promoting a new form of market-oriented cinema, Eichinger made certain that films would continue to be 'made in Germany' in the 21st century, and that both domestic and international audiences would watch them.[6] Yet the three films I consider in this chapter—Wolfgang Petersen's *Das Boot* (1981); Tom Tykwer's *Lola rennt* (*Run Lola Run*, 1998); and Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's *Das Leben der Anderen* (*The Lives of Others*, 2006)—also demonstrate how Eichinger's neoliberal cinema and its offspring affirm the victory of global capitalist imperatives over local artistic traditions, whose strategies they appropriate and neutralize. As my feminist analysis of these films bears out, this affirmative vision promotes discourses of personal responsibility, freedom, choice, and self-sacrifice, typically articulated through a misogynist gender politics that frequently sidelines women

4 Uka, 'Der deutsche Film "schiebt den Blues"', 105.

5 These are, beginning with the most successful, *Der Schuh des Manitu* (Manitu's Shoe, 2001); (*T*)*Raumschiff Surprise—Periode 1* (Dreamship Surprise – Period 1, 2004); *Der bewegte Mann* (The Moved Man, released in English as *Maybe...Maybe Not*, 1994; see Chapter 5); *The Name of the Rose* (1986); *Das Parfum* (*Perfume*, 2006); *Werner—Das muss kesseln* (Werner – That's Got to Be Fun, released in English as *Eat My Dust!*, 1996); *Wickie und die starken Männer* (Wickie and the Strong Men, 2009); *Werner—Beinhart* (Werner – Hard as Bone, 1996); *The Neverending Story* (1984); *Christiane F. – Wir Kinder vom Bahnhof Zoo* (*Christiane F.*, 1981); and *Der Untergang* (*Downfall*, 2004). Eichinger produced all of these except for (*T*)*Raumschiff Surprise* and *Wickie und die starken Männer*. See http://www.insidekino.de/DJahr/DAlltimeDeutsch50.htm.

6 As Halle points out, 'rather than German directors making German films, now industry experts speak of a film as "made in Germany" or from "location Germany" [*Standort Deutschland*]', a shift that Eichinger played a key role in bringing about. Halle, 'German Film, European Film', 252.

or expunges them altogether from the filmic narrative. Building on that analysis, this chapter takes a critical view of the global blockbusters whose form Eichinger helped to engineer, while also recognizing the ingenuity of his strategies and their significance for German film history.

Producing Global Blockbusters from Location Germany

To this day the top-grossing German film in the U.S. (and among the top-grossing worldwide), *Das Boot* pioneered a range of strategies that helped to shift discourses about and expectations of German cinema. These strategies include a renewed emphasis on stars; stylistic developments like shooting coverage that were previously unusual for German films because of their expense; and visual and narrative innovations designed to increase global competitiveness despite factors like low budgets and the unfamiliarity of the German language to foreign audiences. Inasmuch as Eichinger's stylistic trademarks are all self-consciously adapted from Hollywood to some degree, they align his films with the production values and extradiegetic expectations of Global Hollywood. At the same time, by fulfilling a double function as big-budget domestic successes that could also be marketed to arthouse audiences abroad as specifically German or European cinema, Eichinger's productions represent a kind of reverse engineering of the Global Hollywood strategy to create exportable films that make huge foreign profits. Following on the strategies employed by *Das Boot*, the global blockbusters *Lola rennt* and *Das Leben der Anderen*—respectively the third and second highest grossing German films in the U.S.—also achieved popularity and profitability with innovative production models underpinning new formal and aesthetic effects.[7]

As discussed in Chapter 1, Wim Wenders's *Der Stand der Dinge* and Iris Gusner's *Alle meine Mädchen* employ metacinematic narratives about film production in the 1980s to mediate and reflect on two different conceptions of cinema at the inception of the neoliberal turn: the national-cultural film project of the New German Cinema and DEFA, on the one hand, and the mandate to marketize by creating (transnational) films with commercial appeal, on the other. By contrast, the films discussed in this chapter

7 Ranked at number 24 among highest grossing foreign-language films, *Das Boot* is the top-grossing German-language film of all time in the U.S. followed by *Das Leben der Anderen* (ranked number 25) and *Lola rennt* (ranked number 44). See https://www.boxofficemojo.com/genres/chart/?id=foreign.htm.

represent a fundamentally new stage in German film history by resolving the contradiction between the cultural and commercial functions of film. Each film succeeds in competing with Global Hollywood by following a slightly different template for abrogating the cultural/commercial binary: *Das Boot* co-opts elements associated with German art cinema in the context of the transnationally popular war film genre; *Lola rennt* marketizes the German auteur film; and *Das Leben der Anderen* appropriates the German cinematic strategy of defamiliarization for a melodrama designed to elicit cathartic emotions. In this way, each film endows universally familiar aesthetic experiences (connected to genre, auteurism, and cinematic address) with aspects of difference associated with the particularity of German (film) history. The resulting global success of *Das Boot, Lola rennt,* and *Das Leben der Anderen* is especially noteworthy in an era defined by declining state support for film, intensified competition for audience attention due to the rise of the home video market, the concomitant increase in audiovisual and entertainment choices, and the particular difficulties faced by filmmakers in small national markets like Germany in competing with the massive productions of a few dominant global media conglomerates.

Lola rennt was produced by X-Filme Creative Pool, the immensely successful production company co-founded by director Tom Tykwer in 1994 together with producer Stefan Arndt and directors Wolfgang Becker and Dani Levy. Modelled on the Hollywood company United Artists (founded in 1919 by Charlie Chaplin, Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks, and D.W. Griffith), X-Filme Creative Pool describes its project as producing 'challenging (audience) films – or as "Variety" called them "smart movies people want to see"'.[8] As the motto on X-Filme's profile page attests – 'Film is like life after editing the boring parts' – the company's production strategy overtly departs from the tradition of depicting the ordinary in European art film, while retaining other elements of that tradition such as attention to artistry and an emphasis on quality content. X-Filme follows an integrated model from conception through production to distribution, and the company is noteworthy for its pursuit of new technologies for production and distribution across multiple platforms. Many of its biggest commercial and critical successes have been international co-productions, such as *Cloud Atlas* (2012), co-directed by Tom Tykwer with Lilly and Lana Wachowski, the most expensive independently financed European film of all time, and the Michael Haneke pictures *Das weiße Band* (*The White Ribbon*, 2009), which won the Palme D'Or at Cannes, and *Amour* (2012), which won both the Palme D'Or and the Oscar for Best

8 X-Filme Creative Pool, Website.

Foreign Language Film. The fact that these three films were shot in English, German, and French respectively reflects the transnational and multilingual production model pursued by X-Filme, whose production code specifically eschews traditional comedies, remakes, and literary adaptations of German classics because of their limited appeal to audiences abroad.[9] More recently, the company has achieved international success with the streaming series *Babylon Berlin* (2017-), the most expensive non-English-language television production ever, which was facilitated by an innovative public-private financing model. However, *Lola rennt* remains the biggest hit of all time for X-Filme and one that continues to drive the company's formula for success.

Das Leben der Anderen was produced by Wiedemann & Berg Filmproduktion, at the time a very young company founded by two film school classmates of director Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, with whom he had collaborated on several short films made during his Munich studies. In many ways imitating Eichinger's production strategy, Max Wiedemann and Quirin Berg have positioned themselves as auteur producers whose profile 'stands for successful cinema films',[10] consisting of a mixed production roster designed to appeal to both German and international audiences. Wiedemann & Berg achieved such a marked success with their very first film production—*Das Leben der Anderen* sold 2.4 million tickets in Germany alone and won the Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film—in part by signing a lucrative pre-production deal with Buena Vista International, the international distribution arm of the Walt Disney company, which secured international distribution rights to the film in return for a large infusion of capital. This deal helped the filmmakers to maintain very high production values for *Das Leben der Anderen*, a strategy they have subsequently pursued with international partners such as Sony Pictures and Netflix, notably with *Dark* (2017-2020), the first Netflix series produced entirely in Germany. Meanwhile, well-known comedies like *Männerherzen* (*Men in the City*, 2009) and *Willkommen bei den Hartmanns* (*Welcome to Germany*, 2016) have proved remarkably popular on the German market.

Key to the particular production strategies underpinning the global success of *Das Boot, Lola rennt,* and *Das Leben der Anderen* is the way that they universalize familiar elements of German national cinema, in terms of both content and form. Their narratives rely on images of and associations with the specific trajectory of German history in the 20th Century (World War II, post-unification Berlin, and the East German past respectively),

9 X-Filme Creative Pool, 'Eins, zwei, drei…X Filme', 41.

10 Wiedemann & Berg, Website.

but their depiction of this history aims to transcend time and space rather than focusing on the particularity of the German context. In this way, all three films participate in the dominant neoliberal tendency to normalize the German past. Likewise, they draw on widespread associations with German film and cultural history but simultaneously evacuate familiar tropes and icons of their original meanings in order to resignify them for the affirmative and conciliatory schemas of the present.

Characteristic for these films is thus how they decouple aesthetic innovation from political critique, employing formal qualities historically associated with defamiliarization in the service of marketability. In contrast to a trajectory of German filmmaking visible in productions associated with the New German Cinema, DEFA, and the Berlin School discussed elsewhere in this book, whose focus on ordinary life archives Germany's neoliberal transition, *Das Boot, Lola rennt,* and *Das Leben der Anderen* turn their lens on the sensational, metaphysical and transcendent. In their focus on the extraordinary, these films draw precisely on the reputation of Germany for producing visually inventive, quality art cinema; experimentation with form is thus as crucial to their unique approach to storytelling as it is to their popular appeal. However, rather than archiving the transformations of daily life, social structures, and the city that emerge through the process of neoliberalization, thereby rendering them visible—as do German films informed by various realist and counter-hegemonic projects—the films addressed in this chapter co-opt the forms of countercinema for commercial purposes at the same time as they anticipate or even foretell latent traits of global capitalism and neoliberal cinema that will subsequently become manifest. The result is a disorganized filmic language, a key characteristic of the German cinema of neoliberalism. As I argue here, this language is nascent in *Das Boot*, a film that predicts the success of the subsequent global blockbusters *Lola rennt* and *Das Leben der Anderen*, the latter presenting a marked intensification of the market-oriented strategies first debuted by Eichinger.

Three explanatory paradigms have predominated in German film studies for considering the developments I am concerned with here: Eric Rentschler's conception of the 'cinema of consensus'; Randall Halle's explication of the transnationalization of German film 'after Germany'; and theorizations of the heritage genre, elaborated in the German context in particular by Lutz Koepnick. *Das Boot, Lola rennt,* and *Das Leben der Anderen* exemplify aspects of all three critical categories, which help to explain the changing production and reception contexts as well as the aesthetic and political transformation of German cinema after the neoliberal turn.

Writing in 2000, Rentschler looked back critically on the first decade of postwall cinema, emphasizing his own 'ardent nostalgia' for the oppositional films of the New German Cinema and his 'marked disdain and bitter sense of loss' regarding the popular cinema that had come to replace it.[11] Rentschler details how postwall directors, all consummate professionals (as opposed to the autodidacts and critics-turned-filmmakers of the NGC), accede to the now hegemonic view of cinema as a commercial enterprise and a 'site of mass diversion' rather than a forum for aesthetic experimentation and political and moral commentary: 'Quite emphatically, the most prominent directors of the post-wall era aim to please, which is to say that they consciously elicit a new German consensus. In this sense the cinema they champion is one with a decidedly affirmative calling.'[12] Though Rentschler conceives of the cinema of consensus as a postwall development, he traces its rise back to the change in film subsidy laws initiated by West German Minister of the Interior Friedrich Zimmermann in 1983 (see Chapter 1) as well as to changing 'fantasy scenarios and master narratives' underpinning generational relations to film in the postwar period and beyond.[13] In this regard, Rentschler's account is especially important for the way it emphasizes how economic change drives aesthetic and political change in German film during the late 20th Century.

Halle charts these same changes by analysing the transnational shift in German film production, arguing that transnationalism forms the 'affiliative and ideational network' that characterizes culture in the era of globalization. While Halle acknowledges how film production is increasingly defined by global capitalism, in contrast to Rentschler he emphasizes 'the vibrancy of cultural production that globalization and transnationalism bring forward'.[14] Describing the transnational aesthetic that emerges from the turn to new ensembles of filmmaking that transcend the confines of the nation, Halle concludes, 'Globalization establishes an expanded trade in images and in so doing opens up the possibilities of representation, enriches the articulations of visual language, and develops a more sophisticated spectator.'[15] Halle also expresses optimism about the positive potential of the shift away from national cinema, which, he argues, displaces ethnocentrism and creates a new 'intersubjective openness': 'The move from "made for Germans" to "made in

11 Rentschler, 'From New German Cinema to the Post-Wall Cinema of Consensus', 261.
12 Rentschler, 'From New German Cinema to the Post-Wall Cinema of Consensus', 264.
13 Rentschler, 'From New German Cinema to the Post-Wall Cinema of Consensus', 271.
14 Halle, *German Film after Germany*, 15.
15 Halle, *German Film after Germany*, 88.

Germany" makes possible films that mark a subtle but significant aesthetic shift in the representation of the lives of Germans, of life in Germany. In the products of transformed national film industries we find models for a reimagination of community."[16] Thus, for Halle, the emphasis on profitability and self-sustainability in the film industry produces a filmmaking practice that foregrounds entertainment while also heightening critical awareness of cultural difference and revealing openness to experimentation with film form.

This reimagining of community is a key premise of the German heritage film, the wave of historical films that Lutz Koepnick describes as 'a symptomatic and theoretically challenging expression of postmodern globalization'.[17] German heritage films stage conciliatory narratives that 'present the texture of the past as a source of visual attractions and pleasures', repackaging history as an object of mass identification and consumption.[18] Emerging in the 1990s, these films use melodramatic German-Jewish love stories to normalize the past, representing the Nazi period not only as an era of terror and tragedy, but also as one filled with catchy songs, cool costumes with retro-vintage appeal, and an air of dangerous adventure. A hybrid genre, the heritage film mediates elements of art cinema and popular culture, presenting an essentially conservative ideology in tandem with a multicultural vision of the past that challenges dominant views of gender and ethnicity. Heritage films are characterized by high production values, and they privilege setting over narrative, and mise-en-scène over editing. Yet unlike costume dramas, which generally use history as a backdrop, heritage films are actively involved in negotiating and re-presenting the past. While he is critical of their affirmative politics, Koepnick also suggests that heritage films participate in reconstructing a pluralistic vision of the German past that reflects, at least to some extent, more progressive understandings of race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality in the present: 'Despite their overt nostalgia, these films actively reinterpret the past according to changing views of history, memory, gender, and ethnicity

16 Halle, 'German Film, European Film', 258.

17 Koepnick, '"Amerika gibt's überhaupt nicht"', 194. Pioneered in Britain in the 1980s, the heritage film (a term coined by British film theorist Andrew Higson and much debated in Anglo-American film scholarship) designated a production trend that repackaged British history in affirmative terms coherent with the rise of Thatcherism. Reflecting a postmodern awareness of their own constructedness and an emphasis on setting, heritage films are a primary genre of the cinema of neoliberalism.

18 Koepnick, 'Reframing the Past', 50.

within the bounds of what we must understand as a self-confident mode of European popular filmmaking."[19]

My analysis builds on these three influential paradigms for describing the changing landscape of German cinema, while accentuating how the context of neoliberalism shapes and takes shape in the consensus-driven political agendas, transnational ensembles, and affirmative aesthetics of German films from the 1980s on. At the same time, this chapter expands on my previous discussion of Deleuze's film theory to consider its relevance for understanding the popular, market-oriented filmmaking that emerged in the wake of the neoliberal turn. Deleuze's account of film history focuses on a canon of auteur films defined by Parisian cineastes and largely excludes industrial entertainment films from further consideration within the paradigm of *Cinema*. Even as he argues for the critical potential of modern cinema's aesthetic practices, Deleuze generally downplays the political and social contexts in which they operate. However, by considering here how Deleuze's paradigm connects to popular, commercial films like *Das Boot*, *Lola rennt*, and *Das Leben der Anderen,* I demonstrate how *Cinema* can open up generative standpoints for the analysis of market-oriented filmmaking. By the same token, my analysis suggests that the disappearance of politics in Deleuze's *Cinema* is symptomatic for the era of neoliberalism, whose hegemonic mode of discourse works precisely to erase politics from view. As Fredric Jameson has written of Deleuze in a different context, his writing is 'prophetic of tendencies latent within capitalism itself'.[20] The three films discussed here may suggest some unforeseen consequences of Deleuze's characterization of film history, inasmuch as they appropriate for the cinema of neoliberalism the elements he identifies as critical forces of art cinema.

The Cinema of Neoliberalism and the Time-Image

As discussed in Chapter 1, Deleuze's account of film history, conceived and written during the period of neoliberal intensification in the 1980s, responded to the widespread perception of a film crisis by investigating cinema's past and present, and theorizing its future, at a moment characterized by the increased commercialization and marketization of film; the erosion of state sponsorship for filmmaking; and technological changes affecting production, distribution, and reception. Looking back at postwar

19 Koepnick, 'Reframing the Past', 56.

20 Jameson, 'The End of Temporality', 711.

art cinema from the standpoint of the 1980s, Deleuze suggests that World War II brought about a break in narrative cinema, such that 'time is no longer subordinated to movement, but rather movement to time'.[21] For Deleuze, the rupture of teleological conceptions of historical time following the cataclysms of the mid-20th Century underpins a shift from a cinema in which action (the movement-image) determines the succession of time to a cinema dedicated to capturing images of time directly. Displaying the coexistence of multiple layers or 'folds' of time, modern films respond to the bankruptcy of the movement-image by 'making visible these relationships of time which can only appear in a creation of the image'.[22] Deleuze's overall project traces the decline of cinema's potential as an art of the masses in the early 20th century through its instrumentalization for the domination of the masses at mid-century to its turn inward to metacinematic storytelling about film form and the 'camera-money exchange' in the later 20th century. Deleuze writes of how 'space and time becoming more and more expensive in the modern world, art had to make itself international industrial art, that is, cinema, in order to *buy* space and time as "imaginary warrants of human capital"',[23] suggesting a direct link among market forces, internationalization, and the shift from the movement-image to the time-image that my reading of global blockbusters from location Germany makes explicit.

A central facet of the time-image, embodied for Deleuze by the crystal, is the function of splitting: 'since the past is constituted not after the present that it was but at the same time, time has to split itself in two at each moment as present and past [...], it has to split the present into two heterogeneous directions, one of which is launched towards the future while the other falls into the past.'[24] This splitting, or forking, time entails paradoxical notions such as 'contingent futures', 'incompossible presents', and 'not-necessarily true pasts' that lead to a fundamental questioning of truth and ultimately give rise to a new form of narrative: 'narration ceases to be truthful, that is, to claim to be true, and becomes fundamentally falsifying.'[25] In contrast to conventional fictions, which posit their own veracity and conform to common-sense conceptions of space and time, 'falsifying narratives' subvert truth by abandoning those conceptions. Certainty about past, present, and future, and how these moments in time exist in relation to each other, is cast

21 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, xi.
22 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, xii.
23 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 78.
24 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 81.
25 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 131.

into doubt. In the case of cinema, this doubt is created, for example, through a deliberate confounding of continuity editing; rather than exhibiting clear connections across space and time, editing choices link noncontiguous spaces and unrelated times, causing viewers to question space-time relationships, to deliberate upon the constructed nature of truth, and to consider the role of their own subjective perception.

However, as Claire Colebrook argues, 'The importance of Deleuze's definition of modern cinema does not lie in the standard post-modern line that everything is unreal and that we are not sure what reality is any more. Cinema of the time-image, for Deleuze, is a transcendental analysis of the real; it explores all those virtual planes and differences from which actual worlds are possible.'[26] Ultimately, this analysis of the real emerges from the transformative 'power of the false', which is seen in art cinema: 'Only the creative artist takes the power of the false to a degree which is realized, not in form, but in transformation. [...] What the artist is, is *creator of truth*, because truth is not to be achieved, formed, or reproduced; it has to be created'.[27] The generative problematization of truth in falsifying narratives, which allow cinema to represent both the labyrinthine quality of time and the subjective nature of perception, are exemplified for Deleuze by the classics of the European New Wave, particularly Alain Resnais's *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* (*Last Year at Marienbad,* 1961), as well as in Italian neorealism and the New German Cinema. For Deleuze, falsifying narration is a primary facet of modern art cinema's formal-aesthetic structure, but also of its political valence. As D. N. Rodowick explains, 'Chronosigns [signs of the time-image] and falsifying narration augment our powers of life by affirming change and creating images of thought that put us in direct contact with change and becoming as fundamental forces'.[28] At its best, cinema will literally make us see and think differently, bearing transformative potential for the individual viewer, for film form, and for the system of late capitalism (and this project of making us see and think differently is one that practitioners of political cinema including feminist filmmakers and the neo-auteurs of the Berlin School, among others, continue to pursue, as we will see in later chapters).

Yet, beginning with *Das Boot*, a kind of falsifying narration also comes to dominate in popular blockbusters, which appropriate this critical force. The tendency of neoliberal cinema to co-opt falsifying narration reaches its apex

26 Colebrook, *Understanding Deleuze*, 160.

27 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 146.

28 Rodowick, *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine*, 137.

with *Lola rennt*, a film that encapsulates the time-image by focusing on the splitting of time into incompossible presents, all of which notably coalesce around money. The appropriation of falsifying narration also characterizes many of the *Ostalgie* films of the 2000s, most paradigmatically *Good Bye, Lenin!* (2003), which relies on the device of the not-necessarily true past in rethinking GDR history in consumerist terms. A co-opted form of falsifying narration may also be found in the German heritage film which, as Koepnick has suggested, reframes the Holocaust to 'enact forms of German-Jewish solidarity that surpass public history'.[29] Combining aspects of the *Ostalgie* production trend and the German heritage film, *Das Leben der Anderen* exemplifies the co-optation of falsifying narration, enacted through the remixing of historical signifiers in the service of achieving greater filmic veracity and through the repurposing of aesthetic signs associated with both DEFA and political modernism in the service of affirmative culture.[30]

Along with their appropriation of the critical force of falsifying narration, *Das Boot* and *Lola rennt* in particular also make ample use of what Deleuze terms 'pure optical-sound situations', scenes in which conventional links between action and reaction are ruptured so that we experience only the pure audiovisual qualities of the film. In modern cinema, pure optical-sound situations replace the action-image of the classical era: 'This is a cinema of the seer and no longer of the agent.'[31] Again, this change was specifically brought about by World War II: 'The fact is that, in Europe, the post-war period has greatly increased the situations which we no longer know how to react to, in spaces which we no longer know how to describe',[32] leading to the turn from movement-image to time-image.[33] While Deleuze points out that most commercial films throughout the postwar period continue to rely on the action-image along with a narrative structured by a conflict, or duel, and its resolution, 'The soul of cinema demands increasing thought, even if thought begins by undoing the system of actions, perceptions, and affections on which the cinema had fed up to that point. We hardly believe any longer that a global situation can give rise to an action which is capable of modifying it – no more than we believe that an action can force a situation

29 Koepnick, 'Reframing the Past', 48.

30 See Schmidt, 'Between Authors and Agents.'

31 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 2.

32 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, xi.

33 Deleuze argues that the crisis of the action-image originated with neo-realism in Italy: 'The timing is something like: around 1948, Italy; about 1958 France; about 1968, Germany.' He also suggests that elements of the time-image received their fullest realization in the New German Cinema. Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, 211.

to disclose itself, even partially.'[34] In a context where the links between situation, action, and reaction have dissolved, 'chance becomes the sole guiding thread'[35] of contemporary film narratives, a paradigm that is abundantly evident in the three films discussed in this chapter. In these and many other neoliberal films, chance is linked with the promise of happiness, igniting a sense of possibility that is ultimately as threatening as it is sustaining, thereby operating as a form of cruel optimism.[36] However, while they depict relations of time, the escalating role of chance, and the concomitant challenges to human agency in the global age, *Das Boot, Lola rennt,* and *Das Leben der Anderen* do so in ways that often resonate with the agendas of neoliberalism.

The Crystal-Image of *Das Boot*

Das Boot tells the story of the doomed submarine U-96, which sets sail from the French harbour of La Rochelle, travels around the Atlantic, stops in Spanish waters to take on supplies, then proceeds through the Strait of Gibraltar, sinks many leagues under the sea, and finally moors ever so briefly in Italy before it is destroyed in an Allied air raid that maims or kills the boat's entire crew, including its beloved captain, known as Herr Kaleun (Jürgen Prochnow). The only unharmed survivor of the bombing is Leutnant Werner (Herbert Grönemeyer), the journalist who has been assigned to the submarine as a war correspondent, and who is thus notably the only 'outsider' on board the ship.

A film about World War II that very specifically thematizes the crisis of action and changing modes of perception, especially regarding time, that were initiated by the war, *Das Boot* can be productively understood as a 'cinema of the seer' (and the listener) rather than the agent, even as it cannibalizes many laudatory elements of postwar art cinema and NGC in particular. Among the crystal-images specifically discussed by Deleuze in *Cinema* is the ship: 'Seed impregnating the sea, the ship is caught between its two crystalline faces: a limpid face which is the ship from above, where everything should be visible, according to order; an opaque face which is the ship from below, and which occurs underwater, the black face of the

34 Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, 206.
35 Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, 207.
36 See Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*.

engine-room stokers.'[37] Hinging on this double or split quality of the ship, its cinematic representation initiates a circuit of exchange between the visible and the invisible, the performative and the hidden, suggesting the possibility of 'a simultaneity of presents in different worlds'.[38] Constructed from its opening sequence onward around the central tropes of invisibility and performativity (a *making visible*), *Das Boot* reflects the doubling and splitting analysed by Deleuze.

While on the surface, *Das Boot* appears to embody a traditionally suspenseful, action-driven plot, in fact we see very little action, and to the extent that the crew does engage in 'duels', these do not bring about conventional resolutions. While the submarine is ostensibly deployed on a combat mission, its journey around the Atlantic seems largely aimless, as the crew's hopes for engagement, which are deferred again and again, rely on flawed information or chance encounters. In place of action, the film offers pure optical-sound situations in the form of lengthy sequences in which Herr Kaleun and his crew search the seas for British convoys, using a variety of audiovisual prosthetics, including sonar, headphones, radar screens, gauges, periscope, and binoculars. We hardly see these men 'act'; the film's suspense is constituted for the viewer not through spectacular battle scenes (of which the film exhibits only a very few), but rather through the process of listening and viewing, making the inaudible audible and the invisible visible. The creation of optical-sound situations is accentuated on a formal level by the use of handheld cameras; unique lighting schemes (with red, blue, and green filters); and audio tracks that foreground the ping of the submarine's sonar, the constant ticking of clocks, the clicks of gauges measuring the submarine's depth and weight, and the gurgling sounds of the ocean.

On a formal and diegetic level, *Das Boot* made a virtue of the financial limitations of German film production in the 1980s, ingeniously employing a ship to mobilize the gaze of the spectator not through spectacular special effects, but by transforming the (normally invisible) circumscribed internal spaces and technological dynamics of the submarine into a cinematic spectacle. An ideologically promiscuous film, *Das Boot* marshals viewer identifications in order to achieve sympathy for its protagonists, German soldiers and Nazis, thereby offering an affirmative vision of World War II.[39]

37 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 72-73.

38 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 103.

39 Brad Prager notes the representation of soldiers as victims in *Das Boot*, arguing that the film 'can be understood as a persistent symptom of the collective denial of the past'. My reading

Producer Günter Rohrbach notes that in *Das Boot* 'except for one dance number, not a single woman appears![40] Yet in appealing to both male and female spectators, the film mobilizes a range of gender performances and identifications, which foreground its double-edged politics. As my feminist analysis of the film helps to establish, *Das Boot* deploys gender and sexual mobility as a key facet of its global appeal, but in ways that ultimately must be understood as coherent with its affirmative agenda.

Das Boot floats on multiple planes, enacting multiple histories, always appearing to be one thing while simultaneously embodying another. The diegetic, formal, and ideological strategies of producer Rohrbach, director Wolfgang Petersen, and distributor Eichinger facilitated the unparalleled domestic and global success of *Das Boot* and of its filmmakers, who, largely on this one film's merits, went on to pursue international careers.[41] The success of *Das Boot* hinged not least on the filmmakers' nuanced appeal to diverse audience segments, as well as their deft navigation of changing technologies for film exhibition and reception.[42] At the same time, its narrative and aesthetic structures emerge in tandem with the producers' and distributors' efforts to create a financially viable German film, or to put it in different terms, to transform the German film into a privately financed market commodity.

In *Das Boot*, we find a film that deploys notions of individual freedom and personal responsibility so compellingly (even in the context of a wartime

builds on Prager's analysis, which also emphasizes the film's transitional status in the shift from *Autorenkino* to commercial entertainment cinema. Prager, 'Beleaguered Under the Sea', 242.

40 Rohrbach, 'Nachwort', 216.

41 Rohrbach, who became CEO of Bavaria Studios in 1979, quickly made his name there with his first two big-budget productions, Fassbinder's 14-part miniseries *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1980) and *Das Boot*. Rohrbach later became a pioneer of the German heritage film, producing international prestige movies like *Stalingrad* (1992), *Aimée und Jaguar* (1998), and *Anonyma – eine Frau in Berlin* (*A Woman in Berlin,* 2008). Petersen is sometimes referred to as Germany's greatest cinematic export—he went on to become the director of a series of immensely successful blockbusters that reinvent the formula of *Das Boot* within the confines of Hollywood spaces, among them *Air Force One* (1997), *A Perfect Storm* (2000), and *Poseidon* (2006).

42 Conceived from the outset for a variety of exhibition contexts, *Das Boot* was screened first in cinemas worldwide and then released as a popular television miniseries in the FRG in 1985. The film's afterlife (and ongoing profitability) derives from multiple release versions for the cinema and home video markets over the last forty years, including both the original theatrical release and the longer miniseries version marketed in various formats; a Director's Cut exhibited in cinemas worldwide in 1997 and released on DVD; and, in 2011, Blu-ray DVD versions released to coincide with the film's thirtieth anniversary. My analysis relies on the original theatrical release from 1981 as well as the Director's Cut on DVD (Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 1997).

submarine staffed by young men shipped out to die by the Nazis) that, as James Clarke writes, 'You don't feel as if you are watching a film about "the enemy."[43] This pioneering form of falsifying narration, which enables a future trajectory of blockbusters to emerge, offers an early example of what Koepnick calls 'heritage identity', an objectified, eminently consumable form of self-representation that appeals to global tourists and local inhabitants alike 'by placing the nation's subjects outside of their own culture, asking them to look at their own lives like tourists who typify different cultures as sites of radical—and, hence, pleasurable—alterity'.[44]

In an early sequence, the U-96 chases a British naval convoy that has been traced by another German submarine. As the sequence unfolds over many minutes, the crew of the U-96 uses every mechanism in their power to track the invisible convoy; as they race over the ocean in a raging storm, Herr Kaleun curses the weather as he tries in vain to spot a ship with binoculars and telescopes. Finally, he orders the submarine to dive. Leutnant Werner, who is still learning the ropes of naval life, asks why the boat is submerging; the second officer (Martin Semmelrogge) explains to him, 'In this weather, we can *hear* more down here than we can *see* up there'. With Werner, the film's viewers experience the eerie underwater quiet that replaces the roar of the stormy seas above; with the radioman Hinrich (Heinz Hoenig), we strain to hear the mechanical sounds of engines or underwater bombs that might indicate the proximity of a naval fleet. Again and again, the film's editing emphasizes the concentrated gazes of the crew as they look or listen, intercut with extreme close-ups of measuring gauges, a stopwatch, or the view through a periscope. These optical-sound situations foreground the pure audiovisual qualities of the film in ways that contribute to its entertainment value; like its appropriation of the falsifying narrative, *Das Boot* co-opts this form of modern cinema, draining it of critical potential and employing it in the service of affirmative politics, in particular a normalized view of the German past.

Despite the lack of action, it is no accident that German producers seeking a new strategy for creating a market-driven cinema turned first to the genre of the war film, whose ideology dovetails with the ideology of neoliberalism. As Halle points out, 'the war genre, the genre once singularly most important for the public production and consumption of national narratives and symbols, proves to have a great deal of resiliency' for the transnational

43 Clarke, *War Films*, 112-113.

44 Koepnick, '"Amerika gibt's überhaupt nicht"', 199.

aesthetic.[45] Transnationalism is inherent to the war film genre, which is typically a site of multilingualism and cultural contact, and which often serves as a mouthpiece for humanitarianism and world peace, while at the same time paradoxically mobilizing the violent pleasures and antagonistic mentalities of the battlefield.[46]

Central to the affirmative vision of *Das Boot* are several important conventions of the mainstream war film: war is conceived of as an end in itself, utterly divorced from its historical or ideological context, which helps foster identification with the plight of the soldiers. The soldiers, in turn, are portrayed as individuals, who are vested with personal responsibility to ensure their own survival and that of their compatriots, a mission that is again cut off from any larger ideological struggle or sense of cause-and-effect. In the case of *Das Boot*, the sailors in the submarine are quite literally separated off spatially from the larger battlefield for the majority of the film, which aids the film's historical amnesia, since the markers of war—and not least, of Nazi ideology, nationalism, and anti-Semitism—would be much more obvious above ground. Already from the title sequence, which tells us that '40,000 German sailors served on U-boats in World War II/ 30,000 never returned', the crew of *Das Boot* are cast as underdogs, indeed as victims. Portrayed as neither German soldiers nor Nazis, these men don't wear uniforms but rather fashionable sweaters, and we hardly see a swastika for the entire 150 minutes (209 for the Director's Cut) of the film. In fact, the one soldier who does wear a uniform and who overtly performs Nazism is the first officer (Hubertus Bengsch), an ethnic German who grew up in Mexico and volunteered for naval service, and who is taunted, even castigated for his devotion to Nazi ideology by all the men on board, not least the captain.

Das Boot purports to create a space of difference—the film's gripping plot revolves around the men on board overcoming personality conflicts to work together, and one of the film's central appeals is the way the camera dwells on and relishes different physiognomies—all the while falsifying the fact that the mission of the German navy during World War II not only presumes a fundamental (racial and ethnic) sameness among the sailors, but also relies on radical exclusions. The brilliant innovation here is the use of a small, separate space, which demarcates very narrow thresholds of visibility.

45 Halle, *German Film after Germany*, 98.

46 The paradigmatic film here is Lewis Milestone's Hollywood adaptation of *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930), prior to *Das Boot* the premiere film to humanize the German soldier for international audiences, and the first film to win an Oscar for best picture.

The submarine never comes near to German soil; the only sense that the sailors are Germans comes from a few cherished photos of the *Heimat* that they display in sentimental moments. Since the film was shot silent and dubbed after the fact, and since it is regularly watched in international release in dubbed versions, not even the German language plays an integral role in establishing national culture in the film. This is heightened by the fact that the captain inspires the affection and loyalty of his crew by regularly turning off droning Nazi radio speeches to play popular phonograph records, many of them non-German, such as 'It's a Long Way to Tipperary'. In terms of language, story, and form, this is literally a deterritorialized German cinema, a strategy integral to the twofold goal of *Das Boot* to promote agendas of normalization and globalization as part and parcel of a globally profitable, market-driven cinema.

With the dual leads of Prochnow and Grönemeyer, the film not only decentres its male protagonist, but in fact splits him in two, creating a crystal-image of masculinity. This strategy is significant for both the inverted specular relations and for the historical agenda of *Das Boot*. As a film without women and one much concerned with masculinity in crisis, *Das Boot* makes its male characters both objects of the gaze and voyeurs, who look rather than transact, a fact which was also crucial to the film's appeal to (female) viewers. By emphasizing Leutnant Werner's witnessing gaze, the film foregrounds Herr Kaleun's specularity, his status as an object to be looked at, thereby dispersing his authority. At the same time, *Das Boot* relies on the heartthrob appeal of the pop singer Grönemeyer, who plays Leutnant Werner as an exemplar of vulnerable, modern masculinity.

While making the perilous journey through the Strait of Gibraltar, the U-96 sustains damage in a raid and sinks to the bottom of the Mediterranean, where it springs a number of leaks. Once again, the action is deferred through recourse to a cinema of the seer and listener. A group of officers collects around the depth gauge as the boat sinks, gritting their teeth and sweating. Herr Kaleun calls out orders to the crew, but all his attempts to raise the sinking ship are in vain. A sailor has been injured in the blast; he writhes in pain, bleeding and suffocating, a metonymy for the damaged, airless boat. As the boat sinks into the ocean, the camera zooms in on the depth gauge, whose needle slowly inches into the red. The men begin to groan and shake; some exhibit wide-eyed resignation. Leutnant Werner, still a submarine novice, looks horrified. The chief engineer (Klaus Wennemann) calls out, 'The boat can't be stopped!', and we watch the needle inch downward, 'Passing 230… 240 meters…250…260 meters!' The needle passes by the

highest number on the gauge, pointing perilously downward, and we hear glass shatter and plugs pop, before the U-96 crashes to a standstill on the ocean floor, 280 meters below the surface.

Throughout this sequence, the editing emphasizes the men's emotional response to the compression of time and space in the grounded submarine, as the water encroaches and available oxygen diminishes. Exhibiting men sweating, shaking, and weeping, the scene places traumatized masculinity on display. While the film's narrative logic relies on the crew successfully fixing the boat, it is notable that, for the most part, we don't witness the action that leads to this resolution. Instead, we see Werner as he watches the clock (an omnipresent pocket watch that dangles into the frame); having fallen asleep, he awakes with a start to look at the clock again. Believing themselves about to die, Werner and Herr Kaleun weep together, only to see the chief engineer emerge from the nether regions of the boat to announce meekly that he has thoroughly repaired it. 'Listen up', shouts Herr Kaleun, 'We're going to blow all tanks and see if we can get off our bottom!' The boat does in fact rise to the surface one last time, but for Herr Kaleun, death is only deferred. As Brad Prager has argued, 'the past is given meaning and rendered comprehensible for its broad audience through the depiction of the death of the submarine captain [...] whose death stands in for the fate of the fighting nation'.[47] By killing off its hero, a death eye-witnessed—and subsequently born witness to in prose—by Leutnant Werner (a stand-in for Lothar-Günther Buchheim, the author of the book on which the film was based), *Das Boot* ultimately recoups male defeat, so that privileging male lack becomes an affirmative strategy in representing World War II and the Nazi war machine.

Das Boot corresponds closely to Deleuze's cinema of the time-image, which it co-opts for commercial entertainment. Not only are the dispersive situation, chance as guiding principle, and the form of the aimless and labyrinthine voyage used to create a hybrid narrative which capitalized on globally appealing elements of modern cinema, but *Das Boot* also operates with plot and clichés in ways characteristic of the time-image. Rodowick summarizes Deleuze's discussion of the 'consciousness of clichés' that preceded the emergence of the time-image: 'without the context of a global ideology and a belief in real connections, the action-image is replaced by clichés. The double sense of the French use of the term should be maintained: both tired images and snapshots of random impressions'.[48]

47 Prager, 'Beleaguered Under the Sea', 247.

48 Rodowick, *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine*, 76.

Building on modern art cinema's conscious use of clichés, the cinema of neoliberalism once more repackages clichés—along with audiovisual attractions, generic plot forms, and historical signifiers—for pleasurable consumption. As Koepnick points out, this double-edged gesture works along multiple registers in the heritage film to create market appeal at home and abroad, a point echoed by Halle in his reading of Petersen's films. Halle suggests that successful transnational films employ national-cultural clichés to signify a double valence that is crucial to their appeal. For example, Petersen's Hollywood blockbuster *Air Force One* (1997), in many ways a direct adaptation of *Das Boot*, appealed to U.S. audiences with highly patriotic images, while audiences abroad often interpreted these as satire.[49] Yet both the political affinities of Petersen's films and the double-edged play with clichés upon which they rely appear problematic for Halle's argument that just as 'the transnational aesthetic accelerates the global trade in images, it expands the possibilities of cultural production'.[50] Petersen's use of national-cultural clichés in *Air Force One* simply inverted the strategies he used in *Das Boot*, which capitalized on the worldwide interest in Nazism and World War II, achieving a normalized representation of 'the enemy' as heroic soldiers and eliciting sympathy for Germans as war victims through its representation of the sailors' valour even in the face of their death mission. The film's ending, in which these war heroes are then killed in an Allied air raid, underscores its purportedly 'antiwar' message. Emphasizing the crystalline quality of the film's representational strategies, Prager suggests that in this regard *Das Boot* shares much in common with popular Vietnam war films from the late 1970s and 1980s, films that fostered a collective denial of guilt via empathy with individual soldiers.

Jaimey Fisher has suggested a model for linking Deleuze's film theory to gender in the context of German cinema, arguing that 'a gendered social crisis contributed to the emergence of what Deleuze calls the time-image'.[51] The postwar period in Europe was characterized not only by a general undermining of human agency, but specifically by a crisis of masculine agency in tandem with a disruption of conventional family and gender roles, nowhere more so than in Germany.[52] As Fisher demonstrates, this crisis of hegemonic masculinity closely parallels the collapse of classical cinema traced by Deleuze: postwar films 'depict the breakdown of the

49 Halle, *German Film after Germany*, 41.
50 Halle, *German Film after Germany*, 88.
51 Fisher, 'On the Ruins of Masculinity', 27.
52 See Baer, *Dismantling the Dream Factory*.

action-image via the failure of traditional masculinity'.[53] Writing about German rubble films, Fisher points out that even though these films strive toward a reconstruction of the action-image along with a rehabilitation of male subjectivity, they often end up 'privileging the male subject who has embraced lack over the male subject who simply disavows it, that is, over the male subject who would normally play the hero in the conventional action-image'.[54] Similarly, *Das Boot* strives to reassert masculine agency but ends up privileging male lack once again.

Featuring decentred male protagonists who are noteworthy for their immersion in pure optical-sound situations, and who turn out to be 'heroes' although, for the most part, they lack agency, *Das Boot* portrays the loss of faith in patriarchy, ideological fatigue, and general male defeat that emblematizes the cinema of the time-image. As we have seen, the film inverts conventional modes of specularity; by dispersing masculine agency and privileging male lack, it also opens up new viewing positions, mobilizing voyeurism and desire on the part of female spectators. Fisher points out that at historical moments of crisis traumatized masculinity can expose male lack, allowing different masculinities to emerge.[55] *Das Boot* portrays such an historical moment (World War II), while also occupying another at its moment of production, when the gains of second-wave feminism had challenged popular cinema's representation of gender.

From the outset of the film, *Das Boot* is constructed around the central tropes of invisibility and performativity, a crystal-image that comes together in its representation of gender and sexuality. Even before the credit sequence, the film begins with an auditory signal, the 'ping' of the sonar system employed by British destroyers targeting the U-96. This ping re-emerges during scenes of heightened suspense throughout the film, encoding the submarine's invisibility as it dodges British depth charges. After the credits, the film's first shot presents a green screen—a blank slate reminiscent of studio screens used to produce special effects—but when we look closely, a very phallic submarine slowly emerges from underwater obscurity. By contrast, the first above-ground sequence immediately establishes a visible performance of masculinity, when we view a group of sailors who stand by the roadside, open their trousers, and, genitals in hand, piss in unison all over the car that is bringing the U-96's commanding officers to the mooring docks. We follow the officers, including Herr Kaleun and Werner,

53 Fisher, 'Deleuze in a Ruinous Context', 56.
54 Fisher, 'Deleuze in a Ruinous Context', 56.
55 Fisher, 'Deleuze in a Ruinous Context', 58.

the war correspondent, into a shoreside bordello. Here we see the film's only women, French prostitutes who perform cabaret songs, along with naval officers and crewmembers partying before their deployment. Two things are notable about this sequence. First is the grotesque representation of drunken men, exemplars of masculinity in crisis. We see men not only urinating, but bleeding, vomiting, and collapsing in their own excretions—a foregrounding of bodily fluids and physicality, which is not conventionally associated with masculinity but which connects the men metonymically with the ocean. Second is this scene's explicit commentary on Nazism and masculinity, in the form of a drunken toast given by the submarine captain Thomsen, who has been awarded the iron cross. Thomsen's ironic toast 'To our glorious, abstinent, and womanless Führer!' verges on insubordination until Thomsen concludes by joking that Hitler has shown Churchill where to stick his cigar. Like Hitler, both the submarine crew and the movie itself are abstinent and womanless, and this aspect of Thomsen's toast will be pathetically echoed by Werner later in the movie. Believing himself about to die, Werner cites the Nazi writer Rudolf G. Binding, '"Standing before the inexorable. Where no mother looks for us, where no woman crosses our path. Where only reality reigns, gruesome and grand." I was completely besotted by it.' Werner's citation invokes a longstanding convention of poetic representations of war (and of the war film genre), emphasizing battle as the only truly authentic experience, and one that is notably womanless.

Thomsen's toast not only defines the submarine as a homosocial space, but also includes a more explicitly sexual homology between the submarine and Churchill's cigar, which will be echoed again and again as the U-96 squeezes into and through tight spaces. Thomsen's speech sets up a motif that is replayed in words and images throughout the film: the motif of *Arschbacken* [butt cheeks]. Thomsen defines the 'Quexen', the extremely young recruits being sent off to battle with little preparation, by their clenched butt cheeks and their tightly clamped genitalia: 'Butt cheeks together, clamped-down balls, and the belief in the Führer in their gazes.' The single bathroom on the submarine is lit up by a sign depicting an androgynous ass with an anchor tattoo. And in a scene that condenses *Das Boot*'s representation of gender, we encounter numerous bare butts once more. Here, the crew celebrates success in battle with a drag show. A band plays, 'Yes! We have no bananas', and a soldier performs as Josephine Baker, in blackface with fake breasts and a faux-banana-leaf skirt. Shortly after this remarkable performance of both ethnic drag and cross-dressing, we see a close-up of a sailor's bare bottom and witness the diagnosis of an outbreak of crabs. While the sailors scream hilariously, 'Gib dem Luder ordentlich Puder!' [Give the floozy a good

4. Homoerotic discourse in Wolfgang Petersen's *Das Boot* (1981): Bare bottoms on display.

dose of powder (medicine)], at the officers' table Herr Kaleun notices crabs visibly crawling in the first officer's eyebrows. When he seeks attention at the medic's station, the first officer finds a whole line of men naked from the waist down (see Illustration 4), a sight that the film plays for laughs, since the Nazi first officer is known to be a prude.

What are we to make of the foregrounding of gender performances and homoerotic discourse in *Das Boot*? Prager points out that at various moments in the film—including when they listen to foreign sailing songs on the phonograph—the crew 'cross-identify as the enemy'. A very specific form of the crystal-image, this cross-identification enables the film's discourse of normalization. Something similar takes place in the film's representation of gender, where we see men enacting a whole range of masculinities—both gender identities and sexualities—which are permitted only and precisely because *Das Boot* is a womanless space.

This mobility of gender, enabled by the war film, constitutes an important facet of *Das Boot*'s global appeal. By introducing both an explicitly sexualized homoeroticism and a range of masculinities into the film, the filmmakers capitalized on audience expectations of European movies (and in this case of art films associated with NGC) to provide more frank depictions of sexuality than Hollywood. At the same time, the filmmakers built on familiar representations of masculinity in the internationally successful Vietnam war films that Annette Brauerhoch has described: 'Masculine, muscled, beautiful men are put on display, who are pursuing dangerous, violent activities. But despite this fact, they are not classical heroes, since they are not endowed with attributes of power, dominance,

or inviolability'.[56] Brauerhoch argues that female viewers gravitate to war films because they offer a moment of control otherwise unavailable in dominant spectatorial relations; moreover she proposes that war films mobilize for all viewers sexual fantasies 'in which sexualized power is played out violently, but at the same time the violence of sexuality can be enjoyed'.[57] Emerging in the era after feminism, war films of the 1980s served a double-edged purpose: on the one hand, they reflected a revisionist history and a conservative world view and sought to rehabilitate masculinity in the face of feminist incursions; on the other hand, they achieved success by mobilizing spectatorial identifications and audiovisual pleasures linked to the representation of male bodies in positions that dominant cinema usually reserves for women. Men in *Das Boot* occupy a range of feminized, objectified, and/or sexualized roles; they are subjected to sadistic acts; they become one with their bodies; they lose control. As Brauerhoch observes, 'The role assigned to women is of extraordinary significance for the cohesion of a patriarchal society. [...] Interestingly, in relation to the state and its force, the soldier on the whole comes to occupy a feminized position.'[58] Just as war casts soldiers in a feminized position (they have no control over their own bodies; they must be brought into alignment with norms; they must always be ready to serve; they must exemplify the notion of personal responsibility for the sake of the larger good), neoliberalism casts women as its ideal subjects for all the same reasons. Thus, just as *Das Boot* appropriates the filmic language of gender performance and frank sexuality developed in the New German Cinema, the atypical, even feminist viewing positions it mobilizes are also coherent with its affirmative ideology.

As the context of gender helps to make clear, far from creating images of change suggested by Deleuze's conception of the time-image, the falsifying narrative of *Das Boot* is thoroughly in line with neoliberalism, which offers its own falsifying narrative par excellence. By appropriating for its affirmative vision discourses of transnationalism and gender mobility and by developing innovative and profitable production strategies that co-opt the aesthetics and politics of modern art cinema, *Das Boot* laid the groundwork for a new, audience-friendly, market-driven filmmaking practice.

56 Brauerhoch, 'Sexy Soldier', 85.
57 Brauerhoch, 'Sexy Soldier', 85.
58 Brauerhoch, 'Sexy Soldier', 93.

Time is Manni: *Lola rennt*

Following the course charted by *Das Boot*, Tom Tykwer's acclaimed film *Lola rennt* 'almost single-handedly put an enervated film industry back on the international map'[59] in the 1990s, achieving unparalleled global success with its techno-fuelled depiction of protagonist Lola's race against time to save her boyfriend Manni by scoring DM 100,000 in twenty minutes. Drawing attention to the history of (German) cinema by foregrounding formal techniques such as split screen, slow motion, and jump cuts, and combining 35mm cinematography with still photography (black and white for flashbacks and colour for flash forwards), video, digital effects, gaming iconography, and animation, *Lola rennt* captivated audiences across the world with its mash-up of aesthetic styles and its innovation on the three-act narrative structure.[60] Associated metonymically with the best German films and exemplary of the most laudable tendencies in German film history, *Lola rennt* was at the same time celebrated precisely for its difference from German cinema, evident in its fast pacing and transcendence of the ordinary, as well as in its affirmative qualities. As Owen Evans argues, '*Lola rennt* is a reaffirmation of the potential of humanity, a celebration of the durability of the human spirit.'[61] Indeed, Tykwer's rejection of the political critique of NGC and his simultaneous repurposing of its aesthetic strategies prompt Muriel Cormican to view *Lola rennt* as a manifesto articulating a programme for the future of German film,[62] while Christine Haase argues that the film effects a kind of do-over of German cinema: Lola's first two runs end bleakly with the deaths of the main protagonists Lola (Franka

59 Span, 'Tom Tykwer, Bringing a Bold New Concept to German Films: Fun.'

60 In its ability to awaken interest in German cinema internationally though inventive aesthetics, Tykwer's film has been compared to German classics like *Das Kabinett des Dr. Caligari* (*The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari,* dir. Robert Wiene, 1919) and *Nosferatu* (dir. F.W. Murnau, 1923). See Evans, 'Tom Tykwer's *Lola rennt*', and Langford, 'Lola and the Vampire', respectively. Its depiction of post-unification Berlin revitalized interest in the genre of the Berlin film and evoked comparisons to *Berlin – Sinfonie einer Großstadt* (*Berlin – Symphony of a City,* dir. Walter Ruttmann, 1928) and *Der Himmel über Berlin* (*Wings of Desire*, dir. Wim Wenders, 1986).

61 Evans, 'Tom Tykwer's *Lola rennt*', 114.

62 'He wants it to be more about moving pictures, action, the visual, and the possibility of identification with the characters, and less about stills, long takes, logos, and alienation from the characters, more about action that gives way to contemplation rather than simply about contemplation. Nonetheless, he does not advocate absolute suture or identification and forces the viewer to become an active participant in the reading/writing of the film', albeit by compelling reflection through repetition rather than, for example, through Brechtian defamiliarization techniques. Cormican, 'Goodbye Wenders', 131.

Potente) and Manni (Moritz Bleibtreu) respectively, while the redemptive third run offers a positive, Hollywood-style ending.[63]

Haase analyses *Lola rennt* as a 'go-between' combining elements of German and Hollywood cinema, 'a film that investigates the spaces and exchanges between the two paradigms.'[64] Building on her analysis—which also highlights the role of transnational capital in the film—I argue that, like *Das Boot*, *Lola rennt* also functions more broadly as a site of exchange between the cinema of neoliberalism and its film historical precursors, especially but not exclusively those of German cinema. The focal point of this exchange, the eponymous character Lola, also becomes—like the female characters in many of the other films discussed throughout this book—a key site for imaging the present in Tykwer's film. A crystal-image unto herself, Lola combines and displays the paradoxical qualities that characterize both gender roles and forms of aesthetic representation in neoliberalism.

Whereas the producer-driven strategies of *Das Boot* quite deliberately co-opted aspects of European art film for the global market, X-Filme's production code marketizes auteur cinema for the neoliberal age, creating a differently hybrid (but no less successful) form of global blockbuster.[65] Like *Das Boot*, *Lola rennt* was a domestic hit, selling millions of tickets in Germany, but (as with *Das Boot*) its real success came abroad. Despite being produced on a shoestring budget of only DM 3.5 million, *Lola rennt* remains the third highest grossing German film of all time in the U.S., and it was highly profitable in other foreign markets as well. Here, the key innovation was to feature images of Lola running: according to one calculation, more than half of the film's (very short) 79-minute screen time consists only of one-shots of Lola in motion, 'without any other relevant information being conveyed'.[66] Making a virtue of the limitations of the film's production context, the filmmakers relied on cheap but striking footage that is repeatedly repurposed and, through the skilled editing of

63 See Haase, 'You Can Run, but You Can't Hide.'

64 See Haase, 'You Can Run, but You Can't Hide', 414, n. 21.

65 Like *Das Boot*, *Lola rennt* also captured the attention of Hollywood: based largely on the success of Tykwer's film, Miramax signed a first-look deal with X-Filme Creative Pool granting the distributor the option of exclusive first rights to all of the production collective's properties in return for offers of directing projects to X-Filme's members (a deal that launched Tykwer's international career, beginning with *Heaven* (2002)). See Jäckel, *European Film Industries*, 31-35.

66 Haase, 'You Can Run, but You Can't Hide', 207.

Mathilde Bonnefoy, mixed with other visually arresting imagery, set to the thrumming beat of the soundtrack.[67]

Characteristic of the cinema of neoliberalism, the hybridity of *Lola rennt*—what Michael Wedel refers to as its 'paradoxical aesthetic disposition'[68]—extends from the film's flouting of conventional oppositions (high/low, art/popular, Europe/Hollywood) through its ambiguous gender politics and incongruous depiction of Berlin's geography to its self-conscious merging of the movement-image, Lola's iconic run, with a narrative frame and editing techniques representative of the time-image. In this regard, *Lola rennt* appears to encapsulate and revivify cinema itself, exploring key aspects of film's medium specificity as it has unfolded across history, including movement, technology, vitalism, the fantastic, specularization, indexicality, and the epistemological status of the image, at the moment of its impending digitalization. As Tykwer has observed, for him it was 'absolutely clear [...] that a film about the possibilities inherent in life had to be a film about the possibilities inherent in film as well. That's why the film contains colour and black and white, slow motion and time lapse, in other words, all the basic components that have been used throughout film history'.[69] Notably, these various strands of *Lola rennt*—its narrative drawing on ideas from chaos theory (e.g. the butterfly effect) and philosophical debates about agency and determinism to examine human destinies, as well as its formal investigation of film's aesthetic possibilities —all converge around money. As Deleuze writes, 'Money is the obverse of all the images that the cinema shows and sets in place, so that films about money are already, if implicitly, films within the film or about the film.'[70] In Deleuze's framework, the confrontation of the film with money, as its own internal structuring principle, correlates to the shift from movement-image to time-image and with this shift to a 'new status of narration', falsifying narration, which 'as a labyrinth of time, is also the line which forks and keeps on forking, passing through *incompossible presents*, returning to *not necessarily true pasts*'.[71] Broadly descriptive of the play with narrative time that characterizes *Lola rennt*, labyrinthine time and falsifying narration underpin Lola's three runs—which fork out into different presents and spiral back onto not necessarily true pasts—as

67 Significant for X-Filme's reboot of auteur cinema is the fact that, in addition to writing and directing *Lola rennt*, Tykwer also composed the film's score, together with Johnny Klimek and Reinhold Heil.

68 Wedel, 'Backbeat and Overlap', 141.

69 Qtd. in Wedel, 'Backbeat and Overlap', 140.

70 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 77.

71 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 131.

well as the flash-forward sequences of still photographs that open onto apparently contingent futures.

The narrative of *Lola rennt* is set in motion with Manni's phone call to Lola, in which he explains that he has lost DM 100,000, the pay-off for a smuggling operation across the German-Polish border. Manni must recover the money by noon (that is, in twenty minutes), when he is set to meet with his boss Ronnie, who will kill him if he fails to hand over the cash. Having accidentally left the money in a subway car—he reflexively jumped off the train when transit cops boarded to check passengers' tickets—Manni blames Lola for the loss of the cash, since she failed to meet him at the agreed-upon pick-up point, having herself fallen victim to a series of botched exchanges resulting from the theft of her moped and the subsequent bungling of post-unification Berlin geography by a taxi driver who took her to the Grunewaldstrasse in the eastern rather than the western part of the city. Manni asks for Lola's help but also doubts her ability to find a solution to his impossible dilemma ('See! I knew that you wouldn't know what to do. I kept telling you that one day something would happen and even you wouldn't find a way out of it!'). This challenge prompts Lola to utter an ear-splitting scream that, in the course of the film, will become recognizable as one of her 'superpowers', and to instruct Manni: 'Now listen up. You wait there! I'm coming, I'm going to help you. Don't move from that spot. I'll be there in twenty minutes…I'll come up with something, I swear…You stay right there…I'll help you. I'll get the money.' While transposed onto the action movie genre—which the hybrid *Lola rennt* both relies on and interrogates—Lola's statement, and her ensuing runs, demonstrate an entrepreneurial spirit, a belief in her own ability to take responsibility and succeed at the impossible, that is consistent with neoliberal conceptions of the self.

Featuring a decentred male protagonist who exhibits failure and lack across multiple registers and an optimized female action hero who embodies 'the primal image of cinema' while defying conventional forms of specularization, *Lola rennt* destabilizes traditional gender roles.[72] Like *Das Boot*, the film also employs gender mobility—especially a particular form of active, defiant, and transgressive femininity associated with Lola's numerous namesakes from the history of German cinema[73]—as a key component of its popular appeal to the broadest possible global audience.

72 Tykwer refers to the image of Lola running as an 'Urbild von Kino' in 'Generalschlüssel fürs Kino', 31.

73 Lola is only the latest iteration in a long line of cinematic Lolas from Marlene Dietrich's Lola Lola in *Der blaue Engel* (*The Blue Angel,* dir. Josef von Sternberg, 1929) to Barbara Sukowa's

However, in the third act, the film rather patently forecloses on this gender mobility. As Haase notes, Lola's final run is divested of both causal agency and narrative meaning, since Manni ultimately recovers the money independently of Lola's efforts, in the film's 'happy ending', which restores heteropatriarchal gender roles and depicts the couple walking off hand-in-hand. This bait-and-switch caused feminist critics of *Lola rennt* to puzzle over its paradoxical gender politics: 'But what are the fantasies that the film produces and do they allow for new images of gender? Do gender coordinates get recoded?'[74] Ingeborg Majer-O'Sickey considers the possibility that the happy ending is ironic, 'a *quotation* of traditional endings in Hollywood romances' (though she does not seem fully persuaded that this is the case).[75] Indeed, just as it flouts passé dichotomies of irony vs. earnestness, or subversion vs. incorporation, this hybrid film also sutures together contradictory gender role expectations and requirements, making visible the coexistence of traditional and emergent forms of gender and sexuality in the period of neoliberal intensification at the turn of the millennium.

An allegory of neoliberalism, *Lola rennt* enacts neoliberal mandates (including the profit motive as the key motive of both cinema and human activity) while also placing them on display, particularly through the characterization of Lola as an exemplary neoliberal subject. Much like a video game character, Lola appears to carry skills learned in one run—such as the ability to quickly release the safety on a gun—over to the next run, exhibiting an overt form of self-optimization across the narrative of the film. In this way, Lola not only represents the self-improving and entrepreneurial individual, but she also quite literally embodies the cruelly optimistic 'necessary fiction' that an ordinary person can become extraordinary. Lola by-passes normal routes to fame and especially to fortune, thereby demonstrating a key neoliberal 'fantasy of transformative success'[76] at a moment when the dream of class mobility was becoming stronger, even as the chances of actually gaining in socioeconomic status had diminished substantially in millennial Germany. In Lola's case, the new technologies of the self required to achieve the impossible (DM 100,000 in twenty minutes) are figured as superpowers—the scream that silences men (Manni) and causes the ball to drop into the right place on the roulette wheel; the gaze that triggers the heart attack experienced by the security

Lola in Rainer Werner Fassbinder's eponymous 1981 film.

74 Barbara Kosta, 'Tom Tykwer's *Run Lola Run* and the Usual Suspects', 172.

75 Majer-O'Sickey, 'Whatever Lola Wants, Lola Gets (Or Does She?)', 131.

76 Hall, 'The Neo-Liberal Revolution', 723.

guard Schuster (Armin Rohde); and the healing hand that normalizes his heartbeat again—which provide narrative resolution to the problem of human agency posed repeatedly by the film.

Throughout *Lola rennt*, Lola articulates a range of (sometimes contradictory) wishes and desires, echoed in the lyrics of the song 'Wish', which plays extra-diegetically during Lola's run and where the female voice (sung by actress Franka Potente) expresses the wish to be a hunter, an animal, a starship, a princess, a writer, a prayer, and a forest of trees, among others. As Michelle Langford puts it, 'With no clear distinction between human and non-human, material or ephemeral, Lola expresses her desire to be all and everything, regardless of the logical 'impossibility' of becoming any of them.'[77] On the one hand, Lola succeeds in this regard, ending up not only with Manni but also with (double) the money, thereby defying Schuster's directive to her in the second act, 'You can't have it all', and apparently emerging with all four of the components enumerated by Helen Gurley Brown in her postfeminist classic *Having It All: Love, Success, Sex, Money* (1982). On the other hand, Lola's wish, as articulated in the song and figured through her embrace of superpowers, to transcend the dilemmas of human sovereignty in the present by becoming Other, might also suggest an attempt at unbinding from the fraying fantasies of the good life in post-unification, neoliberalizing Berlin. The narrative strand of the film focusing on the melodramatic story of Jutta Hansen (Nina Petri)—Lola's father's lover and a board member at his bank, who asks him to start a family with her, while revealing in only one of the three runs that the baby she is pregnant with is not his biological child—similarly reflects on shifting and contradictory gender and sexual roles and expectations in the present. In the context of the film's gender politics, it is noteworthy that Lola achieves the impossible task that Manni asks of her, only to have her accomplishments undermined and discounted. As Barbara Kosta puts it, at the film's end 'Manni has regained his mobility, restored his masculinity, and taken control of his circumstance.'[78] Manni—a homophone for money and a metonym for man—prevails, representing a new form of mobile assets notably detached from established forms of institutional capital, the latter embodied here by Lola's banker father (Herbert Knaup).

Just as *Lola rennt* functions, on a formal-aesthetic level, as a hinge between the historical legacy of German film and its market-oriented contemporary incarnation, the film's narrative figures the decline of the bricks-and-mortar

77 Langford, 'Lola and the Vampire', 198.

78 Kosta, 'Tom Tykwer's *Run Lola Run* and the Usual Suspects', 174.

bank, together with the gold standard and convertible currency, and the deregulation of national financial markets, making way for the emergence of the transnational financial services sector (and in this regard it is no accident that the film debuted just before the introduction of the Euro in Germany). Her father's bank is portrayed here as a quaint institution that Lola, in the second run, symbolically smashes, literally shattering an embossed image of legal tender that adorns its walls, before she proceeds to rob the bank and abscond with its cash. While in the first and second runs, Manni and Lola obtain the money through criminal activity, by robbing the supermarket and the bank respectively, the third run has them procuring the funds legitimately, in Lola's case through gambling at the casino (speculation). As Haase notes, Lola's punkish look contrasts sharply with the well-dressed milieu of the international bourgeoisie populating the casino, 'demonstrating that you don't have to be like them to participate in what they are doing. The flipside, though, is that this also demonstrates the undeniable hegemonic and conformist powers of capital and economy across cultures and countries'.[79] Haase's analysis of the casino, and of 'the presence and interlacing of different cultures in one location, and the pivotal part that economy and capital play in connecting them' throughout the narrative and mise-en-scène of *Lola rennt,* underscores both the film's narration of Berlin's transition to global capitalism and its depiction of the co-option of difference, as 'alternative' types like Lola and Manni are hailed by the neoliberal mainstream.

Emphasizing this double-edged quality of the film, David Martin-Jones's Deleuzian reading suggests that *Lola rennt* appeals to international markets at the point of Berlin's ascendance to the status of global city—a convergence point for business and finance at the interface of East and West—while also working on a local level as national cinema. Significant here is the film's financing by the Filmboard Berlin-Brandenburg, with its emphasis on boosting the regional economy and promoting Berlin both as a film-producing location and as a site for global investment more broadly, a production context which drives the film's form: 'Its seamless integration of different media aesthetically depicts several similar integrations that occur at the level of the narrative. The most obvious of these is the integration between East and West and the possibilities that offers for international trade.'[80] As with *Das Boot,* then, the promotion of both globalization and normalization underpins the international appeal and

79 Haase, 'You Can Run, but You Can't Hide', 403.

80 Martin-Jones, *Deleuze, Cinema and National Identity*, 105.

market orientation of *Lola rennt.* Indeed, Martin-Jones argues that the film allegorizes the 'right and wrong' ways to live in the global city, a Berlin that in addition to its newfound status as the locus for international investment in the neoliberalizing East Bloc has also just become the national capital of reunified Germany. While the first two runs exhibit Lola and Manni on the wrong path, the third run displays the 'right' way to inhabit Berlin, the mandate to responsibilize: 'The global city, we are [...] shown, favours those who take charge of their own destiny', and the film's temporal dimension reinforces 'its message of the entrepreneur's ability to determine their future in Berlin'.[81] In this regard, Martin-Jones observes that, in the portrait of globalizing Berlin offered by *Lola rennt*, the problems of the middle class take centre stage, while the social conditions of the disenfranchised (e.g. poor people in the former East Berlin and migrant populations), together with the ordinary problems faced by everyday Berliners due to gentrification, are side-lined.

In contrast to the films discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, which archive the transformations in ordinary life during the era of neoliberal intensification with a special focus on documenting the gentrification of Berlin by resignifying the genre of the *Alltagsfilm*, *Lola rennt* envisions gentrified Berlin by stitching together East and West in phantasmatic, virtual ways, thereby making visible already in 1998 the virtuality that would emerge as a key characteristic of the neoliberal city.[82] For instance, Manni tells Lola that he is in the 'Innenstadt' (inner city) in front of the 'Spirale' (the Spiral Bar) and that he will meet Ronnie at the 'Wasserturm' (water tower) right around the corner in 20 minutes. This fictional geography belies the fact that Berlin does not have a clearly delineated 'inner city' or downtown area (and its still palpable history of partition means that in the late 1990s, at least, there are still several contenders for city centre). The actual shooting location of the Bolle Supermarket where Manni stands in this scene lies in the western district of Charlottenburg, while Berlin's best-known water tower is near Kollwitzplatz in the eastern district of Prenzlauer Berg. Similarly, in this virtual Berlin, we see Lola running down one street in the heart of the eastern district of Mitte and turning the corner to emerge at an intersection several kilometres away in the western district of Kreuzberg. *Lola rennt* virtually images and seemingly naturalizes *avant la lettre* the gentrified city of the 2010s, when the market-driven reshaping of the landscape means that the remnants of Berlin's divided past have now become largely indiscernible

81 Martin-Jones, *Deleuze, Cinema and National Identity*, 107-108.

82 See Ward, 'Berlin, the Virtual Global City.'

to the untrained eye. In this way, the film anticipates, even participates in, latent processes of global capitalism and neoliberalization.

If, as Martin-Jones argues, *Lola rennt* allegorizes the mandate to self-optimize and master the contingent futures offered by the global city, in his analysis it does so by reduplicating 'the binary distinction that only enable[s] an expression of female performativity under the guise (!) of a game, magical fantasy, or dream. Thus the reterritorialization of the woman that we expect [...] is used to justify the "right" version of the narrative of national identity' with which the film leaves us.[83] *Lola rennt* mobilizes unconventional viewing positions through the 'magical fantasy' of Lola's runs, just as it develops qualities of the time-image, including labyrinthine time and falsifying narration, as key to its hybrid aesthetic. As in *Das Boot*, these dimensions of the film are coherent with the largely affirmative ideology of *Lola rennt*, which promotes entrepreneurialism and risk-taking as essential to success in the neoliberal age. However, as Martin-Jones's reading suggests, Lola, like other female protagonists of the German cinema of neoliberalism, ultimately embodies a form of cruel optimism, understood here as the illusion of (female) sovereignty and agency that is unmasked by her reterritorialization in a 'game-over' ending that firmly situates her within the heterosexual matrix, assuming the role of consumer-citizen in the normalized national context of globalizing Berlin.

For Martin-Jones, the reterritorialization of woman is mirrored in the reterritorialization of the time-image by the movement-image via the conventional ending of *Lola rennt*, which establishes one 'right' conclusion that renders the other possibilities raised by the film as 'wrong'. However, the film's ending—emblematic of the disorganized filmic language that is a trademark of the German cinema of neoliberalism—scrambles genre conventions and cinematic styles in its mash-up of Hollywood and German tropes, thereby complicating any thorough reterritorialization of the time-image.

The final scene finds Lola standing in the intersection in front of the Bolle Supermarket looking around uncertainly for Manni. A car approaches down the street, and Manni jumps out, shakes hands with Ronnie, and walks toward Lola. A medium shot shows Lola turning toward him in profile, as Manni enters the screen and kisses her, casually remarking, 'What happened to you? Did you run? No worries, everything's okay. Come on!' Turning away from the camera, they exit the intersection (see Illustration 5); as they walk away, a close-up shows their entwined hands, emphasizing their confirmed

83 Martin-Jones, *Deleuze, Cinema and National Identity*, 113.

5. Restoring the heteropatriarchal order: Lola (Franka Potente) and Manni (Moritz Bleibtreu) hand-in-hand in the 'game-over' ending of Tom Tykwer's *Lola rennt* (*Run Lola Run,* 1998).

coupledom. However, the camera then cuts to a medium close-up of Manni's face as he looks down at the bag Lola is carrying (which contains the 100,000 she has just won at the casino), and he casually asks her, 'What's in there?' As he looks up at Lola, who is not visible in this shot, Manni's face is captured in freeze frame, and the familiar sound of a camera shutter opening and snapping closed takes over the final seconds of the audiotrack. Freeze frame and shutter sound refer directly to the flash forward sequences that punctuate *Lola rennt*, when the film freezes on various minor characters, whose alternate paths through incompossible futures are shown via a series of Polaroid-style snapshots that portray alternative fates for these characters, which appear to be contingent on the minute differences in each of Lola's three runs. Forming a relay back to these scenes, the freeze frame and shutter sound in the final shot of *Lola rennt* suggest an opening onto forking futures for Manni, deferring the linear force of the movement-image. This deferral is further suggested by the credit sequence that immediately follows upon the final freeze-frame shot, in which the credits roll from top to bottom, disorganizing filmic convention by reversing the direction of the typical credit sequence and implying once more the idea of a rewind or 'do over'.

The freeze frame on Manni signalling the end of *Lola rennt* occurs directly after Manni asks Lola about the contents of the bag, and before

she reveals the money it holds. In this final snapshot, Manni is literally recentred in the frame, while Lola's face and body—which have dominated the visual language of the entire film—are completely erased from view, recalling the thematization of women's narrative exclusion in Wenders's *Der Stand der Dinge*, discussed in Chapter 1, which also occurs in relation to photographs. Not only do we hear no reply to Manni's query about the bag, but the film withholds altogether any reaction shot of Lola. If, as *Lola rennt* has demonstrated throughout, time is money, in the exchange enacted by the final scene, Manni indexes time, while Lola—the emblem of German film, left holding the bag—forms a cipher for money. The 'internalized relation' that defines cinema from within, in Deleuze's formulation, the time-money exchange is externalized, even specularized, in *Lola rennt*, a film that makes visible not only the marketization of German cinema in the age of neoliberalism but also the specifically gendered form of cruel optimism faced by its protagonist and ideal viewer, the responsibilized postfeminist consumer citizen of global capitalism.[84]

Reterritorializing Defamiliarization: German Cinema as Global Cinema in *Das Leben der Anderen*

The disorganization of cinematic conventions regarding time and genre and the overt depiction of Lola's run for the money in *Lola rennt* foreground the financialization of German auteur cinema at the turn of the millennium. Premiering eight years later, the next global blockbuster to emerge from Germany, *Das Leben der Anderen,* similarly relies on a calculated disorganization of formal language associated with German film history—here, mixing references to Brecht and epic theatre with a melodramatic narrative designed to elicit cathartic emotions—in order to produce a universalizing mode of German cinema for the global marketplace. Central to this project is the film's development of the heritage form, a fundamentally transnational genre that cloaks itself in national garb. Indeed, while *Das Boot* and *Lola rennt* pioneered innovative strategies to transcend the limitations of their national production contexts (small budgets, the German language) to appeal to global audiences, *Das Leben der Anderen* reflects a much more overtly transnational production model, evident in the role Hollywood financing played in the film's creation. For this reason, *Das Leben der Anderen* poses an emblematic case study for thinking through the impact of an increasingly

84 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 77.

globalized film industry on the creation of a popular cinema whose products retain a claim to national specificity.

Notable in this regard is how the film instrumentalizes familiar signifiers of political modernism in the German context for an affirmative vision of art that allegedly transcends ideology, history, and national specificity, appropriating oppositional aesthetic and political legacies in the service of its ostensibly neutral and immutable values. As Jennifer Creech observes, *Das Leben der Anderen* 'insistently asserts a clear division between the "good" and the "bad," placing us comfortably in the post-*Wende* globalized space of capitalism.'[85] While critics have emphasized how the film constructs a triumphalist narrative that reimagines Cold War history from a markedly Western perspective, less commonly acknowledged is the film's investment not only in normalizing the German past, but also in naturalizing the emergence of global neoliberalism through its form and content. Indeed, as Stuart Taberner has argued, these two projects operate in tandem, insofar as the agenda of normalization is 'a means of safeguarding German business interests, while fully integrating the FRG into the international economic, political and diplomatic order'.[86] In contrast to the strategy of 'deterritorializing the New German Cinema' described by John Davidson, in which the postwar Federal Republic pursued the complementary goals of fostering an internationally recognized cinema that would also offer a sanctioned space of aesthetic resistance and political opposition to dominant culture and policy, *Das Leben der Anderen* demonstrates how the German cinema of neoliberalism inverts this strategy by co-opting Germany's cultural legacies for a fundamentally market-driven form of filmmaking that eclipses the confines of the national.[87]

There is perhaps no other contemporary German film that has generated so much secondary literature, not least on the question of its historical and aesthetic verisimilitude, a testament to the emblematic status of *Das Leben der Anderen*.[88] Despite the fact that it has been amply discussed by scholars, I choose to return to the film here because there is no better example for demonstrating how changing production cultures in the age of neoliberalism underpin aesthetic and thematic choices. The transnational production

85 Creech, 'A Few Good Men', 117.

86 Taberner, *German Literature in the Age of Globalisation*, 8.

87 See Davidson, *Deterritorializing the New German Cinema*.

88 See for example Cooke, *'The Lives of Others' and Contemporary German Film*; Creech, 'A Few Good Men'; Dueck, 'The Humanization of the Stasi in *Das Leben der Anderen*'; Herrmann, 'The Spy as Writer'; Schmidt, 'Between Authors and Agents'; Stein, 'Stasi with a Human Face?'; and Wilke, 'Fiktion oder erlebte Geschichte?'

context of *Das Leben der Anderen* is strongly implicated not only in the film's formal-aesthetic choices, but also in the vision of German history it proffers. The widespread success of the film thus helps to chart the aesthetic impact of transnational production strategies on German narratives, in particular the way these narratives affirm the large scale victory of global capital and Western artistic imperatives over independent and local traditions.

My discussion of this impact is not targeted at discrediting the representational practices of Hollywood-style popular cinema per se; as many critics have pointed out, in employing melodrama, conventional structures of identification, and high production values, the production trend of *Ostalgie* films in the late 1990s and early 2000s, including *Sonnenallee* (*Sun Alley,* 1999), *Helden wie wir* (*Heroes Like Us*, 1999), *Good Bye, Lenin!*, and *Das Leben der Anderen* made the history of the GDR interesting and accessible to new audiences and generated new debates about the German past. However, the global success of these and other neoliberal films has often come at the expense of expunging both alternative cinematic traditions and alternative views of history from their filmmaking archive. Moreover, as critics have emphasized, the *Ostalgie* films all notably coalesce around a male subject-narrator who is defined in opposition to a female-coded socialist state whose demise is typically figured through the death or side-lining of the female protagonist.[89] In this regard, it may be an overstatement to contend that *Ostalgie* films are 'privileged sites where the legacy of the [GDR] is actively contested, [offering] a potential critique of the socioeconomic-political situation in Germany today'.[90] Instead, the films pay lip service to the project of representing GDR history, while actually projecting, in often troubling ways, a triumphalist fantasy of reconciliation and a favourable rather than critical take on the post-unification socioeconomic-political situation. This conciliatory vision is typically figured through discourses of individualism, personal freedom, and self-sacrifice that take shape through a misogynist gender politics that seeks to resolve crises of history and sovereignty by expunging women from the narrative.

In this regard, the *Ostalgie* films constitute emphatic examples of the 'consensus cinema' identified by Rentschler as the characteristic mode of filmmaking in post-unification Germany. Rentschler argues that a key factor in the rise of consensus cinema was the increasing dominance of the German film market by the top five American distributors, who sprang in at the zero hour of unification to capitalize on the domestic profitability of German

89 See especially Schmidt, 'Between Authors and Agents', and Creech, 'A Few Good Men.'
90 Enns, 'The Politics of Ostalgie', 479-480.

cinema in the 1990s, fostering the rise to prominence of a new generation of younger German directors whose filmmaking influences and ambitions lay solidly with Hollywood.[91] The development and production history of *Das Leben der Anderen* strongly reflect this account, not least through the role of Disney's international distribution company Buena Vista International in helping to finance the film. What is more, as Halle points out, *Das Leben der Anderen* and the productions of X-Filme Creative Pool exemplify a 'new matrix of production' that distinguishes itself from a critical, locally-oriented direction in German film history through 'a universalizing perspective and a light-hearted quality or at least a positive redemptive ending'.[92] Halle argues that this new matrix was largely responsible for the silencing of a successful and important generation of GDR filmmakers, whose projects overwhelmingly failed to receive funding in the post-unification period: 'It is this matrix that East German directors identified as the censorship of the market.'[93] While East German directors therefore found few opportunities to interrogate East German history in post-unification cinema, Western directors predominated in the *Ostalgie* wave, and it is their visions of the GDR past that have in large part shaped its cinematic depiction.

Writer and director Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck is no exception. The son of German aristocrats displaced from the East at the end of the second World War, he was born in Cologne, grew up in various Western countries including Belgium and the United States, and studied in Oxford and Leningrad. Himself the product of a thoroughly internationalized background, Donnersmarck approached the creation of *Das Leben der Anderen* with a transnational mindset. Highly critical of German cinema, he counts among his filmic idols Robert Zemeckis, and his favourite movies include *Back to the Future* (1985) and *Groundhog Day* (1993), both films that notably engage with concepts of falsifying narration through the language of popular cinema.

Drawing in *Das Leben der Anderen* on familiar stylistic conventions associated with Hollywood, such as establishing shots, continuity editing, and lush musical scoring, Donnersmarck at the same time catered to international expectations of German cinema with his invocation of what historian Timothy Garton Ash has called 'Germany's festering half-rhyme', Stasi/Nazi.[94] Thus Donnersmarck, in portraying the GDR, cast actors familiar

91 See Rentschler, 'From New German Cinema to the Post-Wall Cinema of Consensus.'
92 Halle, '*The Lives of Others*, the New Matrix of Production and the Profitable Past', 64.
93 Halle, '*The Lives of Others*, the New Matrix of Production and the Profitable Past', 62.
94 Ash, 'The Stasi on Our Minds.'

from their roles as Nazis, clothed them in uniforms and leather jackboots, and invoked an atmosphere of terror reminiscent of films about the Third Reich and the Holocaust, not least Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993), which provides a narrative template for Donnersmarck's story of an insider turned critic of the regime and heroic saviour.

The producers of *Das Leben der Anderen,* Wiedemann & Berg, helped Donnersmarck recruit the film's cast of notable actors, its talented cameraman Hagen Bodanski, and, perhaps most importantly, its composer, Gabriel Yared, famous for his scores for well-known heritage films such as Anthony Minghella's *The English Patient* (1996), whose music is crucial to the achievement of Donnersmarck's film. For Wiedemann & Berg, *Das Leben der Anderen* presented a prestige project, an investment that they saw as a financial risk, but one that could (and did) amply pay them back in artistic credibility. In this regard, too, Wiedemann & Berg have followed the patented strategy of the heritage film, capitalizing on the ongoing voyeuristic fascination with German history in creating prestige productions made in Germany with transnational appeal.

Foregrounding the heritage film's project of aestheticizing history, Donnersmarck has said of his film, '[W]e've created a GDR that is truer than the real thing, that is realer than the actual GDR, and I hope more beautiful.'[95] This beautiful vision of the GDR focuses on the lives of two of the country's most beautiful people, the fictional playwright Georg Dreyman (Sebastian Koch) and his girlfriend, the actress Christa-Maria Sieland (Martina Gedeck). Having fallen in love with the actress after seeing her perform on stage, the nefarious Bruno Hempf (Thomas Thieme), Culture Minister of the GDR, orders Stasi surveillance of the couple's apartment, hoping to find a reason to imprison the apparently squeaky-clean Dreyman. Rather than finding dirt on Dreyman, however, the Stasi man appointed to surveille him, the drab Hauptmann Gerd Wiesler (Ulrich Mühe) undergoes a metamorphosis. Voyeuristically observing Dreyman and Sieland's bohemian lifestyle of lively parties, artistic creation, and passionate sex, Wiesler slowly begins first to identify with his subjects and then to undermine the aims of the regime to which he has sworn loyalty.

In this regard, the specific form of 'falsifying narration' that the film appropriates is significant. Like *Das Boot* and *Lola rennt*, and like many other *Ostalgie* films, *Das Leben der Anderen* relies on the device of the not-necessarily-true past to develop its creative vision of German history, one that yokes the demand for empathy and positive affects characteristic of

95 Qtd. by Enns, 'The Politics of Ostalgie', 490.

neoliberalism to its dismantling of agency and sovereignty. In its depiction of his aesthetic education, the film emphasizes Wiesler's interpellation into a regime dominated by emotion and affective attachments, generated through the resonance of great art, which cause him to turn away from the bad deeds that characterized his life path as a Stasi agent to become a 'good man'. *Das Leben der Anderen* is at pains to demonstrate how the emotional catharsis facilitated by literature and music leads Wiesler to switch sides and come to the aid of those he had been assigned to surveille, a fundamentally false narrative that, as critics protested, has no historical precedent. However, what is 'true' about this creative vision is how it naturalizes and affirms the emergent emotional regime of neoliberalism, in which the performance of empathy becomes a surrogate for the human capacity to act.

The film's imaging of the process of identification that emerges from Wiesler's intense audiovisual spectatorship also affirms on a narrative and diegetic level the ethical imperative of precisely the kind of conventional cinematic language employed by *Das Leben der Anderen* for fostering empathy and moral behaviour, thereby conjoining the film's political critique of the Stasi with its aesthetic rejection of German cinematic and theatrical traditions, especially forms of distancing and defamiliarization. This is certainly one reason why so much criticism of the film revolved around the question of its historical authenticity, and in particular the insistence of various critics that no Stasi agent was ever known to have switched allegiance or come to the aid of his targets. The discussion of historical authenticity in this sense functioned as a cipher for the way the film disorganizes cinematic form by discrediting the cultural heritage of aesthetic modernism and socialism while simultaneously co-opting that heritage for its affirmative and normalizing depiction of the German past. As Gary Schmidt puts it, 'The film renegotiates the fraught relationship between art and ideology in 20th-Century German history' in order to reproduce 'an aesthetic space deemed to be separate from and superior to the political'.[96] Notably, its promotion of this illusion of political neutrality dovetails with the film's market orientation, and it is precisely in this conjunction that *Das Leben der Anderen* functions as an avatar of cinematic neoliberalism.

Indeed, the first sign of Wiesler's change of allegiance comes when he swipes a volume of Brecht's poems from Dreyman's desk; we see him voraciously reading the distinctive canary-yellow book on the couch in his drab apartment while we hear, in voiceover, Dreyman pronouncing the lines of Brecht's well-known love poem 'Remembering Marie A'. As Marc

96 Schmidt, 'Between Authors and Agents', 231.

Silberman has written, 'the filmmaker appropriates Brecht in this context for a symptomatically un-Brechtian purpose. Whereas [...] Brecht's views on art generally insist on the need to change society so that the goodness of individuals [...] will not be perverted, von Donnersmarck inserts Brecht into his own aesthetic "system" that assumes great art must remain apolitical in order to humanize a bad person like Wiesler, who can then change the world'.[97] In *Das Leben der Anderen,* the aesthetic legacy of Brecht operates as a meme for 'the transformative value of art', here drained of its broader collective social vision and deployed in the service of individual development. As Silberman concludes, 'The film viewer is asked to recognize the domain of art as a means of self-transformation and redemption, no matter what the social and political contingencies; capitalism and communism from this perspective are both equally oppressive and, as far as art is concerned, the individual, not society, needs to be changed.'[98] Not only is this vision entirely coherent with the neoliberal emphasis on the transformation of the self, but it quite explicitly emphasizes the promotion of individualism that is a hallmark of neoliberal ideologies, and it does so precisely within the context of the dismantling of the 'mass utopias' of both welfare capitalism and state socialism along with forms of state provision and collectivity supported by both. By narrating the collapse of the GDR and the fall of the Wall as a story about individual redemption through art—a story that notably portrays the redemption of the Stasi man and the socialist author, both of whose redemption is contingent on the death of the female protagonist—*Das Leben der Anderen* transforms this historical rupture into a common-sense tale of personal liberty, at the same time ensuring, in Schmidt's words, 'the legitimacy of art, and of this particular work of art as a vehicle for the expression of ostensibly universal truths or values'.[99]

The story of Donnersmarck's inspiration for the script of *Das Leben der Anderen*, which he wrote as an assignment during his studies at film school in Munich, has been widely reported. In interviews, Donnersmarck recounts lying on the floor of his apartment, listening to classical music, and recalling a statement made by Lenin that his love for Beethoven's *Appassionata Sonata* got in the way of his urge for revolution. 'It shows so clearly how any ideologue has to shut out his feelings altogether in order to pursue his

97 Silberman, '*The Lives of Others*', 153.

98 Silberman, '*The Lives of Others*', 152.

99 Schmidt, 'Between Authors and Agents', 232. Schmidt quotes an interview with Donnersmarck in which the director stated, 'I really don't believe there is such a thing as politics. It's all about individuals. [...] You can't really analyse politics on a systems level', a quote that demonstrates the neoliberal underpinnings of his work (246, n.6).

goals', Donnersmarck proclaimed, 'So, I thought: What if Lenin could have somehow been forced to listen to the Appassionata, just as he was getting ready to smash in somebody's head? [...] I "saw" a picture (actually even something like a medium close-up) of a man in a depressing room, with earphones on his head, expecting to hear words that go against his beloved ideology, but actually hearing a music so beautiful and so powerful that it makes him re-think (or rather: refeel) that ideology.'[100] This image, of course, forms the central scene of *Das Leben der Anderen*, the pivotal moment in the film's discourse on the transformative value of art and one that also makes reference to Brecht.

Dreyman has just learned that his friend Jerska, a blacklisted theatre director who had staged breakthrough performances of Dreyman's plays, has committed suicide, hopeless about his prospects for ever working again in the GDR. Mourning Jerska, Dreyman picks up the piano score for *Die Sonate vom Guten Menschen* (The Sonata of the Good Man), a recent birthday gift from his dead friend. As Wiesler listens through surveillance headphones, we hear the opening strains of the sonata, whose title resonates with Brecht's famous play *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan* (*The Good Woman of Sezuan*). Underscoring the slippage between the film's story of transformation through art and its own deployment of art as transformation, the first bars of the sonata play extradiegetically as we watch Dreyman and Sieland grieve; it is only in a subsequent shot that we see Dreyman playing the sonata on his baby grand piano. A cut to the surveillance centre in the attic of Dreyman's apartment building shows Wiesler from behind; as he (and we) listen to the sonata, the camera makes a slow, 180-degree pan around the Stasi man, finally revealing his face, which is glistening with tears: his cool and detached persona dissolves as Wiesler experiences the cathartic potential of the music and breaks down at its beauty. Driving the message home, Dreyman repeats to Sieland the anecdote about Lenin and Beethoven, posing to her the rhetorical question: 'Can a person who has heard this music—I mean, really *heard* this music—still be a bad person?'

Here, the film suggests that Wiesler's emergent critique of the state, and his willingness to work against the Stasi in order to save Dreyman and Sieland, come about because of his appreciation of the beautiful vision of art they have exposed him to; this scene also specularizes Wiesler's emotional catharsis as an index of his transformation into an empathic subject, a 'good man'. Of course, this beautiful vision also contributes to the overall audiovisual attractions of Donnersmarck's film, treating audiences

100 Sony Pictures Classics, 'Press Booklet for "The Lives of Others,"' 8.

to the ostensibly German strains of the harmonious piano sonata and the sweeping camera movements that culminate in the great reveal of Wiesler's redemption. In this way, the aesthetic and political trajectories of *Das Leben der Anderen* converge: the film valourizes the transcendence and catharsis produced by its own transnational style of filmmaking to elicit consensus with an affirmative vision of German history, and in the same gesture it dismisses the longstanding German tradition of dialectical art (including Brechtian *Verfremdung*, a central facet of German cinema from the Weimar period onward) as a disposable byproduct of the GDR. In fact, contrary to some critics' expression of surprise at Donnersmarck's enlisting of Brecht for an aesthetic project so diametrically opposed to political modernism, the deployment of Brecht is actually central to the neoliberal project of co-opting resistance and difference engaged by *Das Leben der Anderen*. Rentschler remarks that Donnersmarck's movie is quite literally a heritage film in that 'it inscribes heritage in its narrative and, as a cultural artefact, enacts the construction of a humanistic heritage'; appropriating Brecht is integral to this double gesture.[101]

Also crucial for the film's inscription of heritage for a universalizing cinematic language is how, like *Das Boot*, it repackages clichés for pleasurable consumption, portraying the key representatives of the GDR state, Culture Minister Bruno Hempf and First Lieutenant Anton Grubitz (Ulrich Tukur) as cynical bureaucrats in grey, ill-fitting suits, eager to exploit anything or anyone for their own power and pleasure. Their essential evil is counterposed with the spectre of the 'good man' repeatedly referenced in the film's dialogue, beginning with Hempf's winking comment to Dreyman that the state likes his plays because they demonstrate a belief in the essential goodness of people and their ability to change; as Hempf suggests, this belief is naïve, for no matter how often he writes it in his plays, 'Menschen verändern sich nicht' (people never change).

The film's affirmation of the possibility of human transformation and redemption—and its concomitant normalization of history—is achieved not only through its co-optation of modernist aesthetics and politics, but also, crucially, through its employment of gender clichés, especially its conventional association of the female protagonist with the undesirable elements of the GDR. As Creech writes: '*The Lives of Others* incorporates both Brecht and Lenin into a nostalgic reconstruction of a western Cold War narrative of the GDR (Brecht the "romantic," Lenin the "weepy bourgeois subject") and uses the female character as a space through which the male

101 Rentschler, '*The Lives of Others*', 252.

protagonists move to achieve their heroic agency.'[102] Like *Das Boot*, *Das Leben der Anderen* is a film about men; aside from the female protagonist, the actress Christa-Maria Sieland, the film's only female characters are the prostitute who visits Wiesler in his apartment and Dreyman's neighbour, Frau Meinecke, whom Wiesler threatens after she witnesses the installation of surveillance equipment in the apartment. As for Sieland, the film requires her death for its narrative resolution, which not only figures the demise of the GDR, but also unites the two male protagonists in a transcendent—and wholly masculine—aesthetic space, restoring Dreyman's agency as an artist and providing for Wiesler's redemption as a good man.

Sieland, a beautiful but volatile woman addicted to prescription pain pills, stands at the nexus of the film's love rectangle: the girlfriend of Dreyman, she attracts the attentions of both the GDR Culture Minister Hempf and the Stasi man Wiesler. When Wiesler fails to turn up any incriminating evidence about Dreyman, Hempf resorts to other measures to satisfy his desire for Christa-Maria, blackmailing her to sleep with him in exchange for continued access to the pills. Caught between the two men, Sieland finally breaks, betraying to the Stasi Dreyman's identity as the author of an incriminating story about the GDR published in the West, an act that justifies her impending death in the film's narrative economy. Unaware that Wiesler is on her side and has covered up the evidence of her betrayal, Sieland is riddled with guilt and jumps in front of a truck. The melodrama of her highly operatic death scene is heightened by the film's artful use of the colour red to puncture its otherwise muted visual tones: The red blood that flows from Christa-Maria is visually linked to the red typewriter ink that Dreyman used to write his illegal essay, which taints the hands of Wiesler—red of course being the colour of communism as well. When, in the film's epilogue, Dreyman reads his Stasi file in the Normannenstrasse archive after the fall of the Wall, he finds Wiesler's red fingerprints on the report of Sieland's death. These prints, which derive from the ink of the contraband typewriter Wiesler has rescued from Dreyman's apartment, and which recall Christa-Maria Sieland's blood, constitute for Dreyman incontrovertible evidence of the essential goodness of the unknown Stasi agent, whose deeds Dreyman only now discovers.

If Sieland's death allegorically kills off the GDR, putting an end to the psychodrama between Hempf, Dreyman, and Wiesler, and signalling the end of socialism both aesthetically and in the storyline, then her suicide also enables the final triumph of melodrama over dialectical cinema and

102 Creech, 'A Few Good Men', 111.

of catharsis over defamiliarization techniques in the larger aesthetic drama staged by the film. In *Das Leben der Anderen*, we first see Sieland on stage, where she is the object not only of our gaze as spectators of the film, but also of the gazes of all three male characters who share an infatuation with her. Playing in one of Dreyman's dramas, a kitschy GDR theatre production that conforms to the worst stereotype of proletarian theatre, Sieland's prodigious acting talents appear to be wasted. Disturbingly, it is only in her death scene (the film's most climactic and cathartic scene) that Sieland seems to finally get her due as an actress. Then, in the epilogue to *Das Leben der Anderen*, we see a Western restaging of Dreyman's play, a sublime counterpart to the ridiculous GDR version. Here, a new actress has taken on the stage role of Martha previously played by Sieland, while Dreyman sits in the audience holding hands with an elegant new Western girlfriend, who has replaced Sieland in the playwright's private life. Without comment, the film substitutes new, apparently Western counterparts for Sieland, thereby again equating the dead female lead with the extinct GDR. What is more, the actress now reprising Sieland's original role is played by Sheri Hagen, the well-known Black German director and performer. Although she is only briefly visible in this scene, the choice to cast Hagen—the only Black character in the film—in a visible stage role previously performed by the white protagonist conspicuously introduces racial diversity as a quality of post-unification German culture that had been lacking in the GDR. *Das Leben der Anderen* tokenizes Hagen (whom we only see this once) for its superficial vision of contemporary Germany as a multicultural society where diversity is celebrated, a vision that retroactively justifies once more the symbolic death of Christa-Maria/the GDR.

Watching this Western production of his own play, Dreyman is moved to tears, underscoring the film's message about the emotional and redemptive value of art. Just as Wiesler's transformation into a good person was effected by his cathartic experiences reading poetry and listening to 'The Sonata of the Good Man', Dreyman's catharsis now signals his postwall transformation as an artist. We learn that he hasn't written anything since the fall of the Wall, but now he visits the Stasi archive, learning the truth about his surveillance and the role played by Wiesler in manipulating the dramatic events of his life. As a result, Dreyman writes a new novel, cleverly titled *The Sonata of the Good Man*, which he dedicates to HGW XX/7, Wiesler's Stasi code name. Departing from the dialectical form of the drama that characterized his work as a writer during GDR times, Dreyman's postwall novel presumably exemplifies the much-lauded 'return to narrative' (and concomitant turn away from politics) that followed the discrediting of

6. The marketization of culture in Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's *Das Leben der Anderen* (*The Lives of Others*, 2006): Wiesler (Ulrich Mühe) discovers an advertisement for the redemptive novel written by Dreymann (Sebastian Koch).

political writers from East and West, such as Christa Wolf and Günter Grass, in the aftermath of unification. At the end of *Das Leben der Anderen*, Wiesler, now a postman in postwall Berlin, notices a photo of Dreyman and a display of his new book as he walks by the Karl-Marx-Bookstore, a famous landmark in eastern Berlin (see Illustration 6). Entering the bookstore, he buys a copy of the novel. When the clerk asks him whether he wants it gift wrapped, Wiesler answers 'Nein, das ist für mich' (No, it's for me), a neat double entendre that indicates his recognition of Dreyman's intentions in writing the book. Notably, the film ends with a freeze frame on Wiesler holding the book he has just bought, an image that echoes the recentring of Manni via freeze frame in the final shot of *Lola rennt*.

This final scene functions as a clever summary of the film's larger gesture, emphasizing once more on a diegetic level the conquest of conventional, market-based, consumable forms of culture over art associated with political modernism. This triumph is figured precisely through a financial transaction that exemplifies the commodification and marketization of culture: the climactic act of *Das Leben der Anderen* is Wiesler's purchase of Dreyman's book. Both a pleasurable feat of consumption and an emblem of the Stasi man's redemption, this act functions as a metonymy for the neoliberal transition entailed by the fall of the Wall insofar as it depicts Wiesler's literal acquisition of a new, post-unification identity endowed upon him through his purchase of the book. Forming a relay back to the Brecht volume that Wiesler had stolen from Dreyman's desk and which initiated his transformation, Dreyman's book completes the circuit of reterritorializing defamiliarization by replacing Brecht in Wiesler's hands.

Writing in *Der Spiegel* in 2007, Günter Rohrbach, President of the German Film Academy and producer of *Das Boot* among many other successful

German films, offered a spirited defence of *Das Leben der Anderen* precisely as an exemplar of consensus cinema. Rohrbach inveighed against German film critics for lauding low-budget films like Valeska Grisebach's *Sehnsucht* (*Longing*, 2006, see Chapter 5), which attract limited domestic audiences, while panning big-budget box-office draws like Tom Tykwer's *Das Parfum*:

> That a film was expensive shouldn't speak against it per se [...]. One also shouldn't take umbrage at a film simply because it aims for a big audience. That isn't the easiest but, as a rule, the hardest path. It shouldn't be forbidden for a film that achieves popular success to also win prizes. One doesn't need to invent insults like 'consensus film' or, as the film *Das Leben der Anderen* was labelled in a sign of heightened disdain, 'multi-compatible consensus film'. One cannot [...] simply pan *Das Parfum* without even hinting at the extraordinary achievement of its direction, camera, sets, and costumes, [which exhibit] a professional standard that is extremely rare in Europe let alone in Germany.[103]

For Rohrbach, 'multi-compatible consensus film' is in fact far from an insult—it is precisely a praiseworthy quality insofar as it signals the aim to please the largest possible audience, with all the international ambitions and professional standards that entails. As he concludes, 'People don't go to "good" movies, they go to movies that interest them, and they are grateful when these movies are also good.'[104] In Rohrbach's estimation, not only should German filmmakers make consensus films, but German film critics should support and indeed legitimize these films rather than insisting on a differentiated film landscape, let alone on critical reflection about the aesthetics and politics of cinema.

A kind of manifesto for the German cinema of neoliberalism, Rohrbach's essay demonstrates how the new 'matrix of production' he helped set into motion with the global blockbuster *Das Boot* prevails in the new millennium (the scepticism of some critics notwithstanding). Writing as a representative of the German film industry, Rohrbach naturalizes as common sense the connections among 'professional quality', political complicity, and marketability, writing off considerations of aesthetic form (let alone the possibility of minor or counter-hegemonic filmmaking) altogether. In this sense, his essay demonstrates the extent to which, from an institutional perspective at least, contemporary German cinema is driven by a commercial imperative

103 Rohrbach, 'Das Schmollen der Autisten'.
104 Rohrbach, 'Das Schmollen der Autisten'.

above all else. As the global blockbusters *Das Boot, Lola rennt,* and *Das Leben der Anderen* reflect, German filmmakers have continued to succeed in parlaying this commercial imperative into universally appealing films.

If the metacinematic films *Der Stand der Dinge* and *Alle Meine Mädchen* analysed in Chapter 1 employ films within films to address the crystal-image of time/money as a means of confronting the impending financialization of German cinema, the three emblematic films discussed in this chapter illustrate a trajectory of appropriation and eventual subsumption of local German film traditions that ultimately forecloses on the critical potential heralded by the crystal-image itself. Deleuze's multivalent figure suggests the contradictory heterogeneity, variety, and political force of a form of cinema defused and subsumed by the global blockbuster. Indeed, Deleuze's emphasis on the time/money relation, which had emerged as a central preoccupation of art cinema during the writing of *Cinema* in the early 1980s (a preoccupation for which *Der Stand der Dinge* serves as the emblematic example in his analysis), anticipates the way this relation is neutralized via neoliberalism's economization of everything. In this sense Deleuze virtually predicts the eventual obsolescence of his own account of cinema in and for the age of neoliberalism.

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3. From Everyday Life to the Crisis Ordinary: Films of Ordinary Life and the Resonance of DEFA

Abstract
This chapter examines Wolf's *Solo Sunny* (1980) and Dresen's *Summer in Berlin* (2005), two films that chart the transformation of ordinary life across the period of neoliberal intensification in eastern Germany. Emphasizing the transition away from—as well as the enduring influence of—DEFA and socialist realism, this chapter also attends to the affective dimensions of the neoliberal turn by focusing on women characters who figure as seismographs of political and cultural re-orientation. This chapter and the next chapter operate in tandem to analyse films that break with conventional forms of representation to signal disaffection with prevailing circumstances. I argue that this disaffection becomes retrospectively legible in the earlier films through the pointed critique of neoliberalism developed by their later intertexts.

Keywords: *Alltagsfilm*, Konrad Wolf, Andreas Dresen, socialist realism, self-optimization, affect

At the outset of the critically acclaimed box-office hit *Sommer vorm Balkon* (Summer on the Balcony, 2005; released in English as *Summer in Berlin*), a woman arrives at a job interview. Visibly nervous, she perches on the edge of her chair and gulps coffee while describing her work experience as a window dresser for a department store chain. Her eager responses to the male interviewer's questions demonstrate her desire to adapt to the demands of the modern workplace as well as her anxiety at being out of step with its requirements. When he asks her how she would approach her job today, she responds with the axiomatic statement, 'I'm a team player', but when pressed she is unable to explain what this means to her in practice. After an awkward silence, an offscreen voice interrupts the interview and the camera pans

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around to reveal a teacher with a video camera and a classroom full of students. Only now do we understand that the preceding scene has been a performance, a role-play scenario in the context of a training course for the unemployed, trainees who now proceed to critique the woman's interview skills. A balding man criticizes her incorrect body language, while a young woman wearing a hijab notes that she has failed to convincingly market herself; several others comment on her unpersuasive use of the term 'team player'.

By placing viewers squarely within this documentary-style job interview scene and only subsequently revealing it to be a performative role play, *Sommer vorm Balkon* accentuates the erosion of boundaries between documentary and fictional modes in an era when realism has been co-opted for reality tv. At the same time, the film subtly makes visible both the technologies of the self required by the contemporary economy, and, more broadly, the changing scripts of the present that have left people like the character Katrin (Inka Friedrich) behind. A thirtysomething single mother and Hartz IV welfare recipient, Katrin finds herself among the ranks of the long-term unemployed, existing just at the edge of economic precarity. Like other young, female characters who populate recent cinema, Katrin responds to the insecurity of the present by drinking excessively, in a bid to create the kind of social solidarity that is sorely lacking in other facets of her life. Together with her best friend and neighbour Nike (Nadja Uhl), Katrin seeks and fails to find an identity tied to the local community of their neighbourhood in the gentrifying Berlin district of Prenzlauer Berg; the film chronicles the two friends' adjustments to the shifts in daily life effected by neoliberal restructuring, in particular privatization and an increased emphasis on personal responsibility and self-optimization. Employing female characters as sites for imaging the transformations of the present, *Sommer vorm Balkon* develops narrative and formal strategies to help us apprehend otherwise imperceptible gendered aspects of daily life in neoliberalism.

In *Cruel Optimism*, Lauren Berlant draws a distinction between the modern trope of *everyday life*—linked to the sensorium of the 20th-century metropolis, where subjects make do amidst the shocks of urbanization and mediation—and the *ordinary life* of neoliberal capitalism, which is characterized by affective adjustments to the systemic crisis that is embedded in the lives of populations increasingly affected by economic collapse, downward mobility, environmental disaster, and new bifurcations of gender, class, and race.[1] Following Berlant, this chapter and the next trace the generic shift

1 Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 68-69.

in German cinema from films about everyday life to those depicting 'crisis ordinariness' beginning around 1980.

Alltagsfilme (films about everyday life) constitute a specific historical and aesthetic trajectory within German cinema, especially during the Weimar era and in both DEFA films and the New German Cinema of the postwar period.[2] Like other films in this tradition, *Sommer vorm Balkon* depicts the ordinary activities of Katrin and Nike at work, during leisure time, pursuing reproductive labour, and in their relationships with friends and lovers, focusing on the quotidian and the ephemeral in order to probe the relationship between the public and private spheres, between professional life and individual desires. However, in contrast to the mimetic representation of everyday life that characterizes the conventional *Alltagsfilm*, *Sommer vorm Balkon* exemplifies a transition, in form and content, away from the traditions of both socialist realism and postwar art cinema. At a point when prevailing forms of cinematic representation in the GDR and the FRG no longer appear adequate to the task, a new heterogenous narrative style develops that employs genre blending, along with a disruptive mode of documentary realism, to convey emergent forms of ordinary life.

In order to trace this transition, I analyse a 'foursome' of films paired across historical, geopolitical, and generic divides. This chapter addresses the transformation of the *Alltagsfilm* in the context of DEFA and its filmmaking legacies through a reading of Konrad Wolf's *Solo Sunny* (GDR, 1980) and Andreas Dresen's *Sommer vorm Balkon*. In the following chapter, I develop a parallel reading of shifting paradigms for depicting the ordinary in West German feminist cinema and the films it has inspired, focusing on Ulrike Ottinger's *Bildnis einer Trinkerin* (Portrait of a Female Drinker; released in English as *Ticket of No Return,* FRG, 1979) and Tatjana Turanskyj's *Eine flexible Frau* (A Flexible Woman; released in English as *The Drifters,* Germany, 2010). Set in Berlin and featuring female protagonists, all four intertextually related films explore crisis ordinariness through narratives of gendered refusal that turn on the excessive consumption of alcohol and

2 While the term *Alltagsfilm* typically denotes a genre specific to the 1970s and the 1980s in the GDR, films emphasizing a close observation and poetic depiction of everyday life, often combining documentary and narrative styles, are common throughout German film history. They occur for example in the genres of the street film and the Berlin film; in certain films of the New Objectivity and proletarian cinema from the Weimar Republic; in the postwar West German *Zeitfilm* (film about the present) and in many films of the New German Cinema. On the GDR incarnation of the *Alltagsfilm*, see Feinstein, *The Triumph of the Ordinary*; Hake, *German National Cinema*; and Harhausen, *Alltagsfilm in der DDR*.

drugs. In each film, women respond to the crisis of the present by drinking to the point of oblivion, falling into unconsciousness, hospitalization, and even death rather than acceding to normative regimes of self-regulation. The disturbing and discomfiting narratives presented in these films offer no resolution, progress, or catharsis; instead, they 'reveal cracks in the local experience of life that can be mobilized toward alternative imaginaries'.[3] Crucial to my analysis is a discussion of the way these alternative imaginaries make neoliberalism visible not least by rejecting a future-oriented model of political consciousness. Exhibiting neither nostalgia for the past nor a futural orientation, these four films nonetheless emphasize paths not taken, thereby suggesting that things could be otherwise and disrupting any sense that the present represents the natural order of things. In this way, they differ from the films discussed in Chapter 1, which exhibit the neoliberal transformation of filmmaking itself, and those discussed in Chapter 2, which affirm neoliberal aesthetic and political developments.

As Sara Ahmed has persuasively argued, the promise of happiness has long functioned as a coercive form of politics that constructs a normative horizon of expectation. We expect that, if we accrue the right elements (e.g. marriage, family, career), we will be happy; at the same time, this promise entails our duty to be happy once we have achieved these markers. As Ahmed suggests, feminism and other revolutionary forms of political consciousness involve 'heightening our awareness of what there is to be unhappy about': 'In refusing to be constrained by happiness, we can open up other ways of being [...]. Affect aliens, those who are alienated by happiness, are creative: not only do we want the wrong things, not only do we embrace possibilities that we are asked to give up, but we can create lifeworlds around those wants.'[4] Ahmed's work suggests how images of unhappiness and narratives about affect aliens—'troublemakers, wretches, strangers, dissenters, killers of joy'—can help to make visible the flaws of the present while also opening up a political horizon that favours forms of attachment, solidarity, and possibility not constrained by a focus on goals and ends.[5] Ahmed's vindication of the killjoy resonates with Jack Halberstam's defence of 'the queer art of failure' as an opportunity to harness negative affects in order 'to poke holes in the toxic positivity of contemporary life', particularly in the context of heteropatriarchal neoliberal regimes which define success in terms of 'specific forms of reproductive maturity combined with wealth

3 Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 68.
4 Ahmed, 'Killing Joy', 592-593.
5 Ahmed, 'Killing Joy', 573.

accumulation'.[6] For Halberstam, failure (especially as an aesthetic project) offers a detour around these future-oriented definitions in order to imagine other ways of being in the world.

The films under consideration here and in Chapter 4 all feature as their central protagonists affect aliens who flout social norms, eschew the conventional promise of happiness, and exhibit the art of failure along multiple registers. In *Solo Sunny*, the aspiring pop singer Sunny embarks on a quest for artistic expression and individual self-determination that brings her into deliberate and repeated conflict with socialist society. In *Bildnis einer Trinkerin,* the main character arrives in West Berlin for a weekend of debauchery and binge-drinking that is designed to result in her own death, engaging in behaviour that proves shocking even in the ostensibly decadent environment of the walled-in city. In *Eine flexible Frau*, the unemployed architect Greta clashes with her friends, her son, and her professional circle, finding herself fundamentally at odds with the demands the neoliberal social order places on the responsibilized individual. Like Katrin in *Sommer vorm Balkon*, all of these protagonists are vocal killjoys who alienate those around them—in the films' diegetic worlds and, by extension, in their audiences as well—by expressing their unhappiness in bursts of violent rage and in episodes of self-harm.

While not always expressly legible as *feminist* killjoys, it is nonetheless significant that these characters are women. As critics have noted, the period around 1980 saw a marked rise in the prevalence of women protagonists in films from both Germanies. In the GDR, a general turn away from mythic narratives featuring (male) socialist heroes and toward the depiction of *Alltag* led to a focus on female characters. As Joshua Feinstein has argued, 'The East German cinema's general turn toward the everyday life of ordinary individuals favoured female experience. The abandonment of the GDR's utopian pretensions placed a premium on the private and more concrete social realms conventionally associated with women, while it also called into question the mythic dimensions of the political imaginary on which modern male identity often depends.'[7] By featuring women protagonists, DEFA films emphasized 'the discrepancies between the legislated equal rights of women and everyday reality, in particular in the private realm', but they also used women's experiences as a way of evaluating East German society more broadly.[8] Andrea Rinke explains that, because in Marxist

6 Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 32.

7 Feinstein, *The Triumph of the Ordinary*, 134.

8 Kersten, 'The Role of Women in GDR Films Since the Early 1970s', 47.

thought gender relations were viewed as a seismograph for social advances, at DEFA, '*Frauenfilme* were perceived as providing "snapshots of social conditions" in the GDR', leading to a rise in their prevalence at a moment characterized by social and political change.[9] While some DEFA films of this period featured heroines within the context of work and professional life, increasingly the cinematic representation of women began to focus on the private sphere, exploring women's personal lives and desires, and often portraying nonconformist characters with subversive tendencies. As Sabine Hake suggests, at DEFA, 'Film-makers [...] turned to rebellious women characters to test the limits of the utopian promise of happiness against oppressive social conventions and to explore the corrosive effect of normative definitions of gender and sexuality on personal and professional relationships.'[10] As DEFA films probed the possibilities for individual and collective happiness, they evidenced an increasing preoccupation with emotion and affect in the 1980s.[11] The unhappy women characters in these films became sites for expressing political resignation and cultural reorientation.

Since only a very few women directors were ever able to direct feature films in the GDR, most DEFA films featuring women protagonists were directed by men. By contrast, as we shall see in Chapter 4, the prevalence of women characters in West German films of the late 1970s and 1980s derived in large part from the rise of the feminist film movement, with its support of women directors and its influence on the aesthetic and thematic focus of the New German Cinema. In both Germanies, the return of the *Frauenfilm* developed out of the context of feminist movements and their attention to women's social and political status in patriarchal cultures; in West Germany in particular, the success of the feminist film movement in achieving an unprecedented degree of women's participation in cinematic self-representation within a male-dominated film culture cannot be underestimated.[12]

At the same time, the centrality of women protagonists in East and West German cinema around 1980 also correlates to the rise of neoliberalism, with

9 Rinke, 'From Models to Misfits', 185.

10 Hake, *German National Cinema*, 135.

11 Schütz observes that the turn to emotion and affect in DEFA films of the 1980s opened up new thematic emphases, including sickness, guilt, and the 'reversal of social conditions against society's achievers'. Schütz, 'Zur Erkundung individueller Glücksansprüche in DEFA-Spielfilmen der achtziger Jahre', 155-156.

12 This success was soon foreclosed upon, however, when many of the progressive film policies favoring gender parity were dismantled in the 1980s.

its distinctly gendered repertoire and asymmetrical interpellation of women as ideal subjects.[13] Female characters in women's films from the GDR and the FRG reflect the pervasive socioeconomic changes of the period. More significantly, they begin to figure the loss of hope in the utopian promise of the future offered by 20th-century political formations, including socialism, capitalism, and, indeed, feminism.[14] As seismographs of political and cultural re-orientation, women characters function in East and West German films from this period as sites for imaging the present. As we will see, *Solo Sunny* and *Bildnis einer Trinkerin* demonstrate a break with conventional forms of representation and an emphasis on gendered modes of refusal that suggest disaffection with the prevailing circumstances, a disaffection that is retrospectively legible within the larger context of the neoliberal turn that their later intertexts, *Sommer vorm Balkon* and *Eine flexible Frau,* make patently visible.

After Alltag: Individualism and Refusal in the Transitional DEFA Film *Solo Sunny*

A collaboration of the writer-director team Wolfgang Kohlhaase and Konrad Wolf, *Solo Sunny* 'opened the 1980s cinematically' in both literal and symbolic ways.[15] Debuting at the Kino International in East Berlin on January 17, 1980, the film went on to premiere in February of that year at the International Film Festival in West Berlin, where it won the Silver Bear. On both sides of the Wall, *Solo Sunny* met with an enthusiastic popular and critical reception, and hundreds of thousands of viewers saw the film within just a few weeks of its release.[16] The film's popularity undoubtedly derived from its surprising departure from a range of formal and thematic conventions that held sway at DEFA. In this sense it is emblematic of the sea change in filmmaking, and in GDR culture and society more broadly, that took shape at the outset of the decade (and which is also indexed by Iris Gusner's *Alle meine Mädchen*, as discussed in Chapter 1).

13 See Gill, *Gender and the Media*; Gill and Scharff, eds., *New Femininities*.

14 For an incisive analysis of how the end of the Cold War signaled the demise of mass utopia on both sides of the historical East-West divide, see Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe*.

15 Streckfuß and Bartling, 'Solo Sunny', 299.

16 According to Meurer, *Solo Sunny* sold over a million tickets in the GDR during its first year of release. On the film's popularity, see Meurer, *Cinema and National Identity in a Divided Germany,* 291; Claus, 'DEFA – State, Studio, Style, Identity', 145.

Solo Sunny narrates the story of the nonconformist pop singer Sunny (Renate Krößner), who 'goes solo' in her personal as well as in her professional life. Focusing on Sunny's failed attempt to become a star, a goal that appears both desirable and taboo in the context of the late GDR, the film allegorizes both the dilemmas of artistic production (including popular filmmaking at DEFA) and the paradoxes of East German society more broadly in a period characterized by the bankruptcy of the managed public sphere and a turn inward to private life. As Larson Powell has argued, Sunny's 'bid for stardom stands in for the melodrama of GDR citizenship itself, with its continually frustrated aspirations, its paradox of wanting more freedom, but also not so much as to undermine equality or solidarity'.[17] Blurring genres and combining aspects of tragedy and comedy, the film employs documentary realism to capture the routines of ordinary life in the GDR's ossified cultural scene and especially in the Berlin district of Prenzlauer Berg.

In contrast to predominant forms of socialist realism, which expressed optimism about socialism's capacity to improve human life and encouraged the development of the socialist personality, *Solo Sunny* emphasizes the quest for individual freedom and personal happiness outside of the collective, revealing disillusionment with real-existing socialism. This disillusionment is conveyed not least by the way the film dwells on the banal and mundane qualities of quotidian life, underscored by its setting in the *Hinterhöfe* or back courtyards of old apartment buildings. We see shots of crumbling facades, rows of trashcans, and staring neighbours, evidence of the claustrophobia and internalized surveillance of life in East Berlin and of the dilapidated and decaying social infrastructure of the GDR. Shots of trains speeding along and airplanes flying overhead provide constant reminders of the lack of mobility—both literal and figurative—available to the film's characters and, by extension, to East Germans in general.

The formal language of *Solo Sunny* is characterized by an emphasis on ambient sound, static shots, tight framing, abrupt smash cuts, and the slow unfolding of time, qualities that link the film to developments in international art cinema in the 1970s and 1980s[18] and that anticipate and have proved influential for subsequent countercinematic filmmakers including Andreas Dresen, Tatjana Turanskyj, and directors associated with the

17 Powell, 'The Desire to be Desired? *Solo Sunny* as Socialist Women's Film', 153.

18 Powell compares *Solo Sunny* to the late films of Fassbinder, arguing that Wolf and Fassbinder represent the 'swan song of European art cinema' before the rise of commercially-driven consensus cinema in Germany. He also emphasizes the film's indebtedness to New Hollywood films like Alan J. Pakula's *Klute* (1971).

Berlin School.[19] At the same time, the film presents its protagonist Sunny as an almost Hollywood-style figure of identification, a presentation that resonated strongly with young, female viewers.[20]

A number of factors contributed to the unique intervention into dominant modes of realism posed by *Solo Sunny*.[21] Wolfgang Kohlhaase's script for the film drew on the real biography of Sanije Torka, a singer and social outsider who provided the model for Sunny's uncompromising personality and her refusal to accede to social norms. Kohlhaase's use of real events from Torka's life meshed with his noted mastery of Berlin dialect and calculated use of locations to endow the screenplay with a high degree of authenticity. Crucial also was Wolf's choice to work for the first time with cinematographer Eberhard Geick, a young documentary filmmaker, whose knowledge of Prenzlauer Berg and whose eye for tableaux of ordinary life contributed to the visual style of *Solo Sunny*. While its grounding in authentic sites and events and its use of documentary realism is significant for the critical perspective on socialism presented by *Solo Sunny*, these elements also provide a crucial backdrop for the film's metadiscursive commentary on the role and function of art and the image of the artist in the late GDR.

The film's first shot depicts the proscenium arch of a theatre stage, signalling its attention to performance; in the opening sequence that follows, we witness, along with the provincial audience, emcee Benno Bohne (Harald Warmbrunn) introducing the cast of the variety show that Sunny performs with. His opening routine, punctuated by bad jokes and tired clichés, gives way to a montage of mediocre performances, demonstrating how Sunny's aspirations to the glamorous life of a pop star contrast with the banal reality of her current gig touring the provinces. With its focus on the sheer ordinariness of the musicians' lives on tour and the monotonous and degrading quality of Sunny's work in particular, *Solo Sunny* demonstrates that 'the work of the artist is neither the means for developing the socialist personality nor the most important human activity, but rather consists of routine, stasis, and frustration'.[22] Via the figure of Sunny, the film questions the possibility of developing an individual personality in contemporary society, whether through personal relationships, through work, or through art.

19 See for example the interviews collected by Schenk, 'Aus der Mitte des Lebens.'

20 Claus notes that 'Young East Germans reacted with enthusiasm and extensively modeled themselves on Sunny's appearance and lifestyle.' Claus, 'DEFA – State, Studio, Style, Identity', 145.

21 See Heiduschke, *East German Cinema*, 119.

22 Streckfuß and Bartling, 'Solo Sunny', 303.

Sunny's frustration as an artist mounts in the course of the film as drunk and disinterested audiences pay little attention to her singing and her status in the variety show is questioned. From the outset, *Solo Sunny* lampoons the variety show and especially Bohne, who repeats the same bad jokes at every stop on the tour. However, the film's satirical tone is punctured by repeated moments of violence, both physical and discursive, as Sunny is subjected to the everyday sexism of her bandmates and colleagues. Uta Streckfuß and Thomas Bartling read this blurring of comic and tragic elements as one avenue through which Wolf addressed his 'conviction of a new quality of artistic conflict in socialist society'; this mix is thus crucial to the aesthetic and political work of *Solo Sunny* as a transitional film that addresses the loss of hope in the possibility of transforming the GDR and the demise of socialism's mass utopia more broadly.[23]

Like other DEFA films of the period, *Solo Sunny* focuses on the dilemmas of a female protagonist as representative of the broader social dilemmas of the GDR; as Rainer Schütz has argued, *Solo Sunny* is part of a larger movement of 1980s DEFA films in which women serve as 'Träger des Glücksanspruchs', test cases for the right to happiness.[24] Not only does Sunny embody the quest for individual freedom and personal happiness within the context of the collective, but, as a woman, she struggles for emancipation within the ossified patriarchal structures and patent sexism that characterize her daily life. This thematic focus is set up during the film's credit sequence, which is introduced via a sound bridge that links Sunny's performance with the variety show to her ordinary routines at home. After the introduction of the show, the credits appear over a static shot of Sunny's apartment building; through the window of her apartment, we see her getting in and out of the shower, eating an apple, and looking out the window. From below, Sunny's busybody neighbour Frau Pfeiffer (Ursula Braun) yells at her to clean out her cupboard so that pigeons will stop roosting on her windowsill, an incitement to put her house in order. A cut to the inside of the apartment shows Sunny putting on her bathrobe and telling the man in her bed, 'It's without breakfast'. When he protests, clearly assuming that she will perform the traditional female role by serving him food, she retorts, 'It's without discussion as well'. This morning-after scene demonstrates Sunny's volition as a woman who pursues her own desires without compromise, but her rejection of normative gender regimes in professional and personal

23 Streckfuß and Bartling, 'Solo Sunny', 311.

24 Schütz, 'Zur Erkundung individueller Glücksansprüche in DEFA-Spielfilmen der achtziger Jahre', 150.

relationships is tested again and again in the course of the film. As Sebastian Heiduschke argues, its emphasis on everyday sexism represents the most radical critique of ordinary life articulated by *Solo Sunny*, since it challenges the dominant narrative that socialist society guaranteed gender equity.[25] Like the other films under consideration in this and the next chapter, *Solo Sunny* makes visible through its focus on ordinary life the interpellation of women into choiceless systems in which they struggle to achieve agency. With its dual emphasis on the decline of art's emancipatory function and everyday sexism, the film portrays how Sunny is stymied as an artist and as a woman. Unable to find fulfilment in singing or in personal relationships, Sunny seeks agency instead via forms of refusal.

For instance, having sent away her lover without breakfast, Sunny heads to the police station, where she has been ordered to respond to complaints placed by her neighbours about her lifestyle: 'Loud music, relationships with men, pigeons in the cupboard.' Sunny responds to this litany, which exposes the petit-bourgeois and gender-normative expectations of the social mainstream, by hanging a petition in the entranceway of the building and loudly asking her neighbours to sign it: 'I hereby proclaim that I do not feel assaulted by Fräulein Ingrid Sommer's lifestyle!' Climbing up to her apartment wearing her trademark high heels, Sunny purposefully stomps on the hand of Frau Pfeiffer, who is washing the stairs, thereby deliberately injuring her. The film is punctuated by similar outbursts, gestures of refusal through which Sunny aims to assert herself in the face of stasis. When one of her lovers, the philosopher and erstwhile saxophonist Ralph (Alexander Lang), betrays her trust by sleeping with another woman, Sunny takes a large knife into bed with him. Horrified to discover the knife in the bed, Ralph questions Sunny about it, and she calmly admits that she wanted to kill him but fell asleep before she had the chance to do so. This emblematic episode combines the tragic and the comic since Ralph, who is given to pretentious lectures drawn from his philosophical treatises about death, is reduced to a shaking mess by this scrape with real violence. Calculated to beat him at his own game, Sunny's use of the knife is emblematic of her stance as a killjoy; it is her way of disturbing the promise of happiness.

Like Sara Ahmed's 'affect aliens', Sunny generates scenes of conflict and violence rather than 'settling for' happiness. As Ahmed writes, 'The feminist killjoy spoils the happiness of others; she is a spoilsport because she refuses to convene, to assemble, or to meet up over happiness.'[26] Indeed, Sunny is

25 Heiduschke, *East German Cinema*, 116.

26 Ahmed, 'Killing Joy', 581.

repeatedly designated as a spoilsport throughout the film, not only by Ralph. When she refuses the sexual advances of her bandmate Norbert (Klaus Brasch), the whole band accuses her of ruining their tour. Norbert expects that Sunny will accept him because he is attractive and a relationship between bandmates would be 'practical', an expectation that the rest of the band seems to share. Later, Norbert's anger at Sunny's refusal leads him to sexually assault her, a violent act for which Sunny is again held responsible, and which ultimately leads to her dismissal from the band. Sunny also rejects the repeated advances of the taxi driver Harry (Dieter Montag), whose refrain to Sunny, 'You sure know how to spoil things for a guy', explicitly names her as a killjoy.

Sunny prefers to go solo—to pursue her own desires rather than conform to the expectations and demands of others in romantic or professional relationships. Indeed, her repeated rejection of men throughout the film amounts to a renunciation of heterosexual desire as a channel for female self-realization. Sunny's rejection of Norbert, Harry, and Ralph bears a political dimension not only in its refusal of the patriarchal, heteronormative order in general, but also in regard to the specific context of the GDR. As Streckfuß and Bartling suggest, the film 'shows through its various characters different life paths in real-existing socialism and in this way narrates the general search for personal fulfilment under the conditions of stagnation and mediocrity'.[27] Sunny's rejection of Norbert and ultimate departure from the variety show demonstrates her refusal to make artistic compromises. By rejecting Harry, an entrepreneur who owns his own taxi and earns 'plenty for two', Sunny turns down the offer of financial stability and a heteronormative partnership in favour of retaining her own personal independence. Sunny initially chooses Ralph: as a philosopher, he appears to be an independent thinker, and his nonconformist lifestyle suggests his individuality. However, his fixation on death indicates that Ralph's approach is also a dead end, while his free-spiritedness does not extend much farther than sleeping around. Sunny rejects the paths represented by all of these characters, as well as that of her friend Christine (Heide Kipp), a textile worker whose job security allows her to afford an apartment in a brand-new building, but whose work does not lead to fulfilment or self-actualization.

Instead, Sunny exemplifies the new type of female protagonist identified by Rinke in DEFA films of the early 1980s: 'Their lifestyles appear subversive because they refuse to go along with the socialist code of conduct: they do not seek approval, help or advice from the collective at work; they show no "team spirit" and having a successful career is not one of their priorities.

27 Streckfuß and Bartling, 'Solo Sunny', 301.

Instead they seek personal fulfilment and social recognition in alternative subcultures such as bars and discos or else in total solitude.'[28] The different life paths or 'Lebensentwürfe' represented by the various characters in *Solo Sunny* reflect the *Nischengesellschaft* (niche society) that characterized the late GDR, a pervasive withdrawal from public life into private 'niches'.[29]

However, while some critics have viewed *Solo Sunny* as a plea for the niche society, the film in fact demonstrates that Sunny's dilemma is precisely the lack of social solidarity that the niche society reflects, and the impossibility of self-actualization in the context of total solitude and isolation. This is especially clear in a series of sequences foregrounding Sunny's contemplative gaze at herself. At several key moments in the film, we see her reflected in triplicate, looking intently at her own image in a mirror. The first of these sequences occurs early on in the film, shortly after Sunny steps on Frau Pfeiffer's hand. The scene begins with a cut to the interior of Sunny's apartment, where a tape recorder sitting on her vanity table plays the song Sunny plans to perform solo. A tightly framed long take of her hands and torso reflected in the vanity table's tripartite mirror is followed by a slow pan up to Sunny's face, also reflected in triplicate. Gazing steadfastly at her own image, Sunny slowly unwraps a candy and places it in her mouth as if she were watching a movie. The slow pacing of this sequence—the camera holds the shot of Sunny gazing at her own image for a full minute before panning up to a glamour shot of her that is tacked to the wall—emphasizes both her quest for self-optimization (stardom) and her social isolation. This emphasis is reiterated in a later sequence, when we once again see Sunny sitting at a vanity table gazing into a three-part mirror, this time applying make-up back stage before a show. Fed up with the harassment of her colleagues, Sunny has entered a rocky phase with the band, having recently left the stage rather than endure the taunting of the emcee. Now, the bandleader Hubert enters the room and tells Sunny, 'You paint your face like a whore'. The camera focuses on Sunny's tripartite reflection, a split image of her face and upper torso, as she tells him off.

These mirror sequences in *Solo Sunny* call attention to the fragmentation of the self she experiences; by emphasizing her own gaze in the mirror, they foreground Sunny's individualism and the objectification of her body, both qualities of the star (see Illustration 7). Conventional images of stardom common to the Hollywood woman's film and the celebrity biopic, these citational shots represent the production of Sunny's star persona through self-stylization and media technologies (tape recorder and glamour shots),

28 Rinke, 'From Models to Misfits', 195.

29 See Gaus, *Wo Deutschland liegt*.

7. The quest for self-optimization and the fragmentation of the subject: Sunny (Renate Krößner) gazes at her mirror image in Konrad Wolf's *Solo Sunny* (1980).

8. Labourious technologies of the self: Nike (Nadja Uhl) applies lipstick in the bathroom mirror in Andreas Dresen's *Sommer vorm Balkon* (*Summer in Berlin*, 2005).

but they also attest to the paradoxical sense in which stardom, as the ostensible path to individuality for Sunny, is predicated on her objectification and commodification within patriarchal society.[30]

30 On *Solo Sunny*'s use of the generic iconography of the women's film, see Powell, 'The Desire to be Desired?'.

It is her recognition of this paradox that apparently leads to Sunny's suicide attempt after the failure of her solo performance. In the visual and narrative climax of the film, Sunny performs at a Berlin bar, dressed in a glamorous outfit and singing the song Ralph has helped her to write. A far cry from the variety show with its institutional-representative components, Sunny's solo performance is a carefully curated instance of self-styling, with the costume, make-up and song all tailored to create her star persona. Nonetheless, her performance meets with the same distracted reception that she has repeatedly encountered on tour, and afterwards she is subjected to another instance of sexist behaviour when a man accosts her at the bar. Enraged, Sunny removes his glasses from his face, symbolically emasculating him by breaking them in half. But her rage turns inward in the ensuing scene, when she drinks to excess and then shows up at her friend Christine's apartment and asks for a sleeping pill, telling Christine: 'I had a solo.' Late for work, Christine leaves Sunny with a box of medicine. Sunny takes some pills, and we see her looking out the balcony doors of Christine's newly built apartment onto the vast construction site below.

This equivocal shot—both a symbol of the GDR's ongoing process of *Aufbau* and a desolate wasteland—figures the ambiguity of Sunny's suicide attempt, which *Solo Sunny* represents obliquely. A hard cut takes us from the construction site to the inside of a hospital where Sunny lies on a stretcher having her stomach pumped by a team of women doctors. When a query about her profession is answered—'Schlagersängerin' (pop singer)—they respond with eye rolls and knowing glances. Portrayed ambivalently as a result of Sunny's desperation, as a sign of her refusal, and as a cliché of her profession, the suicide attempt ultimately becomes the pivotal moment in Sunny's quest for individualism. At the mental health clinic where she is treated, a psychiatrist asks Sunny the key question staged by the film, 'How do you define success?' Clearly, this question pertains not only to Sunny's existential dilemma, but also more broadly to the social and political context of the GDR around 1980. Sunny equivocates at first, mentioning her general lack of success as a singer, before adding, 'I usually have my greatest success when I tell someone my opinion…I think I need to know that someone wants me.' Sunny's response identifies the isolation at the root of her alienation, underscoring the necessity of a sociopolitical horizon that can foster both nonconformity and social solidarity.

In the aftermath of her suicide attempt, Sunny tries out several paths forward, all of which culminate once more in failure. Her return to factory work at the textile plant reveals that Sunny will not find success through

labour. Instead, she embarks on a renewed attempt to form a relationship with the taxi driver Harry. Throughout the film, Sunny has refused Harry, telling him at one point that he must be dense to keep pursuing her. As Harry responds, 'With the money I make, there's no way I could be dumb'—as a self-styled entrepreneur, Harry exemplifies the rationale of emergent neoliberalism, where financial success is the only thing that counts. Nonetheless, heteronormative sexuality and economic power also fail to facilitate Sunny's self-actualization, nor does one last attempt at solo performance.

In the penultimate episode of *Solo Sunny*, Sunny narrates a dream she has had that concisely enunciates the film's negation of futurity. In the dream, someone enters Sunny's apartment and says, 'Sunny lived here. Here are traces of Sunny', and Sunny responds 'I'm already far away, I would like to come back, but I can't.' As Sunny cries desperately, the camera pans over the rooftops of Berlin, indicating the loss of hope in the present day about the possibility of a transformed future in the GDR.

Like the many establishing shots of buildings and courtyards in Prenzlauer Berg that recur throughout *Solo Sunny*, this shot of the rooftops places Sunny's story firmly within the quotidian, everyday space of the city, emphasizing the ordinariness of her dilemma within the context of East German life. These documentary-style shots of East Berlin city scenes, with their narrow vistas and confining architecture, punctuate the film in order to emphasize the entrapment of individuals whose experience of the GDR reflects both a lack of personal freedom and the failure of managed forms of collective social life. At times, documentary realism in *Solo Sunny* is employed in a montage-like manner to register the paradoxical fact that the seismic aspirations of socialism's mass utopia fail to exert tangible effects on the ordinary lives of citizens, even as the public and private spheres remain inextricably intertwined in the GDR.

For instance, in a short sequence midway through the film, Sunny arrives at Ralph's apartment bearing bags of groceries and a large melon. As Ralph answers the door, a quick cut away to the view from his kitchen window reveals a building collapsing in the background, one of many war-damaged, obsolete Berlin apartment houses that the regime was still razing through controlled demolitions in the late 1970s. A cut back to the internal space of Ralph's apartment registers the impact of the explosion through a close-up of Sunny's melon shaking on the kitchen table, before we glimpse in reverse shot a view of the dust clouds triggered by the blast. This sequence demonstrates the material effects of GDR architectural policy by juxtaposing a building explosion with the everyday objects in Ralph's kitchen; notably, however, we see neither Sunny nor Ralph respond to the detonation. As Simon Ward puts

it, the sequence is composed 'to imply that such demolition is now simply part of the everyday, rather than the visceral interruption that it is in *Paul und Paula*', the 1973 Heiner Carow film which had also featured footage of an East Berlin building demolition.[31] As Ward suggests, by 1980, exploding buildings had become just another banal fact of ordinary life under state socialism, no longer warranting an affective or sensorial reaction let alone suggesting hope for a revitalized cityscape, a transition that *Solo Sunny* makes visible through its incorporation of documentary realism.

Despite its remarkable indexing of the loss of hope in a transformed GDR, evidenced not least by such documentary sequences, the film nonetheless ends on an upbeat note, with Sunny auditioning to be the singer for a new band. We see her walking alone through the snowy streets, dressed in black leather, a fox fur stole, and her trademark high heels. Arriving in the industrial warehouse in Prenzlauer Berg where the band is practicing, Sunny tells the group of men in no uncertain terms, 'I sleep with someone when it's fun for me. I don't mince words. I'm the one who the Tornadoes kicked out. My name is Sunny.' An extreme close-up of Sunny's face, held in a long take, shows her breaking into a smile, suggesting a guardedly optimistic ending to her quest for self-realization, albeit one that is lodged firmly outside the official venues of the GDR public. In Halberstam's sense, Sunny's repeated failures in fact lead to an ending that suggests 'more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world'.[32] With its twin emphasis on Sunny's self-determination and her pursuit of shared artistic and social aims in the underground rock scene, this ending suggests a reading of *Solo Sunny* as an archive of the past—at the dawn of the neoliberal age—that opens onto different possibilities: it is a film that depicts the end of socialism while insisting on the necessity of individual sovereignty and collective solidarity, political and social equality.

This open ending, and the overall ambivalent and contradictory character of *Solo Sunny*, resonates with broader tendencies in German cinema on both sides of the Wall at a moment that Walter Uka has termed a 'Zwischenzeit' (interim time), characterized by 'the incursion of the artistic and aesthetic and the simultaneous disappearance of society, politics, and ideology critique in the films of the eighties'.[33] This resonance helps to account for the remarkable success of *Solo Sunny* not only in the GDR, but also in the Federal

31 Ward, 'Obsolescence and the Cityscape of the Former GDR', 386.

32 Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 3.

33 Uka's account focuses exclusively on West German film, but many facets of his description pertain equally to the East German case. Uka, 'Der deutsche Film "schiebt den Blues"', 105-113.

Republic, where the film 'had the biggest launch of an East German film ever'.[34] The popularity of *Solo Sunny* helped to usher in a new era of interest in DEFA films in the Federal Republic. Throughout the 1980s, DEFA films played regularly at the Berlin Film Festival[35] and they were also purchased by West German television, where they aired successfully.[36] In terms of its formal-aesthetic and narrative concerns, and on the level of production and distribution, *Solo Sunny* signalled the transitions to come in German cinema and society.

Into the Crisis Ordinary: Refusing Responsibilization in the Post-Wende Comedy *Sommer vorm Balkon*

Director Andreas Dresen's biggest box office success to date, the 2005 comedy *Sommer vorm Balkon* forges a deliberate and explicit intertextual relationship with *Solo Sunny*.[37] *Sommer vorm Balkon* follows the lives of two thirtysomething women living around Helmholtzplatz in Prenzlauer Berg early in the new millennium, combining documentary realism with elements of tragedy and comedy to depict ordinary life amidst the crises arising from economic precarity, the breakdown of traditional family structures, and gentrification. Both *Solo Sunny* and *Sommer vorm Balkon* were written by the noted screenwriter Wolfgang Kohlhaase, whose work helps us to contemplate the continuities and transitions that underpin these two films' attempts to make visible aspects of the historical present.

Kohlhaase has observed that 'Everyday life is preserved in films and this is what gives the medium a different kind of significance.'[38] Kohlhaase's observation resonates with Berlant's suggestion that 'Cinema and other recording forms not only archive what is being lost but track what happens in the time that we inhabit before new forms make it possible to relocate within conventions the fantasy of sovereign life unfolding from actions.'[39] In her discussion of the cultures of neoliberalism, Berlant emphasizes the emergence of new generic and aesthetic forms that 'manifest the unbinding of subjects from their economic and intimate optimism', including the

34 Claus, 'DEFA – State, Studio, Style, Identity', 145.

35 Haase, *Zwischen uns die Mauer*.

36 Kohlhaase, 'DEFA: A Personal View', 128; Wedel et al., eds., *DEFA international*.

37 *Sommer vorm Balkon* sold close to a million tickets and finished in the top ten of German films in 2006.

38 Kohlhaase, 'DEFA: A Personal View', 117.

39 Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 7.

situation tragedy and the cinema of precarity.[40] Exhibiting qualities of both emergent forms, *Sommer vorm Balkon* tracks this unbinding in several noteworthy ways: via scenes (like the one discussed at the start of this chapter) that call attention to the performative nature of contemporary subjectivity; and through its intertextual relationship with *Solo Sunny*, which highlights the connections and disruptions between life in Prenzlauer Berg during GDR times and after unification.

Sommer vorm Balkon addresses the post-unification context by focusing on not one but two female protagonists: Nike, who grew up in East Berlin, and Katrin, who moved there from the western German city of Freiburg after her divorce. While the best friends Nike and Katrin thus figure the merging of East and West after the *Wende*, they also trouble conventional representations of this dynamic, since it is the western German Katrin who experiences insecurity and crisis most directly. An unemployed single mother, Katrin spends her days fulfilling the obligations of a Hartz IV welfare recipient: attending unsuccessful job interviews to meet a quota, completing a coaching programme, and doing menial labour as a temporary employee. Meanwhile, she strives to conform to normative role expectations while mothering her pre-adolescent son and pursuing adult social interactions through friendship and dating. In both her search for gainful employment and her quest for a viable domestic life, Katrin fails miserably to perform properly. Unable to exhibit confident modes of self-presentation or self-regulation, she also chafes at the demand to take personal responsibility for problems that arise from situations of social risk (divorce, unemployment) beyond her control. If *Solo Sunny* ends with cautious optimism in its depiction of Sunny's quest for self-determination, thereby endorsing the possibility of sovereignty, in *Sommer vorm Balkon* self-determination no longer appears on the horizon of possibility for the film's protagonists, whose prospects are shaped instead by forms of self-optimization, identity performance, and responsibilization demanded by neoliberal governmentalities.

Ostensibly occupying a more stable position as a childless, employed woman, Katrin's friend Nike indexes the precarity of the present along different lines. Nike works as a home care aide for the elderly, a job that she excels at and also appears to enjoy, but one that epitomizes the flexibilization of labour. Although she earns so little that her wages hardly equal Katrin's welfare payments, Nike is subjected to a tightly managed schedule that has her biking madly from one apartment building to the next and racing through the routines of feeding and bathing her clients. When she takes the time to

40 Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 7.

read aloud to these senior citizens or listen to their reminiscences, she is castigated by the boss of the private firm that contracts her employment, who tells her in no uncertain terms that these 'personal' activities must take place off the clock. For Nike, neoliberal responsibilization emerges as a demand to quantify all aspects of her work life, excising apparently unquantifiable human interactions from her day in ways that aim to turn her into an automaton.

In her personal life, too, Nike searches for human connections that elude her. An orphan who spent her childhood in a GDR children's home, Nike occupies a carefully curated domestic space and calibrates her days according to a domestic routine featuring pop songs and a well-laid breakfast table. Like Sunny in *Solo Sunny*, the character of Nike is modelled on GDR singer and social outsider Sanije Torka, whose uncompromising attitude and rejection of social norms inspired Kohlhaase's depiction of female protagonists in both films.

Lacking familial relationships, Nike's closest personal relationship is her friendship with Katrin. Early in the film, after drinking on the balcony, the two women lie in bed together, in a scene that expresses the erotic potential of their bond. However, after stroking and kissing Katrin, Nike gently pushes her away, halting Katrin's advances. Subsequently, the problem of desire between the two women is sublimated into their conflict over a man, when Nike begins an affair with the macho truck driver Ronald, in whom Katrin has also expressed interest. As David Lode describes him, 'Ronald is absolutely the projection screen of female longing (sunglasses, open shirt, tattoos) and is established from the outset as a cliched but above all comic figure',[41] and Nike's desire for the masculine ideal he represents, as opposed to the actual person of Ronald, is revealed by the fact that she consistently flubs his name (she keeps calling him Roland). Nike invites Ronald into her space and includes him in her routine, appearing to embrace conventional gender roles by preparing his meals and servicing his needs. While she is at first satisfied by his companionship and sexual performance, however, Nike soon begins to rebuff his chauvinist behaviour. Apparently attracted to him precisely because of his macho self-presentation, Nike ultimately rejects Ronald for living up to his looks, asking him: 'Do you think that just because it's working out sexually you can act like an ass?!'

The depiction of Nike's relationships in *Sommer vorm Balkon* demonstrates the way that both traditional and flexible gender roles coexist in neoliberalizing societies, or what Volker Woltersdorff has described as 'precarious sexualities'. As Woltersdorff argues, the flexibilization of gender paired with the ongoing insitutionalization of the binary sex-gender system has led to

41 Lode, *Abenteuer Wirklichkeit*, 182.

a condition of insecurity in which 'individuals find themselves exposed to contradictory social role requirements. Quite often, different normative ideas compete with one another'.[42] Nike renounces the same-sex eroticism of her relationship with Katrin, instead embracing heterosexual desire. However, she experiences difficulties reconciling her heterosexuality with the normative gender roles it appears to entail. Finally, learning that Ronald has three children by three different mothers, she locks him out of her apartment, trapping him on her balcony where he is forced to spend a cold, dark night, exiled from her domestic space but unable to escape from it entirely.

The eponymous balcony in *Sommer vorm Balkon* is a liminal space, floating above the city streets, neither fully public nor fully private. The film's narrative is framed by episodes on this balcony, where Katrin and Nike meet up regularly to escape the social and economic pressures that shape their lives by drinking, talking, and flirting with the pharmacist who works nights below. As Mila Ganeva suggests, the liminal space of the balcony figures a 'psychological state of in-betweenness' for the two protagonists: 'as the yearnings and hopes of the two remain unfulfilled, the balcony becomes the spatial equivalent of the uncertain present, suspended between past and future'.[43] The spatial symbol of insecurity in a film that maps the crisis ordinary through its authentic depiction of city streets and neighbourhood locales, the balcony represents a space of conviviality, but one that makes visible the precarity of social solidarity and the promise of happiness today.

For what begins as a ritual of escape from the crises of ordinary life soon transforms into a more deliberate form of refusal for Katrin, who begins drinking to excess not only during her nights with Nike on the balcony but also at home alone, at the odd jobs she works, and, in the film's climactic scene, during a night out at the disco that culminates in a sexual assault witnessed by Katrin's son. Ashamed and livid, Katrin drinks the large part of a bottle of vodka, and is ultimately admitted to the hospital with alcohol poisoning. For Katrin, whose overdose is ambiguously represented, like Sunny's, as a possible suicide attempt, it is the experience of rape that pushes her over the edge and that ultimately makes her situation of precarity visible as crisis.

Nearly identical in framing to the stomach pumping scene in *Solo Sunny*[44], the clinic sequence in *Sommer vorm Balkon* deliberately cites Wolf

42 Woltersdorff, 'Paradoxes of Precarious Sexualities', 173.

43 Ganeva, 'Encounters on a Street Corner', 6.

44 A similar stomach pumping scene is also featured at the outset of Heiner Carow's *Coming Out* (1989), the GDR's first film about homosexuality, in which a gay character attempts suicide by overdose (see Chapter 5). The intertextual connections with *Coming Out* add a further

and Kohlhaase's earlier film in order to highlight the continuities—namely the asymmetrical gender relations, everyday sexism, misogyny, and sexual violence—that shape the lives of Sunny, Nike, and Katrin, even amidst the radical transition, in Dresen's words, 'from social welfare state to individual state; from a society of care to a society in which everyone is left to their own devices'.[45] Shot during the night shift at an actual rehab centre at St. Joseph's Hospital in Berlin-Weißensee and using lay actors—members of the clinic staff—Katrin's hospitalization is one of several scenes in *Sommer vorm Balkon* that combine elements of documentary and narrative filmmaking in a move to unsettle both filmic realism and our naturalized perception of the present. The scene includes dialogue improvised by actual doctors and nurses and features a direct, immediate style of cinematography. As Katrin lies on a cot in a stupor, a doctor tries to establish a direct connection with her, asking her to open her eyes and focus on her finger. While the doctor physically examines Katrin, a nurse has her blow into a Breathalyzer and determines that her blood alcohol level is 2.5 per mill (0.25 percent). Katrin, whom we see framed in close-up, groans and grimaces at the bright lights of the clinic and the insistent voices of the medical staff, as the camera pans quickly across her body. This camera style continues in a subsequent scene featuring the real-life clinic director at St. Joseph's Hospital, who discusses liver function, alcohol withdrawal, and addiction with Katrin, drawing on her own work experience to create an authentic dialogue. In this improvised scene, Katrin expresses rage, denial, and desperation, threatens suicide, and ultimately breaks down in tears as the camera hovers close to her face. Filmed in one take, the scene conveys a sense of authenticity through its tight framing and rapid pans between characters.

Documentary-style cinematography and the use of improvisation by lay actors employing genuine professional vocabulary are integral to the representation of ordinary life throughout *Sommer vorm Balkon*. In the hospital scene, actual doctors and nurses discuss medical procedures, drawing on their own work experience to create a sense of immediacy. In the opening sequence of the film, the seminar leader at Katrin's job training course, a real employment coach in Berlin, critiques her interview skills and incorporates the comments of the audience, all participants in an actual job training seminar. Later, Nike meets with the boss of the home

dimension to Katrin's possible suicide attempt, suggesting that her sublimated desire for Nike has contributed to her shame and despair.

45 Sylvester, '"Als ob man mit einem Einbaum auf einen Wasserfall zufährt"', 183.

care service where she works; this actor too is the actual head of a Berlin health care firm. In this improvised scene, the employer drew on her own experience disciplining employees who fail to meet the firm's quotas to develop the dialogue in which she castigates Nike for mismanaging her time. The improvisations of these 'real-life' professionals are crucial to the way *Sommer vorm Balkon* conveys the spreading emphasis on personal responsibility across all realms of contemporary life.

Having previously shot films on both 35mm and digital video, Dresen chose 16mm for *Sommer vorm Balkon*; the cheaper format allowed him to collect more footage (with a shooting ratio of 25:1 in film shot compared to what was used in the final cut) and thereby to incorporate more documentary-style scenes.[46] Involving actual professionals filmed in authentic locations, these sequences mix documentary footage into the fictional narrative to achieve a realist mode that undoes conventional binaries of documentary/feature, unsettling our perception of 'reality' and making processes of neoliberalization visible. Indeed, in *Sommer vorm Balkon*, the recourse to documentary does not so much ground or underpin the film's realism as highlight and make us aware of the slippage among different forms of realist visual representation today. In an era when 'authenticity' has been fully co-opted for fictionalized forms of entertainment via reality tv shows and social media that commodify representations of 'real life', *Sommer vorm Balkon* employs interlaced scenes of 'documentary' and 'fiction' that reflect, echo, and amplify one another, making visible the erosion of boundaries between these two modes.

Similarly, and in an interconnected way, *Sommer vorm Balkon* blurs the lines of established genres. Marketed and in some instances received as a comedy, and building on the popularity of relationship comedies in the post-unification period (see also Chapter 5), the film shifts tone partway through, as its light-hearted depiction of ordinary life culminates in the tragedy of Katrin's sexual assault and alcohol poisoning. As Lode describes it, 'The style of production, its overt minimalism, focuses on the essence of the conflict and allows the escalation of [Katrin's] breakdown to develop in a non-organic, unpredictable, and as a result truly shocking way. The tone of the film transforms radically here: an almost naïve-seeming comedy develops into an existential drama.[47] To be sure, it is no accident that, precisely in the depiction of crisis—of the 'unbinding of subjects from their

46 Köhler, 'Angstfreies Klima', 15.

47 Lode, *Abenteuer Wirklichkeit*, 187.

economic and intimate optimism'—we see comedy and tragedy converge in a new generic form that indexes the precarity of the present.[48]

Crucial to this image of the present, *Sommer vorm Balkon* develops a homology between gentrification and self-optimization, two forms of improvement that demonstrate in stark visual terms the transformation of ordinary life in late-stage capitalism. Shot at a crucial moment in the renovation of Prenzlauer Berg from a dilapidated, working-class neighbourhood to the bourgeois epicentre of the New Berlin, the film captures in Dresen's words, 'Prenzlauer Berg as it once was and is quickly disappearing. Back then, Prenzlauer Berg was a much more raw area, with stairwells that smelled like piss and like old coal-burning stoves. It had something mangy about it. We wanted to tell a story about that world, which is disappearing. The old people are dying out there.'[49] This disappearing world is evident in the apartments of the seniors whom Nike cares for (apartments that will be snapped up by investors as soon as the old people die), and in the neighbourhood bar that Katrin and Nike frequent, emblematic of all the locales that were closing their doors at the time of filming to make way for coffee shops and cocktail lounges catering to the new residents of the district. At the outset of the film, Katrin and Nike inhabit an unrenovated building on Helmholtzplatz, an actual apartment block slated for renovation which the filmmakers were able to use as a shooting location during a short period after all the residents had moved out and before construction began. The film's final shot shows this building under scaffolding, demonstrating how the domain documented by the film was already gone by the time *Sommer vorm Balkon* was released in theatres. The theme of gentrification is echoed metatextually in a series of paintings that Katrin created shortly after moving to Prenzlauer Berg when she documented her impressions of the neighbourhood—'it looked so East German [ostmäßig] back then'—and which she tries to place on consignment in a second-hand shop. Later, Katrin's son Max shows the paintings to his friend Charly, explaining: 'Now they're repainting all the buildings, but here you can see how they used to look.' Katrin's paintings, like *Sommer vorm Balkon* itself, preserve a disappearing world, sharpening our perception of the transformations of the present.

Gentrification names an ambivalent process of neighbourhood improvement in which old forms of life literally become obsolete, as buildings are

48 Ascheid refers to *Sommer vorm Balkon* as a postromantic comedy, aligning it with the genre of the postromance, which she calls the 'dystopian twin' of romantic comedy. She posits the generic innovation of the postromance as a response to the dismantling of conventional gender roles and family relationships in the present. Ascheid, 'The Romantic Comedy and Its Other', 259.

49 Dresen, cited in Lode, *Abenteuer Wirklichkeit*, 177.

renovated, businesses are closed, and populations are cleared to make way for new economic developments. In *Sommer vorm Balkon* the gentrification of Prenzlauer Berg is echoed in the processes of self-optimization demanded of Katrin and Nike if they are to succeed in the changed world of the present, a world in which, as Angela McRobbie has described it, 'it becomes increasingly difficult to function as a female subject without subjecting oneself to those technologies of the self that are constitutive of the spectacularly feminine. There are new norms of appearance and self-presentation expected not just in leisure and in everyday life but also in the workplace, and government concerns itself with this aspect of self-management through various initiatives'.[50] In addition to the many forms of professional improvement that Katrin and Nike are held responsible for, including Katrin's Hartz IV requirements and the demand on Nike to quantify her work through more efficient interactions with the seniors she cares for, the film also reflects on the laborious technologies of the self practiced by the women in their relationships, domestic life, and appearance. This theme is brilliantly indexed via a recurrent shot of Nike in the bathroom of the neighbourhood bar, where she must stand on tiptoe and stretch to see her face in the mirror in order to apply lipstick (see Illustration 8). Demonstrative of the effort required to perform the self, this visual motif highlights the toll for women in particular of the demand for an optimized self-presentation.

Screenwriter Wolfgang Kohlhaase has remarked that, in *Solo Sunny*, Sunny is a character who refuses to make compromises, even in an era (GDR times) when compromises were demanded of everyone.[51] In *Sommer vorm Balkon*, Katrin and Nike similarly refuse to embrace normative roles and relationships or to accede to the regime of responsibilization that characterizes the neoliberal present. Notably, both films suggest and then withdraw the possibility of achieving narrative resolution through the successful pairing of a normative heterosexual couple. Renouncing heterosexual desire, Sunny joins a band and Nike rejects Ronald in favour of a renewed friendship with Katrin. However, while *Solo Sunny* exhibits optimism about the possibility of women's self-determination at a moment of transition for GDR society by ending with an extreme close-up of Sunny's smiling face, *Sommer vorm Balkon*, with its final shot of the scaffolded apartment building undergoing a gentrifying renovation, suggests that

50 McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism*, 60.

51 'What interested us about the character was that she wasn't much good at making compromises, and as people in the GDR had to live with so many compromises, this was what made her attractive.' Kohlhaase, 'DEFA: A Personal View', 127.

the inexorable processes of optimization will continue, despite Katrin and Nike's refusal to embrace them.

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4. Future Feminism: Political Filmmaking and the Resonance of the West German Feminist Film Movement

Abstract

This chapter analyses Ottinger's *Ticket of No Return* (1979) and Turanskyj's *The Drifter* (2010), bringing into focus the imprint of West German feminist filmmaking on contemporary cinema, despite the significant undermining and obscuring of its legacy via processes of privatization and media conglomeration. Like the films discussed in the previous chapter, the two films under consideration here engage themes of refusal and disaffection with the status quo at the levels of both form and content. Focusing on women protagonists in Berlin who exhibit gender, sexual, and class mobility and refuse to accede to regimes of normativity, these films demonstrate how responsibilization, flexibilization, and professionalization emerge as "solutions" to problems of agency and sovereignty in neoliberal capitalism.

Keywords: Feminist film, Ulrike Ottinger, Tatjana Turanskyj, flexibilization, sovereignty, affect

At the outset of *Eine flexible Frau* (A Flexible Woman, 2010; released in English as *The Drifters*), we see protagonist Greta Mondo framed in long shot, standing immobile in the middle of a sunny wheat field. An abrupt cut shows her dancing in a strobe-lit disco, before she stumbles drunkenly up a darkened staircase and falls face first into her apartment. Already on view in this opening sequence, the physical acts of stasis, dancing, stumbling, and falling figure Greta's inability to adapt to—and indeed her ultimate refusal of—the mobility demanded by neoliberal capitalism. *Eine flexible Frau* depicts the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis in Berlin, focusing on the intertwined predicaments of gentrification and privatization and the rise of precarity for the city's creative classes. An unemployed

Baer, H., *German Cinema in the Age of Neoliberalism*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021. DOI: 10.5117/9789463727334_CH04

architect and single mother, Greta embodies this precarity across multiple social and economic dimensions, exhibiting the disproportionate toll that flexibilization takes on women.

Independently produced by writer-director Tatjana Turanskyj, *Eine flexible Frau* revives the project of the feminist *Frauenfilm*, which left a meaningful imprint on the landscape of West German cinema in the 1970s, but whose legacy had been significantly undermined by the deregulation, privatization, and conglomeration of media industries in subsequent decades.[1] Specifically, Turanskyj's film creates a strong—if not entirely deliberate—resonance with Ulrike Ottinger's iconoclastic feminist film *Bildnis einer Trinkerin – aller jamais retour* (Portrait of a Female Drinker, 1979; released in English as *Ticket of No Return*), which presents the transgressive narrative of a binge-drinking protagonist who refuses to accede to regimes of normativity. The resonance between the two films is evident in their mutual thematic focus on a female drinker in Berlin who exhibits gender, sexual, and class (im)mobility; in the aesthetic project of depicting the shifting terrain of ordinary life in neoliberalism; and in the political project of imaging gendered modes of refusal. Bracketing the period of neoliberal intensification (1980-2010), *Bildnis einer Trinkerin* and *Eine flexible Frau* employ similar strategies to make visible the discursive paradigms affecting women in 'the normalizing society' (Foucault), especially the way that professionalization, responsibilization, and flexibilization—technologies of self-management for market actors—emerge as 'solutions' to the problems of sovereignty, agency, and subjectivity in advanced capitalism.

In his elaboration of the principle of biopower, Foucault distinguishes between an older regime of discipline, focused on the control of individual bodies, and an emergent form of biopolitical control that regulates the social body of the population as a whole. For Foucault, it is in the relationship between the individual and the population, the disciplinary and the regulatory regimes that norms are established and circulated: 'The normalizing society is a society in which the norm of discipline and the norm of regulation intersect.'[2] Albeit at very different historical moments, *Bildnis einer Trinkerin* and *Eine flexible Frau* both chart the often imperceptible ways in which these intersecting modes of normalization underpin the neoliberal repertoire.

In both films, the paradoxes experienced by female protagonists due to the precariousness of life and lack of sovereignty are illustrated via circular

1 On the consequences of media conglomeration for feminist cinema and contemporary attempts to combat these consequences, see Baer, 'The Berlin School and Women's Cinema'.

2 Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 253.

narratives that fold back on themselves: *Eine flexible Frau* ends with Greta stumbling drunkenly—or perhaps dancing acrobatically—into the wheat field where she stood at the start of the film, while *Bildnis einer Trinkerin* ends with a coda that revives the female drinker Madame (who had collapsed and died in the previous scene), removing her from the diegetic space of the film into a hall of mirrors that she smashes in a final gesture of refusal.

Both films employ a multi-stranded narrative structure, which includes fiction, documentary-style sequences, and metacommentary to capture ordinary life and to disorganize our perception of the present. Particularly noteworthy in each case is the way commentators—the three fates in *Bildnis einer Trinkerin* and the feminist blogger in *Eine flexible Frau*—bring into view discourses of feminism in the period circumscribed by these two films, with the fates figuring the emergence of post-feminism in the West German 1980s, and the blogger Kluge emphasizing the way that feminism has been simultaneously taken into account and disavowed in the neoliberal society of the Berlin Republic.[3]

In addition to its metadiscursive attention to the state of feminism, Kluge's commentary self-reflexively addresses the predicament of political filmmaking in neoliberalism more broadly. As we have seen, neoliberal culture characterizes itself as politically neutral and co-opts both oppositional aesthetics and modes of collective resistance and difference, including movements for social change; in this context, inherited schema of political cinema as employing subversive or resistant aesthetic practices or presenting a message of dissent may no longer be operative. In an interview with the feminist film journal *Frauen und Film,* Turanskyj addresses this predicament directly, claiming that it is impossible to make a film with 'feminist content' in the contemporary West. As Turanskyj suggests, such content would be illegible as feminist, not least because it would appear indistinguishable from the clichés of the mainstream Hollywood women's film and television that Rosalind Gill has described as postfeminist media culture.[4] Instead, Turanskyj maintains, feminist filmmakers must develop a political critique through form, through an artistic strategy that emphasizes performativity and a lack of authenticity.[5] Indeed, *Eine flexible Frau* constitutes a concerted attempt to redo feminist cinema for a neoliberal age at the levels of both form and content. However, the film also resonates with the project first

3 See McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism*.

4 See Gill, *Gender and the Media*.

5 Kohler and Nessel, 'A Woman under the Influence in Berlin zu Beginn des 21. Jahrhundert', 177.

promoted by feminist filmmakers in the 1970s, in terms of both aesthetic interventions and production strategies.

Following on the successes of new wave cinema, 1970s feminist filmmakers working in a range of national contexts pursued both aesthetic experimentation with dominant cinematic codes and a political commitment to women's access to the means of film production, garnering widespread public support for feminist film projects in many places. Significantly for German film history, this success was perhaps most pronounced in West Germany, where the feminist film movement spearheaded by Helke Sander and Claudia von Alemann sought to change the landscape of filmmaking by rectifying the gender imbalance in the film industry, while also developing a new narrative and formal-aesthetic language of women's cinema. Through a series of interventions, including the International Women's Film Seminar in West Berlin (established 1973) and the journal *Frauen und Film* (founded 1974), they sought to educate women about film history and technology and empower them to seize the means of film production. Organized in 1979, the *Verband der Filmarbeiterinnen* (Union of Female Film Workers) was created to support and advocate for women's participation in filmmaking at a policy level; the group sought to establish gender parity, demanding that women's projects receive half of all available subvention funding and that women occupy half of all jobs and employee training programmes in the film industry.

The group was remarkably successful in achieving institutional and financial support for female directors and making inroads into production and distribution schemes, so much so that by 1989 Thomas Elsaesser proclaimed that 'West Germany possesses proportionally more women film-makers than any other film-producing country.'[6] However, as Elsaesser points out, these women often faced a double bind: eschewing careers as independent auteurs in favour of collective organizing on behalf of women in the film industry, they were then relegated to making films for television, which had a voracious appetite for issues-related programming for women, in turn leading to their films being pigeonholed as trivial.[7]

A solution to this dilemma was formed by the distribution company Basis-Filmverleih, which played a significant role in promoting the work

6 Elsaesser, *New German Cinema*, 185.

7 In a sense, we see the inverse of this situation today, where the achievements of individual women filmmakers are overlooked owing to the lack of a larger collective context in which to consider their films, something that revitalized attention to women's film authorship and recent broad-based calls for quota systems in film funding are aiming to redress. See Baer and Fenner, 'Introduction.'

of women filmmakers in the Federal Republic and abroad by challenging the notion that

> women could be successful filmmakers only by either specializing on women's issues (and thus be ghettoized in television) or as *authors* (and thus become competitive, make it on the international festival scene, in order to achieve a better bargaining position at home). The result was a redefinition and revitalization of the Autoren-film as practiced by Basis which was cooperative at the level of production, but individual at the level of exhibition.[8]

As Elsaesser suggests, the feminist film movement in Germany ultimately succeeded not only by helping women gain access and increasing their involvement at all levels of the film industry, but also by fundamentally transforming the categories of film production and distribution, not least that of the *Autorenfilm*, insisting on the creative freedom and rights of the individual filmmaker, but establishing a collective context and cooperative material structures to allow her to succeed. The diversity of the work that emerged—by notable directors including Jutta Brückner, Helma Sanders-Brahms, Margarethe von Trotta, and Ulrike Ottinger, whose *Bildnis einer Trinkerin* was distributed by Basis-Film—attests to the success of this model.

The conditions that enabled the flourishing of the Union of Female Filmworkers and Basis-Filmverleih have changed dramatically in the years since 1980, leading to the undoing of funding structures and rising inequality in media industries. Nonetheless, the legacy of the feminist film movement can be seen in the way contemporary films by women auteurs such as Maren Ade, Barbara Albert, Valeska Grisebach, Maria Speth, and Turanskyj combine an independent, cooperative production model with an individual filmmaking programme, as well as in their aesthetic practice (see also Chapters 5 and 6).

Developing out of a demand for women's self-representation, the feminist film movement of the 1970s sought access to the means of film production so that women could create their own images, and, in Sander's words, 'dare to see themselves and others, society, with their own eyes'.[9] Accordingly, many films emerging from the movement were rooted in a political critique of patriarchal society, often drawing on autobiographical material or documentary-style engagement with social issues to express this critique.

8 Elsaesser, *European Cinema*, 222.

9 Sander, 'Feminism and Film', 49-50.

Women protagonists predominated in these films, which sought new formal means to explore and trouble visual pleasure, the image of woman, and female subjectivity. As in the GDR, women characters in West German films of the period served as sites for the expression of political and social critique, but increasingly they also became flashpoints for what Elsaesser has termed 'spectacles of self-estrangement', in films 'whose cutting edge [...] is not (yet another form of) realism, but a mise-en-scène of perversion, paranoia, or schizophrenia: modes of perception and consciousness to which the cinema lends itself as no other art form'.[10] As Elsaesser suggests, these films about affect aliens—outsiders, freaks, others—engage new modes of cinematic identification and develop new forms for representing gender on screen.

Pre-eminent among these is Ottinger's allegorical cinema, which, already in the 1970s, eschewed the social drama of authentic experience favoured by other feminist filmmakers. Though it was produced in the context of the New German Cinema and is now remembered as a feminist classic, *Bildnis einer Trinkerin* did not fit comfortably within the predominant trajectories of German filmmaking at the time. Ottinger, who produced, wrote, directed, shot, and appeared in *Bildnis einer Trinkerin*, emerged as a vocal proponent of the German *Autorenkino*, but her fine arts training as a painter and her queer sensibility underpinned a filmmaking practice that diverged substantially from the era's auteur cinema. While Ottinger's work was strongly influenced by the historical avant-garde, evident in the surrealist scenarios that abound in *Bildnis einer Trinkerin*, the film's narrative style led experimental filmmakers at the time to reject it. Moreover, despite the film's roster of female, queer, and gender nonconforming characters, its representation of lesbian eroticism, and its subversion of the heteropatriarchal codes of dominant cinema, *Bildnis einer Trinkerin* did not reflect the predominant formal-aesthetic and thematic concerns of feminist countercinema. In fact, Ottinger's film was panned by feminist critics in Germany, who questioned its aestheticism and narrative organization, argued with its lack of social realism, and skewered its politics, especially its ostensible objectification of women and its alleged failure to engage with class conflict.[11]

10 Elsaesser, *European Cinema*, 225.

11 Reviews in the key venue for feminist film criticism, *Frauen und Film,* were universally negative. See Wismeth, '*Bildnis einer Trinkerin*'; Lenssen, 'Mit Glasigem Blick'; Reschke, 'Frau Ottingers (Kunst)Gewerbe.'

However, as Ulrike Sieglohr observes, 'Ottinger's work, while out of synch with dominant trends in the 1970s, foreshadows contemporary developments',[12] and its political and aesthetic resonance in *Eine flexible Frau* retrospectively attests to this fact. Blurring generic categories, formal styles, and aesthetic modes, *Bildnis einer Trinkerin* signalled new directions in both theoretical and cinematic approaches to gender and sexuality,[13] emphasizing the performativity of gender and, as Alice Kuzniar has argued, developing a mode of allegory whose signifying structure, by relentlessly separating images from their potential meaning, underpins its depiction of queer genders and desires.[14] Departing from a widely held conception of the political among feminist filmmakers at the time, who advocated a mode of realism designed for maximum accessibility and consciousness raising toward social change, *Bildnis einer Trinkerin* instead expresses disaffection with prevailing circumstances by narrating a tale of gendered refusal in the form of excessive drinking, elements that recur in the more patently visible context of neoliberalism in *Eine flexible Frau* three decades later.

Julia Knight has suggested that *Bildnis einer Trinkerin* can 'be viewed as exploring *what it feels like to be a woman*, foregrounding the way women are continually objectified within dominant culture and how many consequently have no sense of their "true" selves'.[15] Knight's reading emphasizes the key role played by affect in Ottinger's queer-feminist critique. While some critics have discovered a Utopian or affirmative strain in *Bildnis einer Trinkerin*, this film about wretched killjoys develops a form of critique that is not constrained by an orientation toward future ends or a horizon of happiness. Rather, Ottinger's film opens up, in Sara Ahmed's sense, onto 'other ways of being, of being perhaps': 'Affect aliens, those who are alienated by happiness, are creative: not only do we want the wrong things, not only do we embrace possibilities that we are asked to give up, but we can create lifeworlds around these wants.'[16] Like Ahmed's affect aliens, the female drinkers in Ottinger's film (and those in Turanskyj's film as well) eschew the promise of happiness offered

12 Sieglohr, 'Women Film-Makers, the Avant-Garde and the Case of Ulrike Ottinger', 194.

13 Caprio argues that *Bildnis einer Trinkerin* signals a turning point for feminism, away from the attention to female experience and modes of realism that characterized the 1970s and toward a critical focus on gender and representation that anticipates the emphasis on performativity of the later 1980s and 1990s. See Caprio, 'Ulrike Ottinger's *Ticket of No Return*.'

14 Kuzniar, *The Queer German Cinema*, 141.

15 Knight, *Women and the New German Cinema*, 132, my emphasis.

16 Ahmed, 'Killing Joy', 593.

by conventional expectations of professionalization or heterosexual family romance, thereby exposing the cruel optimism of these good-life fantasies.

Out of Synch with the Everyday: Crisis and Refusal in the Queer Feminist Film *Bildnis einer Trinkerin*

Writing about Ottinger's film in the 1980s, Miriam Hansen summed up its formal-aesthetic project: 'The whole film attempts nothing less than to disentangle visual pleasure from the voyeurism inherent in the codes of patriarchal cinema. […] By reversing the traditional subordination of looking, display, and fascination to the logic of narrative, Ottinger sets visual pleasure free from the gender hierarchies inscribed in classical narrative cinema.'[17] Reading *Bildnis einer Trinkerin* within the context of the psychoanalytic debates animating feminist film theory at the time, Hansen and other feminist critics have emphasized Ottinger's intervention into questions about woman as spectacle, female masquerade, and structures of looking in dominant cinema, among others.[18]

While acknowledging the crucial importance of psychoanalytic frameworks for understanding *Bildnis einer Trinkerin*, my reading shifts the terms of feminist analysis in order to consider how Ottinger's film archives and comments on the transitional moment of its own production, around 1980, which marked a turning point for the New German Cinema and for West German culture and society more broadly. Characterized by downward mobility in the aftermath of the economic downturn of the 1970s, this era saw the intensification of neoliberal governmentality in the form of emergent discourses of privatization, individualization, and responsibilization, encapsulated by Helmut Kohl's 1982 policy statement announcing a transition in the Federal Republic 'away from more state, toward more market; away from collective burdens, toward more personal achievement [*Leistung*]; away from encrusted structures, toward more mobility, individual initiative, and increased competitiveness'.[19] Like the other films considered here and in the previous chapter, Ottinger's film

17 Hansen, 'Visual Pleasure, Fetishism and the Problem of Feminine/Feminist Discourse', 103; 105.

18 See also Silverman, 'Narcissism.'

19 Ther, *Die neue Ordnung auf dem alten Kontinent*, 49. On West German neoliberalization in the early 1980s, see also my Introduction and Chapter 1.

represents out-of-control femininity as a response to changes in culture, society, and ordinary life at this historical moment. However, in contrast to *Solo Sunny* and *Sommer vorm Balkon, Bildnis einer Trinkerin,* with its emphasis on drinking to oblivion, ultimately presents no opportunity for the reincorporation of the female protagonists into society, and no vision whatsoever of a future that could accommodate them. Reflecting the cultural context of West Germany, with its pivot away from social democracy and the loss of hope in capitalism as a form of mass utopia, the absence of any futural orientation in Ottinger's film marks its political divergence from the paradigms of GDR filmmaking that underpin Wolf's film and resonate in Dresen's.

With its hybrid form, episodic narrative, and exploration of non-future-oriented conceptions of the political, *Bildnis einer Trinkerin* develops a heterogeneous style that combines highly aestheticized tableaux with documentary-like images of ordinary life. Set in the walled-in city of West Berlin, the film portrays a liminal space of gender, sexual, and class (im)-mobility, where anything goes, and where conventional categories of identity appear to be suspended. A tour-de-force of spectacle and stylization, Ottinger's film is chock full of unusual characters wearing extraordinary costumes and elaborate make-up in decadent settings. Yet this spectacular form is paired with a strong focus on the diurnal—in particular the cyclical and repetitive nature of binge-drinking and alcoholism—developed through location shooting and the revelations of a camera that dwells not only on the five-star hotels and fancy cafes but also on the overgrown train tracks, unspectacular corner bars, and ordinary streets of West Berlin in ways that anticipate Ottinger's future embrace of documentary forms, especially the essay film.

Significantly, *Bildnis einer Trinkerin* intervenes into depictions of everyday life around 1980 by incorporating the fantastical and the extravagant. As Ottinger herself described the project, 'I exaggerate so that the viewer will *see*, otherwise no one will notice what I want to show [...] Today it is no longer sufficient just to *show* things in a film [...] I *work* with reality in order to create as many associations as possible for each image. You have to make reality conscious, not simply steal it by means of tape recorders and cameras.'[20] *Bildnis einer Trinkerin* thus combines the spectacular and the everyday in order to make reality visible, developing an exaggerated narrative style to represent the emergent crisis ordinary, tracked through the protagonist's deliberate choice to drink herself to death. Whereas in *Solo Sunny* and *Sommer vorm Balkon,* drinking leads to moments of crisis

20 Qtd. in Silberman, 'Women Filmmakers in West Germany', 133.

for the female protagonists in response to the pressures of ordinary life, in Ottinger's film, drinking itself has become ordinary, a way of indexing the systemic nature of crisis in the present.

By documenting West Berlin's counterculture at its moment of apotheosis, *Bildnis einer Trinkerin*—like *Solo Sunny* and *Sommer vorm Balkon*—serves as a repository for disappearing forms of everyday life threatened by gentrification and co-optation, and for the alternative imaginaries they represent. Ottinger's specific repository archives an array of queer spaces, including gay and lesbian bars, the tunnels and bathrooms of Bahnhof Zoo, and public parks and botanical gardens, as well as the glamorous, fantastical, rebellious, and decadent personae of the many denizens of the punk and art scenes who make cameo appearances in the film, including singer Nina Hagen, writer Ginka Steinwachs, artists Martin Kippenberger and Wolf Vostell, actor Eddie Constantine, and Ottinger herself.

However, far from constituting the relic of a lost time, *Bildnis einer Trinkerin* observes and anticipates key aspects of West German neoliberalization, including the emergent *geistig-moralische Wende* [intellectual-moral turn], the emphasis on quantification, and the penchant for conveying neoliberal thought as a common-sense worldview. These concepts are directly represented through the characters Social Question (Magdalena Montezuma), Exact Statistics (Orpha Termin), and Common Sense (Monika von Cube), a group of sociologists travelling to Berlin to attend an academic conference. Dressed in matching hounds-tooth suits, the three fates 'embody the didacticism and sententiousness of the allegorical strain' in *Bildnis einer Trinkerin*.[21] Like a Greek chorus, the women follow and remark upon the events of the film, providing a running commentary on the socioeconomic context of alcohol abuse and the status of women, as in this early observation by Social Question: 'Keep in mind, dear, that the woman who is rapidly becoming emancipated is often insecure and therefore also more prone to alcoholism.' Co-opting feminist discourse, the moralizing observations of the 'hounds-tooth ladies' coexist, clash, and contend with the dissent epitomized by the punk, art, and queer subcultures, and with the modes of gendered refusal represented by the film's female drinkers. A film fundamentally concerned with 'positions of desire and agency, subject and object, looking and being looked at, *as they exist between and among women*',[22] *Bildnis einer Trinkerin* thus employs women characters—representatives of affirmation *and* dissent—as sites for imaging the contradictions of the present.

21 Kuzniar, *The Queer German Cinema*, 140.

22 Mayne, *The Woman at the Keyhole*, 137.

The opening sequence of the film introduces us to a world that appears at first glance to be far from ordinary. *Bildnis einer Trinkerin* begins with a red screen, an extreme close-up of what slowly become recognizable as the swirling scarlet folds of a cape belonging to a female figure who walks away from the stationary camera and ascends an elaborate marble staircase. The clicking of high heels against a soundtrack of muted horns gives way to a female voiceover, proclaiming in German: 'She, a woman of exquisite beauty, of Classical dignity and Raphaelite proportions, a woman created like no other to be Medea, Madonna, Beatrice, Iphigenia, Aspasia, decided one sunny winter's day to leave La Rotonda.' Though she is otherwise mostly mute throughout the remainder of the film, we hear the woman's voice ordering a ticket to Berlin-Tegel, 'Aller – jamais retour', one ticket, no return. This is our first glimpse into the jet-setting world of Ottinger's nameless protagonist (Tabea Blumenschein), known only as Madame, a character who is presented as an exaggerated incarnation of ideal femininity at the breaking point.

A series of Polaroid snapshots presents the film's characters, cast, and crew in a credit sequence that highlights both the prominence of women's authorship in the creation of *Bildnis einer Trinkerin* and the film's signal focus on visual pleasure and the mediation of images (especially images of women), captured here via the mise-en-abyme of framed photos. A Pan-Am jet lands on a snowy runway and the voiceover resumes, explaining that 'She' wanted to follow her own pursuits and Berlin, a city fully unknown to her, seemed like a good place to leave the past behind and devote herself to her passion: 'Drinking, living to drink, leading a drunken life, the life of a female drinker. […] She decided to make a kind of sightseeing tour of drinking.' An abrupt cut takes us inside Tegel airport. In a long take that reverses the film's opening shot, we see the female drinker walking toward us, traversing the distance from long-shot to close-up in an early instance of the film's disorienting use of diegetic space. Through this chiastic structure, the opening sequence signals crossing, doubling, and inversion as the key formal and thematic concerns of *Bildnis einer Trinkerin*.

A female official intones over the airport's PA system,'Berlin-Tegel, reality, Berlin-Tegel, reality please', calling our attention to the film's juxtaposition of the routines of ordinary life with an emphasis on the absurd, fantastical, and over-the-top. As Hansen describes it, 'The arrival of the strange lady seems to place a spell upon the workings of reality: accidents proliferate, suitcases and pushcarts tumble and eject their contents, objects rebel against their everyday function as if *her* refusal to function as a subject

were encouraging them to do the same.'[23] Underscoring its depiction of a reality that is out of joint, the arrival scene also introduces us to the three fates, who observe and comment on Madame along the stations of her journey through the city.

After imbibing a first drink at an airport kiosk, she heads to the terminal's exit, crossing paths with one of the film's few recurrent male characters, a dwarf (Paul Glauer), whose appearance functions as a hinge between the ordinary and the fantastic, often signalling the inception of a fantasy sequence. In a shot that will be repeated several times in the course of the film, we see the female drinker through a glass pane, as liquid is sloshed over the glass, blurring her image. Representing a rare instance of traditional shot/reverse-shot in a film that otherwise eschews the conventions of dominant cinema—particularly when it comes to specularizing women—a reverse angle reveals that the liquid came from the bucket of a cleaning woman, who grins at the drinker through the pane as she washes the window with a rag. Mayne suggests that the figure of sloshed water is 'repeated at key moments of desire and recognition' to underscore two of the film's key themes, the encounter with difference (in the form of a woman unlike the protagonist) and issues of surface and transparency (calling attention to forms of mediation between the viewer and the object of vision)[24]: 'In a more general way, the encounter with the cleaning woman prefigures the preoccupation in *Ticket of No Return* with women as both like and unlike each other, with separation and desire, projection and distance as the forces that determine women's relationships to each other.'[25] As Mayne's analysis suggests, this encounter with the 'other' woman through the blurred glass constitutes another example of the visual chiasmus that underpins Ottinger's depiction of women's identity and the problem of solidarity via doubled and inverted images.

This doubling recurs most prominently when the protagonist pairs up with Lutze (Christine Lutze), a homeless woman who sleeps at Bahnhof Zoo and pushes her belongings around in a shopping cart. Madame first encounters Lutze when the taxi she is riding in slams into the bag lady's shopping cart, upending it and breaking many of her possessions. Later, after helping the female drinker into another taxi, Lutze shines the car's

23 Hansen, 'Visual Pleasure, Fetishism and the Problem of Feminine/Feminist Discourse', 100.

24 As Mayne points out, this shot presents an intertextual reference to the opening shot of Josef von Sternberg's *Der blaue Engel* (The Blue Angel, 1930), one of many references to Marlene Dietrich in *Bildnis einer Trinkerin*. Mayne, *The Woman at the Keyhole*, 140.

25 Mayne, *The Woman at the Keyhole*, 141.

windshield and the two women look at one another in a shot/reverse-shot sequence that echoes Madame's earlier encounter with the cleaning woman at the airport. Like the sloshing water in that sequence, here the night-time lights on the car's windows call attention to the surface of the glass, at once reflective and transparent, suggesting both recognition and desire between these two women from opposite ends of the socioeconomic spectrum. In the course of the film, Madame and Lutze will—like Nike and Katrin in *Sommer vorm Balkon*—engage in close bodily relationships and forms of physical affection, such as when they bathe together. With its corporeal intimacy and solidarity across boundaries of class, language, and convention, their relationship attests to a complete renunciation of heterosexual forms of desire, of family life, and of kinship structures, all of which *Bildnis einer Trinkerin* eschews.

While Madame has made the conscious choice to drink herself to death, Lutze pursues alcoholism in a less purposeful fashion: 'She is unconsciously drinking herself to death.'[26] Whether deliberate or not, for both women binge-drinking functions as a response to, and a refusal of, conventional female behaviour, the chimera of rational choice, and prevailing modes of common sense. Representing a form of female solidarity that is not connected to economic or intimate optimism, one that dissolves class boundaries and heteronormative role expectations, drinking together offers the women a reprieve from isolation and loneliness, albeit one that culminates in oblivion, black-outs, and total physical collapse. As affect aliens, the two characters heighten our awareness of what there is to be unhappy about (Ahmed), while also demonstrating common cause in their mutual claim on the freedom to be unhappy. Ottinger's film thus employs drinking as a metaphor for the paradoxes of contemporary life across multiple registers. As Temby Caprio has argued:

> Drinking is the desire which motivates [Madame's] journey through Berlin and yet also causes her ultimate collapse. The paradox of desire that is represented by drinking—that which represents agency, or desire, and that which also renders one helpless—is the paradoxical desire to be a subject within the Symbolic and yet not play by its rules. With the trope of alcohol, Ottinger takes the traditional story of more 'realistic' women, their desire (to drink), and their ultimate re-incorporation into

26 Silberman, 'Women Filmmakers in West Germany', 133.

> society, beyond its conventional limits, which are marked primarily by heterosexual romance and family life.[27]

Through the depiction of drinking as a form of agency that paradoxically renders one helpless, Ottinger explores the contradictions and quandaries of female subjectivity, sovereignty, and desire in the era after feminism and Fordist capitalism.

This depiction of drinking in *Bildnis einer Trinkerin* crystallizes in an early sequence when Madame, dressed in a bright yellow costume with a headpiece and veil, sits alone at Café Möhring, ordering rounds of cognac, delivered to her by the waiter two glasses at a time. Alone in the café, she gesticulates, grimaces, and mouths words, as if reacting to an absent interlocutor across the table. Soon, she spies Lutze walking by outside the café's large plate glass window and beckons her to come inside. Leaving her shopping cart on the sidewalk, Lutze drinks several rounds with Madame. A long take from inside the café shows a tranquil tableau, with the female drinkers framed in deep focus against the plate glass window. An abrupt reverse shot takes us outside the café, where we now view the drinkers through the window, which Madame sloshes with a large cup of water, again blurring her image through the glass. Like the mirror sequences in *Solo Sunny* and *Sommer vorm Balkon*, *Bildnis einer Trinkerin* calls attention here to the objectification and commodification of women in heteropatriarchal cinema. The film's attention to the representation of women in dominant culture is underscored in this scene by the appearance of several tabloid photographers who snap photos of the female drinkers as they slosh water, break glasses, and are finally ejected from the café, photos documenting the spectacle of non-normative female behaviour which will turn up on the tabloid's front page the next day ('Rich Foreigner Goes Berserk in Café Möhring!'). In contrast to the earlier scenes of water against glass, however, this time there is no one standing outside the window. Rather, the projection of female difference is turned back on the drinker herself—and reflected onto the spectator, who implicitly occupies the place of the 'other woman' at the threshold.

A crucial part of the film's project to explore 'both women's investment in the pleasures of fetishism and voyeurism and the possibilities of new forms of visual pleasure that take as their departure the erotic connections between women',[28] the suturing of the spectator into this

27 Caprio, 'Ulrike Ottinger's Ticket of No Return', 109.

28 Mayne, *The Woman at the Keyhole*, 147.

scene of recognition and desire opens up an explicit space for feminist and queer reception in *Bildnis einer Trinkerin* that is unique to Ottinger's art cinema and that we don't find in realist-inflected films like *Solo Sunny* or *Sommer vorm Balkon*. While facilitating women's identification and same-sex desire, this sequence also interpellates the spectator into the scene of destruction and the politics of gendered refusal embodied by Madame and Lutze, signalled by the shattering of glass. An audiovisual trope that we first encounter in this scene and that recurs throughout the film in tandem with water-sloshing, shattering glass emerges as a signifier of both the allegorical iconoclasm and the narrative of self-obliteration that are key trajectories of the film. While, as Mayne has argued, the trope of water sloshing symbolizes the search for new forms of visual pleasure outside of patriarchal representation in Ottinger's film, its insistent pairing with the trope of shattering glass also emphasizes the violence that accompanies dissent and the refusal of normative behaviours. Rather than accede to the demands of self-regulation and responsibilization, the female drinkers create an alternative imaginary through the self-destructive behaviour of binge-drinking—'getting sloshed' and breaking things—that allows them 'to take joy in killing joy', gleefully calling attention to their unhappiness with the world.[29] As a bystander in the café remarks in response to the shattering glass, 'It's shocking when women get drunk in public!'.

Crucial to the discourse of self-destruction developed in this scene is the commentary of the three hounds-tooth-clad sociologists, who enter the café in the midst of Madame's drinking binge, where they discuss the problem of alcoholism and quarrel over the best way of apprehending and contending with this scourge. Though their commentary is integral to the formal and thematic construction of *Bildnis einer Trinkerin* and to the film's political intervention, the three women have received little attention in the ample secondary literature on the film thus far. For this reason their emblematic conversation in this key scene is worth recounting at length here:

> *Exact Statistics*: Upon closer inspection, the manifold damages of alcoholism can be calculated and expressed in marks and pfennigs.
> *Social Question*: It's a matter of values, not of numbers.
> *Exact Statistics*: We find this interesting above all because numbers have a much greater impact on public opinion.

29 Ahmed, 'Killing Joy', 592.

> *Social Question*: Believe me, when it comes to the necessity of preventative or rehabilitative measures against alcohol abuse, it really doesn't matter if millions of people feel concerned or if millions of marks are spent…
> *Exact Statistics*: Yes, but think about the unreported cases. One can't take them seriously enough.
> *Social Question*: Statistics are always tainted by errors.
> *Common Sense*: Can't you forget your figures for a moment and recall the enchanting congress in Kenya, when that delightful little Sarotti-Moor served us the replica of a giant swan/giant penis [*eines Riesenschwans/schwanz*] made of banana ice cream?
> *Exact Statistics*: The group of housewives without further employment outside the household represents, with 39.2 percent, the highest proportion of alcoholics.
> *Social Question*: Certainly, but among the chronic alcoholics there is a remarkable number of people who exhibit an unstable character, which is more likely the cause of their behaviour than their professional status.

This conversation is noteworthy in several ways. On a narrative level, it contextualizes the exaggerated story of the female drinker within economic and political discourses about the social costs of alcoholism, strategies for combatting alcohol abuse, and the problem of women's oppression in patriarchal society. In terms of the film's larger metanarrative, this conversation allegorizes, via Exact Statistics and her discourse about public opinion, the quantification of social problems, or what Wendy Brown refers to as 'the distinctive signature of neoliberal rationality': 'the widespread economization of heretofore noneconomic domains, activities, and subjects'.[30] Moreover, the concluding dialogue about housewives constituting the highest percentage of female alcoholics provides a remarkably succinct example of both the co-optation of feminism and the rhetoric of responsibilization (blaming the individual—rather than social structures—for situations of social risk such as alcoholism), further trademarks of neoliberal thought.

Last but not least, the conversation is also striking for the interjection offered by Common Sense, a racist nonsequitur in which she urges her companions to recall a visit to Kenya during which a 'Sarotti-moor' served them ice cream. Referring to an iconic logo of German advertising for the Sarotti brand of chocolate, one of many racist and colonialist images populating Germany's visual landscape, the comment, particularly in

30 Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 32; 31.

its attribution to 'common sense', adds everyday racism to the stream of sexist, classist comments uttered by the three fates, emphasizing racism as a constitutive component of social and economic discourse in advanced capitalism. At the same time, with its homonymic reference to a *Riesenschwan*(*z*) (giant swan/penis) made of banana ice cream, this comment calls our attention to the over-the-top rhetoric espoused by the hounds-tooth ladies and asks us to consider how its exaggerated absurdity reflects on the everyday.

Hansen has called the three characters 'little more than well-choreographed mouth-pieces of types of social discourse in the film's overall collage, adding one more level of meaning which, nonetheless, remains fragmentary and unassimilated'.[31] In fact, however, their role is integral to the film's political conception. Like the three fates of classical mythology who spin the threads and weave the tapestry that comprises human destiny, Social Question, Exact Statistics, and Common Sense embody the principles that dictate life and death in the present. With their running commentary on alcoholism, the fates are literal embodiments of the principle of biopower as a technology of power in the normalizing society of the Federal Republic. Foucault describes the shift away from an older regime of discipline, in which the power to take life was vested in the sovereign, to a new form of population control: 'The right of sovereignty was the right to take life and let live. And then this new right was established: the right to make live and let die.'[32] Dealing with the population as a scientific and political problem rather than disciplining individual bodies, biopower operates with forecasts, statistical estimates, and overall measures designed to optimize life as a whole. Seeking to 'make live', biopower regulates the population to eliminate accidents, random events, illnesses, disabilities, and deficiencies. For this reason, death becomes the ultimate threat to biopower: '[D]eath becomes, insofar as it is the end of life, the term, the limit, or the end of power too. Death is outside the power relationship. Death is beyond the reach of power, and power has a grip on it only in general, overall, or statistical terms' (the terms of Common Sense, Social Question, and Exact Statistics).[33] In Ottinger's film, the deliberate choice to drink oneself to death enacted by Madame thus constitutes a refusal of biopower's regulatory force to 'make live'. Meanwhile, the three fates in *Bildnis einer Trinkerin* function as emblems of the normalizing society—reflecting

31 Hansen, 'Visual Pleasure, Fetishism and the Problem of Feminine/Feminist Discourse', 100.
32 Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 241.
33 Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 248.

the establishment of norms via the intersecting practices of discipline and regulation—insofar as they constantly seek to discipline the female drinkers while also serving as mouthpieces of biopolitical discourse on the broader population.

Significantly, the fates play an important role in a series of fantasy sequences in which Madame imagines herself practicing different professions, sequences that specifically address Madame's divergence from societal norms. Together with several scenes in which she imagines herself as a butch man with a moustache dressed in leather, the job fantasy scenes in *Bildnis einer Trinkerin* offer glimpses of alternative lifeworlds that ultimately appear to be unavailable to the female drinker. She imagines herself as an actress in drag playing Hamlet, a performance that is criticized when she presents the famous 'to be or not to be' monologue drunk; as a secretary in an office, where she is fired for drinking; as a tightrope artist, where again her drinking impedes her ability to perform, so that she falls from the rope; as an advertising executive developing branding and marketing models for a new beverage; as a daredevil race-car driver executing dangerous stunts in a fireproof suit (a set-up particularly ill-suited to a heavy drinker); and, finally, as an undertaker selling coffins, again in male drag. In each of these scenarios, the drinker imagines herself into a professional role in which she might be able to live a socially sanctioned life, even as the outsider that she is.

However, as the presence of the three fates—arbiters of destiny—in many of these sequences suggests, these professional roles are not viable for Madame, who, as an expression of the feminine ideal, is caught between ossified role expectations and the abjection suggested by drinking to excess. Embodying neoliberal technologies of the self, Common Sense, Social Question, and Exact Statistics pose flexibilization, responsibilization, and professionalization as the solutions to Madame's dilemma, and to the paradoxical situation of women per se in advanced capitalism. Parodying such interpellations, the professional vignettes in *Bildnis einer Trinkerin* portray the drinker's inability to regulate her body in order to adapt to the demands of work, let alone to achieve the promise of happiness through self-optimization. Highlighting the illusory nature of discourses of flexibilization and mobility, these professional scenarios literally place Madame on a stage contemplating the performance of identity, on a tightrope attempting a balancing act, and in a fireproof suit aiming to pull off amazing stunts, scenes that are echoed and re-enacted in *Eine flexible Frau*, a film that develops a much more explicit critique of the toll flexibilization takes on women (see Illustration 9).

Like the opening sequence, the closing scenes of *Bildnis einer Trinkerin* display a chiastic structure in their presentation of the protagonist. In the first of these paired scenes, the solitary figure of the female drinker ascends the stairs of a train station, where she collapses in a blackout. Finding her there, Lutze attempts to revive her, but as she does so, both women are engulfed by a crowd of commuters rushing downstairs as they exit the train. Lutze screams, suggesting that the crowd has trampled Madame, who now lies dead on the staircase. In the film's final scene, which is diegetically removed from the spaces we have encountered thus far in *Bildnis einer Trinkerin*, the female drinker, wearing an elaborate dress of silver foil, walks down a hallway constructed entirely of mirrors, which she proceeds to shatter, breaking the glass with her high heels and thereby literally crushing her own image underfoot. With no narrative motivation, the sequence—which appears to revive Madame from the dead—provides a coda to the film's allegorical representation of women in dominant culture. As Kaja Silverman argues, this shot 'repeats the one that precedes it at a metacritical level. Together, these two shots make clear that Madame's death is less literal than symbolic'.[34] Indeed, this final shot re-animates Madame after her symbolic death in order to portray her in a final scene of iconoclastic refusal and destruction (of her mirror image, of representation), underscoring the impossibility of Madame's assimilation into heteropatriarchal, neoliberal society as well as the film's larger critique of the codes of dominant cinema.

Ottinger's film flouts cinematic conventions, blurring elements of documentary realism with the extravagant and fantastic in order to capture the shifting terrain of ordinary life and 'make reality conscious' to the viewer. Portraying contingency and fantasy, and emphasizing the quest to find new forms for the representation of alterity, *Bildnis einer Trinkerin* underscores Kuzniar's suggestion in *The Queer German Cinema* that, 'if sexuality is contingently determined via word or image, the role played by an art or experimental cinema is crucial for fantasizing and promoting alternative representations'.[35] This project was significantly enabled by the independent production and distribution model of the feminist film project and Basis-Film, with its collective pooling of resources underwritten by state support, a model on the verge of obsolescence in 1980.

34 Silverman, 'Narcissism', 150.

35 Kuzniar, *The Queer German Cinema*, 5.

9. Highlighting the illusory nature of flexibilization and mobility: Madame (Tabea Blumenschein) attempts a balancing act on a tightrope in Ulrike Ottinger's *Bildnis einer Trinkerin* (*Ticket of No Return,* 1979). Image courtesy of Ulrike Ottinger Filmproduktion.

10. The brittle Greta (Mira Partecke) attempts and fails to become a flexible woman in the emblematic dance sequence of Tatjana Turanskyj's *Eine flexible Frau* (*The Drifter*, 2010).

One of Ottinger's final films produced within this model, *Bildnis einer Trinkerin* was funded with federal subventions granted by West Germany's Federal Film Board (FFA) and the Kuratorium Junger Deutscher Film as well as state support from the Berlin Film Board, co-produced through a television deal with the public channel ZDF, and distributed by Basis. *Bildnis einer Trinkerin* epitomizes the art cinema of the era not least insofar

as its production and distribution model freed Ottinger from commercial constraints, enabling the development of her iconoclastic aesthetic vision. However, this mode of production, already threatened, would soon be transformed by the marketization of German cinema in the 1980s, signalled by the changes to federal film policy initiated by Prime Minister Friedrich Zimmerman in 1983. That year, in an essay entitled 'The Pressure to Make Genre Films: About the Endangered *Autorenkino*', Ottinger expressed her opposition to the transformations taking place in the German film landscape at the time. Emphasizing the tendency to 'put control back in the hands of the producers', exemplified by the ground-breaking transitional film *Das Boot* (1981, see Chapter 2), whose producer Günter Rohrbach she cites, Ottinger stresses that when producers are in control, 'artistic-aesthetic arguments are in the end always countered by box-office arguments'.[36] This results in the commercial mandate to make genre films:

> The continuing endeavours of the film industry to limit filmmakers and directors to the most narrow, stereotyped genre cinema possible cannot be overlooked. The more one remains limited to the things which are ostensibly common to everyone, the less one can hope to further understanding for the singular, particular, or independent developments of certain individuals, groups, minorities, countries, etc. The consequence of this is an ignorant, intolerant society whose intolerance grows in accordance with its lack of information and its corresponding lack of understanding for different things.[37]

Prescient in its early diagnosis of the emergent 'cinema of consensus' (Rentschler), Ottinger's essay pinpoints how the marketization of cinema gives rise to an impoverished monoculture that contrasts sharply with Ottinger's own filmmaking, which Janet Bergstrom has described as the difficult project of figuring out 'how to represent Difference as something positive within a repressive society'.[38] This project led Ottinger to transition over the course of the 1980s—like several other notable directors of the New German Cinema including Werner Herzog and Wim Wenders—away from features and toward nonfiction filmmaking as her primary mode of representing difference within ordinary life. In the meantime, *Bildnis einer*

36 Ottinger, 'The Pressure to Make Genre Films', 91.
37 Ottinger, 'The Pressure to Make Genre Films', 90-91.
38 Bergstrom, 'The Theater of Everyday Life', 44.

Trinkerin remains as a document in its own right of the changes taking hold in West German cinema and society around 1980.

The Paradoxes of Flexibilization: Ordinary Life in Tatjana Turanskyj's *Eine flexible Frau*

With its express aim of showing that 'the economy is not gender-neutral',[39] particularly in the age of flexibilized global capitalism, *Eine flexible Frau* brings into sharp focus the critique of emergent discourses of neoliberalization that is nascent in *Bildnis einer Trinkerin*. Set in Berlin, Turanskyj's film depicts protagonist Greta Mondo (Mira Partecke), an out-of-work architect, experimenting with professionalization, engaging with the space of the city through corporeal gestures and acrobatics, seeking female solidarity through drinking, and falling down drunk. Independently produced by Turanskyj's own production company and distributed by the independent distributor Filmgalerie 451, the film revives the project of the feminist *Autorenfilm* as a concerted response to the dismal situation for female filmmakers in Europe wrought by media conglomeration and privatization.[40] In terms of form, content, and production context, *Eine flexible Frau* presents remarkable, even uncanny, similarities to *Bildnis einer Trinkerin*, though this resonance may not have been entirely deliberate.

Writing about her relationship to the tradition of feminist filmmaking, Turanskyj explains: 'I was only half-conscious that my film was taking up where the feminist films of the 1970s left off. But I am a feminist above all and for me, feminism takes a stand against power. It is from this position that I conceived of my film.'[41] This 'half-consciousness' of feminist precursors appears symptomatic of the contemporary moment 'after feminism', when even an auteur director steeped in the history of both film and feminist thought confesses only a passing connection to the considerable legacy of the West German feminist film tradition.[42] However, as one of the few

39 Turanskyj, 'Dies ist unsere Zeit, weil wir sie erschaffen', 308.

40 In addition to the concerted feminist critique developed in her films, Turanskyj has been an outspoken advocate for gender equity in the film industry through her work as a co-founder and organizer of the activist group Pro Quote Film. For more on PQF, see Baer and Fenner, 'Representation Matters', and Heiduschke, 'Women's Interventions in the Contemporary German Film Industry'.

41 Turanskyj, 'Dies ist unsere Zeit, weil wir sie erschaffen', 307, n. 3.

42 In the interview Angelica Fenner and I conducted with Turanskyj in 2017, she qualified this position a bit when talking about the filmmakers who had influenced her, among them

contemporary German filmmakers to embrace feminism explicitly as a political and aesthetic project, Turanskyj conceived of *Eine flexible Frau* as a way of making visible and commenting upon precisely the co-optation of feminism in neoliberal societies—what she refers to as 'false emancipation'—while also unmasking the ongoing economic oppression of women under the guise of flexibilized labour.[43]

Drawing on the work of sociologist Richard Sennett in his influential 1998 book *The Corrosion of Character* (German title: *Der flexible Mensch*), Turanskyj's film specifically investigates the gendering of flexibility as a characteristic that is equated with femininity but increasingly demanded of all employees in post-Fordist capitalism. This investigation connects *Eine flexible Frau* with the subsequent films in Turanskyj's *Frauen und Arbeit* (Women and Work) trilogy, including *Top Girl oder la déformation professionelle* (*Top Girl,* 2014) and an as yet untitled film in progress focusing on the gendering of reproductive labour. All three films were inspired by Turanskyj's engagement with feminist theory, especially discussions of postfeminism, neoliberalism, and precarity, and Angela McRobbie's *The Aftermath of Feminism* (German title: *Top Girls: Feminismus und der Aufstieg des neoliberalen Genderregimes*, 2010) formed a particular inspiration.

Eine Flexible Frau addresses the paradoxes of flexibilization through a formal structure that weaves together three distinct strands. First is the rather straightforward story arc, informed by generic qualities of both the domestic melodrama and the feminist *Frauenfilm*, which follows Greta's search for employment, family conflicts, and drinking. Second is the documentary strand, which captures the changes taking place in Berlin in the first decade of the 21st century, or what Turanskyj has described as the

the feminist directors Helke Sander and Ula Stöckl. She also mentioned *Bildnis einer Trinkerin* explicitly as a model 'with regard to its artifice and this protagonist whose refusal is so absolute'. See Baer and Fenner, 'Representation Matters', 139.

43 Whether deliberate or not, *Eine flexible Frau* makes overt intertextual relationships with numerous films in addition to *Bildnis einer Trinkerin*, especially German films of the 1970s and 1980s. As critics have pointed out, Turanskyj's film evidences many connections to the New German Cinema, including, a depiction of alcoholism and family life that references Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *Händler der Vier Jahreszeiten* (*Merchant of the Four Seasons*, 1971), and citations of films by Alexander Kluge, whom Turanskyj has named as an influence and who is referenced through the character Kluge in *Eine flexible Frau*. In addition to Ottinger's film, *Eine flexible Frau* also cites other feminist films, including notably Evelyn Schmidt's DEFA film *Das Fahrrad* (*The Bicycle*, 1982)—Greta sings the song 'Schwesterlein', which is sung in similar circumstances by Schmidt's protagonist, Susanne—and Helke Sander's *REDUPERS – Die allseitig reduzierte Persönlichkeit* (*The All Around Reduced Personality*, 1977) via an emphasis on work, single motherhood, and the quest for solidarity. See especially Halle, 'Großstadtfilm and Gentrification Debates' and Mennel, 'From Utopian Collectivity to Solitary Precarity.'

destruction of Berlin's urban fabric.[44] This strand focuses on the politics of city space and includes ample footage, often in the form of long takes or montage-style sequences, in which Greta moves through and explores gentrifying urban spaces, sometimes photographing them. Finally, the third strand of *Eine flexible Frau* consists of metacommentary about the status of feminism today articulated by the feminist blogger and tour guide whose appearances punctuate the film.

Like the other films explored in this and the previous chapter, and parallel to contemporary German cinema more broadly, *Eine flexible Frau* maps the crisis of contemporary capitalism onto the body of Greta Mondo, thereby employing its female protagonist as a site for imaging the transformations of the present. Rajendra Roy has observed that the protagonists of Berlin School films—cousins to Turanskyj's film in terms of narrative focus and formal-aesthetic approach—are 'almost invariably women'.[45] As Roy argues, 'The prominence of the female protagonist has remained a constant and critical element in the laboratory of post-Wall German identity proposed by the Berlin School films.'[46] Likewise, in its depiction of Greta Mondo, Turanskyj's film engages explicitly with the tropes and discourses of advanced capitalism in order to make visible the asymmetrical interpellation of women as the primary subjects of neoliberalism. However, *Eine flexible Frau* also differs from other nonstudio filmmaking in 21st century Germany insofar as it eschews the affectlessness that characterizes many Berlin School protagonists and adopts a more explicitly politicized feminist approach. As Turanskyj explains: 'With my film *Eine flexible Frau*, which I began in 2008, I wanted to set something in opposition to this false emancipation [characteristic of the postfeminist present]: the idea of refusal as critique.'[47] Positing unhappiness as the singular affect shared by women, Turanskyj's film emblematically portrays gendered refusal as a (the?) critical response to the general malaise, hopelessness, and lack of alternatives that characterize the present.

Barbara Mennel has argued that '*Eine flexible Frau* has put to rest any utopian possibilities. With pervasive hopelessness, Greta confronts those around her with questions central to the feminist project, demanding what she obviously will not receive.'[48] It is certainly true that Greta demands—and

44 Kohler and Nessel, 'A Woman under the Influence in Berlin zu Beginn des 21. Jahrhundert', 171.

45 Roy, 'Women's Lab', 47.

46 Roy, 'Women's Lab', 57.

47 Turanskyj, 'Dies ist unsere Zeit, weil wir sie erschaffen', 307.

48 Mennel, 'From Utopian Collectivity to Solitary Precarity', 131.

fails to receive—love, respect, employment, and the possibility of self-expression, fantasies of the good life that she is loath to relinquish, and in this sense Greta reflects Berlant's notion of cruel optimism. However, her awkward refusal to adapt to the mandates of the normalizing society, especially the injunction to flexibilize, and her wilful flouting of public and social norms, align Greta with the figure of the feminist killjoy, who disturbs 'the very fantasy that happiness can be found in certain places',[49] thereby exposing the precarity of intimacy, security, and equality as sites of optimistic attachment in neoliberalism.

Eine flexible Frau depicts the precarious situation for Berlin's creative classes due to privatization and economic downturn. Greta Mondo embodies this precarity across multiple social and economic dimensions. Laid off from her job with a global architecture firm which closed its Berlin branch office after the 2008 financial collapse, Greta seeks, and fails to find, stable employment. In a series of increasingly desperate measures, she takes a minimum-wage job at a Call Centre selling prefabricated houses, for which she is overqualified and ill-suited; enlists the services of an employment coach who excoriates her for failing to self-optimize and embrace positivity; and begrudgingly seeks freelancing work by networking with her colleagues from architecture school, who serially reject her efforts to obtain part-time employment through her personal connections.

Unmoored from her professional identity by virtue of her precarious employment situation, Greta also experiences the dismantling of traditional social and family structures that is a hallmark of the flexibilized present. The divorced mother of a 12-year old son, she ostensibly shares custody with her ex-husband, but her son Lucas (Mattis Hausig) finds every excuse to avoid his visits with her, eventually telling her outright: 'I don't want to spend my time with losers!' Her encounters with old friends—especially women—are similarly marked by avoidance and outright hostility, often culminating in shouting matches deriving from professional jealousy or personal misunderstanding.

In terms of gender and sexuality, Greta inhabits a precarious status as well, and the film makes palpable the insecurity that derives for her from the coexistence of traditional and flexible gender roles and norms.[50] Accustomed to working in the male-dominated field of architecture, Greta bristles at performing conventional femininity as embodied, for instance, by the girls who work at the Call Centre, who paint their nails and do their

49 Ahmed, 'Killing Joy', 582.

50 See Woltersdorff, 'Paradoxes of Precarious Sexualities.'

hair while deploying their most charming and persuasive voices in sales calls to potential customers. While she longs to have a better relationship with her son, she also refuses to perform the kind of domestic motherhood that he apparently desires, and the film shows her repeatedly entering into conflicts with the many mothers who populate what Greta derisively refers to as the 'Schnulli-Bulli-Welt, diese heile Mutti-Welt' (perfectly banal mommy world) of today's Berlin, including the pregnant woman who rams her with a stroller and accuses her of trespassing in a gated community of urban townhouses.

When Greta goes to a parent-teacher conference at Lucas's school, she frankly admits to the distant relationship she has with her son and refuses to participate in the 'gestalttherapeutische Spielchen' (little gestalt therapy games) that his teacher, Frau Zeller (Franziska Dick), proposes. Inspired by Greta's frankness, Frau Zeller casts aside her teacher's persona and the two women spend the afternoon together in what seems to be an impromptu date. We witness Greta rowing Frau Zeller in a boat on a lake and the two women drinking shots of whiskey at a bar. Frau Zeller's top slips down, exposing her breasts, and the two women touch, opening up the possibility of a sexual encounter. However, it is at this moment that the teacher confesses to Greta that she finds her son unpleasant and disagreeable, telling her 'he functionalizes everything and everyone'. Recognizing the truth in this assessment, Greta at first laughs, but then ends the encounter, leaving the bar with the words, 'Thanks, Frau Zeller, I've had enough.' As this awkward scene demonstrates, Greta's pursuit of flexibility causes her to seek out new forms of social interaction, but the breakdown of professional boundaries and codes of conduct (e.g. in the parent-teacher relationship) in the precarious present does not ultimately facilitate the formation of new relationships or communities.

Here and elsewhere in the film, Greta's quest for social solidarity often leads—as it did for Sunny, Katrin, and Madame—to drinking, usually with other women. In one sequence, a middle-aged blonde woman, a stranger, sits down next to Greta on a bench outside a shop and pours vodka into a thermos bottle. Greta lights the woman's cigarette, and the woman offers Greta vodka from her thermos. Like Madame and Lutze, Greta and the blonde drinker share an unspoken moment of camaraderie and common purpose in the anonymous space of the city.

Later in the film, Greta arrives at the employment office to seek job counselling and register for unemployment payments. Coincidentally, her case worker turns out to be the blonde drinker, Kracht (Angelika Sautter). Ticking off questions on an intake form, she asks about Greta's

qualifications, employment status, and personal debt. When she reaches the question, 'Do you have an addiction problem?', Greta lowers her sunglasses onto her face, and the case worker finally recognizes her. Locking the door of her office, she pulls out her thermos of vodka and offers Greta a mugful. As the two women drink together, the case worker complains: 'I often hate this job. I curse it. And it's my fault, but the system is all screwed up. It's ridiculous how it's organized. You know, I administer bureaucratic measures, but it doesn't help people at all. Do they think I have jobs to give out? All I can do is hand over a little cash. Orientation? Perspective? Bah. That doesn't exist anymore for most people. And I get paid to…it's depressing.' On the one hand, the case worker's confession about the empty promise of a no-longer functional employment office—'Do they think I have jobs to give out?'—unmasks the façade of job placement in the era of flexibilization and outsourced labour and, more broadly, the limitations of the social welfare system in the wake of the dismantling and privatization of public services. On the other hand, the case worker's litany of complaints appears highly ironic, given the disparity between her stable employment status as a civil servant and Greta's own increasingly hopeless situation. As with Frau Zeller, the connection Greta experiences with the case worker collapses in the face of eclipsed boundaries of professionalism and the flouting of social norms.

For as much as Greta can accede to the mandate of flexibilization in name, as a requirement not only of the modern work force but of contemporary life in general, she is unable or unwilling to embrace flexibility on an affective level or indeed to embody its demands. In this regard, Greta is, as Turanskyj describes her, 'not prepared to function in our contemporary society […] She is torn back and forth between readiness to conform and a spirit of contradiction'.[51] This paradoxical relationship to flexibility is manifest in Greta's willingness to take a low-paying job at the Call Centre and her simultaneous difficulty in internalizing the manager Ann's instructions about how to succeed on the job: 'You always have to be friendly. *You have to smile on the inside*.' When she fires Greta ('I have the impression that it's time for us to part'), Ann (Laura Tonke) informs her, 'Since you've been here, you're performing under your potential. As a call centre agent, you have to be a bit more pliable.' However, this type of pliability is anathema to Greta, who, like Katrin in *Sommer vorm Balkon*, stumbles over the requirements and the vocabulary of the modern workforce.

51 Kohler and Nessel, 'A Woman under the Influence in Berlin zu Beginn des 21. Jahrhundert', 172; 173.

In an early sequence, Greta cold calls a construction company that is building a suburban enclave for federal workers, and we hear her repeatedly tell the employee on the other end of the line, in the self-optimizing vocabulary of flexibilized labour, 'I'm looking for a new challenge', before finally explaining in plain language that she is not calling to buy a townhouse, but to apply for a job. Like Katrin too, Greta attends training sessions with an employment coach, who videotapes mock interviews with her in order to critique her self-presentation. In a telling sequence, the coach zooms in on Greta's face with her digital video camera asking her to 'Spontaneously define your strengths. What can you do really well?' Greta hesitates: 'Nothing occurs to me right now.' The coach prompts her again, 'What are you really good at?' This time, Greta responds instantaneously: 'Drinking.' Calling her a cynic, the coach rewinds the video and we witness, in an excruciating audiovisual combination of squeaking tape and fast-motion images, Greta's contorted face crying in shame. Here and elsewhere, the coach repeatedly admonishes Greta to change her attitude and embrace positivity, suggesting that her unemployment is a matter of individual responsibility and personal failure, rather than a direct result of changes in the labour market. Through these coaching scenes, *Eine flexible Frau* exposes the neoliberal dogma that success results from hard work and failure is always the fault of the individual (even though capitalism is predicated on the systemic production of winners and losers).

Greta's attempt at and ultimate refusal of flexibility is also reflected symbolically in several dance scenes that strongly recall the vignettes of acrobatics and failure in *Bildnis einer Trinkerin*. Greta arrives to join a group of friends spending a summer day on the Teufelsberg, with a long view of the city of Berlin stretching out behind them. Three dancers, the friends practice the corporeal art and theatrical artifice of falling down and physical collapse (see Illustration 10). When Greta joins them, they council her to soften her body and make her legs into an X-shape, but instead, the brittle Greta simply collapses to the ground and lies prostrate while the men dance around her.

This self-reflexive scene comments on the symbolic representation of falling down that is a key trope throughout *Eine flexible Frau*. It is ironic that Greta struggles with the corporeal gesture of collapse here since, beginning with the opening sequence in which she drunkenly trips on the stairs to her apartment, she regularly falls down as a matter of course on several occasions throughout the film. Like Madame's physical collapse in *Bildnis einer Trinkerin*, falling down is a gesture that indexes Greta's absolute refusal. As Turanskyj has noted, underpinning the conception of *Eine flexible Frau* was the key question of how much artifice could inform both the figure of

Greta and the film itself ('wie künstlich diese Frauenfigur bzw. der Film sein darf').[52] This question animated the three-stranded structure of *Eine flexible Frau*, whose formal-aesthetic alternation among fiction, documentary, and metacommentary underpins the protagonist's peripatetic existence (reflected in the film's English title, *The Drifter*) as she drifts across social, class, and spatial milieus in the urban environment, inspiring the film's attempt to track the public, private, and employment status of a 'flexible' woman.

Crucial to the tracking of ordinary life in the present in *Eine flexible Frau*, and underpinning the film's intervention into modes of realism, is a series of documentary-like sequences that record the changing space of the city due to gentrification, globalization, and shifting conceptions of public and private. Like *Sommer vorm Balkon,* Turanskyj's film focuses on the obsolescence of previous forms of life initiated by gentrification in the name of economic development. While *Sommer vorm Balkon* traces this process in a neighbourhood of Prenzlauer Berg, here we see national-representational spaces that showcase Berlin's unique juxtaposition of historically and politically significant architectural styles, now threatened with destruction by the corporatization of the city. Specific landmarks depicted by the film include the Finance Ministry, the Mauerstreifen (strip where the Berlin Wall ran), and the Schlossplatz, the historic site of Berlin's Prussian City Palace, which exemplifies the market- and tourism-driven transformation of central Berlin. Damaged in World War II and razed during the postwar period, the Palace was replaced in the 1970s by the Palace of the Republic, the seat of parliament and a cultural centre in the GDR. At the time of shooting, the Schlossplatz was still a vacant green space in the void of the torn-down Palace of the Republic, before the erection of the reconstructed City Palace (Humboldt-Forum). Also significant to the documentary strand of *Eine flexible Frau* is its depiction of the rapidly changing built environment represented by the townhouse. Recurring at several junctures in the film, this narrative trope makes visible the marked shift away from collective forms of living that characterized the 20th century. Represented by typical Berlin architectural styles like the 19th-century *Mietskaserne* (tenement house; literally: rental barracks) or the postwar *Plattenbauten* (panel buildings) associated particularly with East Berlin, these large scale buildings included public, communal spaces like the *Hinterhof* (back courtyard) or park. In the 21st century, this style of building has been largely supplanted by the exclusive, solitary, and individual lifestyle driven by private ownership that

52 Kohler and Nessel, 'A Woman under the Influence in Berlin zu Beginn des 21. Jahrhundert', 171.

is the provenance of the townhouses and gated communities that Greta studies and photographs.

As we have seen, the blurring of fiction and documentary modes is a common characteristic of the disorganized formal language of German cinema in the age of neoliberalism. In *Eine flexible Frau*, this blurring takes place not least through the ambiguity of the virtual/actual divide suggested by a mise-en-abyme of screens, which figures the elision of generic, representational, and perceptual boundaries in the visual economy of the present. Screens abound in *Eine flexible Frau*, in which shots are often marked as mediated images only after the fact, when the camera pulls back to reveal that the picture we see is emanating from the screen of a laptop, video camera, or overhead projection. Disorganizing our perception, this embedded use of screens emphasizes the extent to which, insofar as they index the mandate to perform an optimized identity, achieved through technologies of the self, virtual images have real material effects. In the coaching sequences, for instance, Greta's larger-than-life screen image is unfavourably juxtaposed to her corporeal existence, demonstrating the gulf between her personal and digital presence. Just as the Call Centre manager urges Greta to *smile on the inside*, to embody happiness in order to convey its affective charge in the mediated venue of a telephone call, her employment coach (Gisela Gard) similarly exhorts her to change her attitude so that she will radiate positivity in mediated forms of self-presentation.

Not tied exclusively to the toxic positivity of neoliberal forms of self-improvement, however, screens in *Eine flexible Frau* also stream feminist metacommentary, emphasizing the paradoxical quality of contemporary technology as a tool of both marketization and new forms of access and participation. It is in a YouTube video that we first encounter the feminist blogger and city guide who serves as the mouthpiece for the film's discursive notes on contemporary feminism and the politics of labour. The video streams on the laptop of a minor character, the administrative assistant of one of Greta's architecture school colleagues, a successful entrepreneur who is crafting a transnational deal to build a golf course in the Moroccan desert. The assistant watches the video while sitting in the Schlossplatz, which, as noted above, is one of the most politically symbolic and fraught public spaces in contemporary Berlin. The conjunction of national-representational space and streaming YouTube video in this scene emphasizes the imbrication of gentrification, globalization, labour flexibilization, and postfeminism as key facets in the neoliberalization of Western societies.

In the YouTube video, the feminist blogger, known only as Kluge (Bastian Trost), delivers a lecture analysing contemporary postfeminism as a

'conservative emancipation' that buttresses the existing system, a system in which men and women alike are bound to lose. Turanskyj has explained her use of the term 'conservative emancipation', one that recurs several times in *Eine flexible Frau*:

> In spite of facts and figures [that demonstrate the gender gap in wages, the glass ceiling, sexual violence against women, and so on] this gender hierarchy is strangely subject to denial today and in fact the opposite is claimed. In popular culture, print media, and also in films, images of female freedom and ostensible success are repeated excessively. These images falsely suggest that the gender hierarchy has already changed to the advantage of women, and it seems to be true: In fact there is a new level of participation and new promises in the name of profession, casual sex, and consumerism. This is what I mean by conservative emancipation. An emancipation that does not attack the status quo—that is, the gender hierarchy—but gets comfortable in it and gives it a new look that matches the Zeitgeist. Many women let themselves be deceived by these images, which are actually nothing other than narcissistic self-reflections.[53]

It is the role of Kluge to puncture the fabric of the film by calling attention repeatedly to the deceiving nature of these images. In each of his three appearances, he intervenes into and comments on a different form of representational space that is implicated in the paradoxes of flexibilization. The first of these, as noted above, is the digital platform of the Internet, specifically YouTube, with its DIY and curated forms of self-presentation.

In the second instance, we see Kluge at work, guiding a group of tourists through the German Finance Ministry, where he points out the depiction of female labourers in a socialist realist wall mural: 'Work is not valued when it is performed by women, indeed, work is not valued *because* it is performed by women. Many poorly paid service jobs face off against fewer and fewer productive high-wage jobs, which the so-called male elite divvy up amongst themselves. You can see that not much has changed. Female labourers have turned into female service workers. This is the Federal Finance Ministry.' Taking place in another fraught architectural space in Berlin—the former Nazi Air Ministry Building, which was also the site of the GDR's official founding in 1949 and later served as the headquarters of the Treuhand, which oversaw the privatization of East German enterprises—this scene calls

53 Kohler and Nessel, 'A Woman under the Influence in Berlin zu Beginn des 21. Jahrhundert', 178-179.

attention to the layered history of the city as well as to changing discourses regarding the women's work upon which Berlin was built.

In a final episode, Kluge leads a tour group through a public park where Greta happens to overhear his lecture on the privatization and feminization of caregiving and domestic labour as a root cause of women's ongoing oppression and an unresolved problem that the feminist movement of the 20th Century did nothing to change. In a striking shot, we see Kluge and his tour group mirrored in Greta's sunglasses, emphasizing precisely how this feminist commentary reflects Greta's own situation.

The role of Kluge in *Eine flexible Frau* strongly parallels the reflexive role played by the three fates Common Sense, Social Question, and Exact Statistics in *Bildnis einer Trinkerin*. As we have seen, those characters present a metacommentary that calls attention to the public discourse of neoliberalization—with its illusion of political neutrality, its management of social risk, and its emphasis on quantification —at the moment of its emergence around 1980. While structurally similar in terms of his formal role to provide commentary on the narrative, Kluge's actual message is something like the inverse of that articulated by the fates in Ottinger's film. Indeed, he is concerned precisely with unmasking the degree to which feminism has been 'taken into account' in Western societies, where some of its key principles have been incorporated into political life and institutions in the guise of individual freedom and choice, while feminism as a collective political movement is simultaneously disavowed as no longer necessary and reviled.[54] The fact that this feminist metacommentary is spoken by a man is also significant, since it reflects the self-understanding of contemporary feminism, under the sign of post-structuralism and Judith Butler's gender theory, as an anti-essentialist political movement that emphasizes the fluidity and contingency of gender and the fundamental instability of identity categories.

Eine flexible Frau ends, as it began, with Greta standing in a field, bringing the narrative full circle. In contrast to the character arc of conventional narrative, Greta is neither transformed nor redeemed in this circular narrative. Instead, as Randall Halle has suggested, 'That circularity can be understood as a reference to the cyclical nature of the capitalist market.'[55] This circularity also reflects the impasse of feminism in neoliberalism—characterized by a circuit of resistance and subversion, co-optation, marketization, and

54 See McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism*.

55 Halle, 'Großstadtfilm and Gentrification Debates', 186.

consumption—that Turanskyj's redoing of feminist cinema and her strategy of depicting refusal as critique aim to expose.[56]

Developing signal images of gendered refusal, both *Bildnis einer Trinkerin* and *Eine flexible Frau* represent out-of-control femininity as a response to the private and professional isolation, responsibilization, and normalization characteristic of neoliberal(izing) societies. Emphasizing the lack of solidarity in an era defined by the erosion of collective politics, both films depict affect aliens who traverse the transforming spaces of Berlin while wilfully expressing disaffection with the prevailing circumstances.

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56 On the impasse and feminist works that grapple with and aim to dissolve it, see also Baer, Smith, and Stehle, 'Digital Feminisms and the Impasse.'

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5. The Failing Family: Changing Constellations of Gender, Intimacy, and Genre

Abstract
This chapter examines a boundary-crossing archive of popular and countercinematic West, East, and post-unification German films that all focus on precarious intimacies: Dörrie's *Men* (1985); Wortmann's *Maybe...Maybe Not* (1994); Carow's *Coming Out* (1989); and Grisebach's *Longing* (2006). Shifting focus onto a consideration of men and masculinity in the postfeminist era, I analyze how these films subject the heteropatriarchal family to scrutiny, often exploring homosocial bonds and queer relations. In addition to investigating the precaritization of gender, sexuality, and intimacy pictured by these four films, this chapter sheds new light on the much vaunted "return to genre" in the German cinema of neoliberalism.

Keywords: Doris Dörrie, Sönke Wortmann, Heiner Carow, Valeska Grisebach, precarious intimacy, queer film

Doris Dörrie's *Männer* (*Men*), a low-budget comedy co-produced by the television channel ZDF for less than half a million dollars, went on to become one of the top box-office draws of 1985 in West Germany, where it beat out Hollywood blockbusters including *Rocky II* and *Back to the Future*, selling more than five million tickets and contributing to German film's sensational 30.9 percent domestic market share that year.[1] The success of *Männer* signalled a change in constellations of gender, intimacy, and genre in German cinema, debuting a template that came to predominate

1 See http://www.insidekino.com/DJahr/D1985.htm. The success of *Männer* was superceded only by the success of that year's number one hit *Otto – Der Film*, co-directed by Xaver Schwarzenberger and the comedian Otto Waalkes.

Baer, H., *German Cinema in the Age of Neoliberalism*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021. DOI: 10.5117/9789463727334_CH05

in the most successful films of the following decade and beyond. These *Beziehungskomödien* (relationship comedies) typically focused on men and masculinity in the postfeminist era, employing love triangles to explore homosocial bonds and queer intimacies among men, and subjecting the heteropatriarchal family to scrutiny. Often 'amphibic' in their production context (i.e. co-produced by television and designed to succeed on both the small and the large screen), these films exhibit hybridity along multiple registers. Combining slapstick comedy with a melancholic tone, they are also ideologically ambiguous in their portrayal of the co-existence of traditional and flexible gender roles and sexual norms characteristic of neoliberalism.

As Dörrie described it retrospectively in a 2000 interview, the immense success of *Männer* hailed from its precise diagnosis of the *Zeitgeist*: 'I think that was one of the reasons why this film became so successful, not only in Germany but really worldwide; that it hit the right moment. It was the moment of abandoning political ideas, and becoming more adjusted to the way capitalism works in the end.'[2] With its story of male transformation through the rejection of alternative lifestyle formations that had been characteristic of the post-1968 era and the concomitant embrace of business masculinity and flexible labour, *Männer* is a neoliberal fairy tale that narrativizes the socioeconomic transition toward a new conservatism in Western societies during the 1980s, encapsulated in the Federal Republic by Helmut Kohl's promotion of the *leistungsbereiten Normalbürger* [competitive average citizen].[3] Insofar as *Männer* depicts the abandonment of 'political ideas' associated with 1968, then, at the same time it makes visible the rise of a new set of political ideas in the wake of the neoliberal turn.

That *Männer* stages these political ideas through the story of a failing family is certainly no accident. While the neoconservatism of the Kohl/Reagan/Thatcher era paid lip service to defending traditional 'family values', in fact shifting conceptions of family, intimacy, and caregiving—which went hand in hand with changing norms around gender and sexuality—were crucial to the privatization of social reproduction as a matter of personal responsibility (rather than state provision) that emerged as a trademark of these neoliberal regimes. Volker Woltersdorff has argued that the intensification of neoliberal governmentality in Western societies since the 1980s gives rise to 'precarious sexualities', a simultaneous strengthening and destabilizing of heteronormativity, since 'the neo-liberal flexibilization of

2 Phillipps, 'A Conversation with Doris Dörrie', 7.

3 Görtemaker, *Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, 688.

gender and sexual identities allows traditional and flexible gender roles to coexist'.[4] As Woltersdorff suggests, the neoliberal discourse of mobility and deregulation appears to open up spaces for non-normative gender identifications, sexual practices, and affective ties, but the institutional sex-gender system is still an imperative, creating a situation of permanent insecurity. Woltersdorff describes how the state increasingly promotes non-monogamy as a way of delegating to new kinds of alliances support and caretaking formerly underwritten by social welfare. While this brings the affordances of sexual mobility and choice as well as the possibility of new social formations and domestic partnerships, 'Social lack of solidarity proves to be a historical condition for the recognition and normalization of non-marital lifestyles and moves within the neo-liberal constellation of gains in industrialization and risk growth.'[5] Thus, sexual and familial 'choice' is possible so long as one assumes the personal responsibility and social risk they entail, since individualization and the privatization of caregiving go hand in hand.

The genre of the *Beziehungskömodie* charts the transformation in family and caregiving structures and notions of intimacy across the period of neoliberal transition. Arguing that its generic interventions connect to the relationship comedy's imaging of precarious sexualities, this chapter considers the two most popular exemplars of the genre, *Männer* and *Der bewegte Mann* (The Moved Man, 1994; released in English as *Maybe... Maybe Not*), directed by Sönke Wortmann, which became the top-grossing domestic film of the 1990s in unified Germany. I examine these popular comedies in connection with two important films that diverge from the *Beziehungskomödie* substantially in terms of form, but which also archive the failing family and transformations in gender, sexuality, and intimacy through interrogations of genre: the first East German feature film about homosexuality, Heiner Carow's 1989 DEFA film *Coming Out*; and Valeska Grisebach's breakthrough Berlin School film *Sehnsucht* (Longing, 2006), which traces the alterations to ordinary life in a rural eastern German town after unification. In contrast to the predominant tendency to gender neoliberalism female by focusing on women protagonists, the four films analysed in this chapter share a notable focus on men and masculinity. Likewise, in all four films, the bed functions as a symbolic space both for representing the transformation of intimacy in neoliberalism and for testing out non-normative images of gender and sexuality on screen.

4 Woltersdorff, 'Paradoxes of Precarious Sexualities', 173.
5 Woltersdorff, 'Paradoxes of Precarious Sexualities', 177.

While this grouping might appear curious upon first look, reading these four films together not only makes visible changing modes of affect and intimacy in the era of precarious sexualities, but it also sheds new light on the much vaunted 'return to genre' in German cinema of the late 20th and early 21st-first centuries. In his introduction to *Generic Histories of German Cinema: Genre and Its Deviations*, Jaimey Fisher points out that studies of genre in the German context have tended to focus only on mainstream, commercial films at the expense of considering how the operations of genre are relevant across a broader cinematic spectrum: '[A]ny investigation of the history of genre should [...] reconceptualize film history in a way that can pertain to both popular and art cinema.'[6] The reconceptualization that Fisher calls for is especially important at a moment characterized by the erosion of traditional distinctions between the twin poles of popular and art cinema—an erosion that is evident not least in the very overt play with genre that characterizes contemporary 'postcinema'.[7]

This chapter and the next therefore emphasize how a broad range of stylistically divergent films marked by different production cultures intervene into genre conventions, often engaging with them self-reflexively and/or disorganizing them in ways that are emblematic for the German cinema of neoliberalism. Thus, while *Coming Out* and *Sehnsucht* do not conform to the generic conventions of the *Beziehungskomödie*, my analysis demonstrates how they anticipate or reflect on these conventions in ways that recall Rick Altman's notion of 'genrefication as process': 'the constant category-splitting/category-creating dialectic' through which genres unfold, consolidate, and morph again.[8]

My analysis develops genre as a conceptual framework for capturing a sense of the historical present, in resonance with Lauren Berlant's attention to genre in *Cruel Optimism*. As we have seen, Berlant develops new paradigms for considering both contemporary aesthetic production and the present as such, focusing on the question of why people persist in attaching to normative paradigms even when these normativities do them harm. Berlant suggests that the rise of neoliberalism is accompanied by the emergence of new aesthetic and generic forms that attend to the pervasive precariousness, crisis, and loss that characterize contemporary experience. In considering

6 Fisher, *Generic Histories of German Cinema*, 3.

7 Steven Shaviro has asserted that 'Digital technologies, together with neoliberal economic relations, have given birth to radically new ways of manufacturing and articulating lived experience', an emergent media regime that he calls 'post-cinema'. See Shaviro, *Post-Cinematic Affect*, 2.

8 Altman, *Film/Genre*, 65.

how cultural productions track the transformations of the historical present, she describes the 'waning of genre, and in particular older realist genres [...] whose conventions of relating fantasy to ordinary life and whose depictions of the good life now appear to mark archaic expectations about having and building a life. Genres provide an affective expectation of the experience of watching something unfold, whether that thing is in life or in art.'[9] In this regard, genre becomes a key mode for charting the disjunction between archaic and emergent conventions of relating fantasy to ordinary life, a way of making visible the 'unbinding of subjects from their economic and intimate optimism'.[10] Berlant's conception of genre as an affectively-charged horizon of expectations around how a narrative will unfold, and as a space for charting changing conventions regarding the interplay of fantasy and ordinary life, helps to describe my approach to examining the failing family and the precaritization of sexuality in *Männer*, *Der bewegte Mann*, *Coming Out*, and *Sehnsucht*.

Männer and the Rise of Business Masculinity

A symptomatic film for the emergent era of 'postfeminism', *Männer* turns its lens on modern masculinity in the West German 1980s. Discovering on the day of their wedding anniversary that his wife has a lover on the side, advertising executive Julius (Heiner Lauterbach)—who is outraged by this transgression despite his own infidelities—sets out to determine what appeal his wife's lover Stefan (Uwe Ochsenknecht) possesses that Julius himself lacks. Following and spying on his rival, Julius discovers that Stefan is searching for a new roommate, and he promptly offers to move in. At close quarters, Julius observes Stefan's impulsiveness and laxity, but what begins as a classic 'odd couple' set-up soon shifts to a Pygmalion tale as Julius sets out to transform Stefan into an exemplar of the new business masculinity. Moulding Stefan in his own image, Julius produces a man who can match him professionally, if not personally, since Julius's wife Paula (Ulrike Kiener) serves merely as an excuse for what emerges as the film's real focus: cultivating a spirit of competition between men to replace the social solidarity that Stefan—with his long hair, countercultural attitude, and communal apartment—initially appears to embody. Julius trains Stefan in the hallmarks of commercially profitable art, teaches him successful

9 Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 6.
10 Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 7.

interview practices, and introduces Stefan to his own professional network. Most crucially of all, Julius buys Stefan a suit and cuts his hair, reshaping his corporeal presence and schooling him in the 1980s art of dressing for success.

Julius's reshaping of Stefan operates as an allegory for the side-lining, under the sign of the neoliberal turn, of social differences, alternative lifestyles, and emancipatory politics associated with the post-1968 period. As Gertrud Koch pointed out already in 1986, in contrast to other popular German comedies, *Männer* draws its humour precisely from the way it embraces the new aesthetic and political mainstream: 'The consensus that delights everyone is the notion that the fusty leftist atmosphere has finally been shaken off', especially the fustiness associated with feminism—and precisely in a film written and directed by a woman.[11] What replaces this fusty atmosphere is an invigorated sphere of business activity occupied by a new-style *homo oeconomicus*, a competitive subject and entrepreneur of the self.

Männer opens with an emblematic shot recalling the heyday of industrial capitalism: an all-female typing pool. With its clanging sounds of soon-to-be obsolete machinery, this deliberately (almost) anachronistic workplace imagery, marked by rigidly defined spheres, will be exposed as outmoded by the end of the film.[12] Here, the gendered division of labour is underscored by a male voice on the intercom, the boss calling one of the typists into his office. As she enters, the camera dwells on the sign affixed to his office door, a harbinger of globalization reading, in English, 'Creative Director, Julius Armbrust'. With its conventional depiction of the 20th-century office, this opening sequence contrasts sharply with the final sequence of *Männer*, also set in Julius's advertising firm, which reconfigures the contemporary workplace as a site of flexibility and self-management. Ultimately, Stefan—exhibiting a combination of hippie spontaneity and professional traits adopted from Julius—emerges as ideally suited for the dynamics of the modern workplace, an early example of the 'creative class' (Richard Florida) who is poised to displace the top-down managerial style embodied by Julius himself.

While *Männer* thus pits two male types against one another in the quest for success in business, there is never any doubt that both of them will pursue this type of success. Indeed, though he is at first introduced as attractive to Paula because of his divergence from business masculinity, Stefan—who

11 Koch et al., 'Bei neuestem Licht besehen', 86.

12 On the gendered depiction of industrial labour in neoliberal cinema, see Mennel, *Women at Work in Twenty-First-Century European Cinema*, 90-95.

has been subsidizing his artistic pursuits with a fast-food job—expresses his interest in management to Julius soon after they meet. Julius, who is fond of uttering managerial slogans ('I don't suffer from problems, I do away with them') subjects Stefan to the 'paper-hat challenge', a business test that ostensibly reveals Stefan to be a follower rather than a leader. Though he labels Stefan a 'loser', Julius takes on the challenge of turning him into a winner in order to demonstrate the truth behind his own neoliberal mantra of personal responsibility: 'Every person is fundamentally free. If he isn't free, the fault is his own.'

Notably, the crucial scene of transformation, in which Stefan begins to model the traits associated with business masculinity, assuming the affective and corporeal style of the manager by literally dressing up as Julius, occurs in a remarkable scene of emotional and physical intimacy between the two men as they lie in bed together. This pivotal sequence of *Männer* begins in one bed and concludes in another, drawing attention to the bed as a symbolic space for representing new intimacies in the era of precarious sexualities. At the outset, we see the two protagonists lying together in a large bed, drinking beer and watching ice hockey on television in a ritual of male bonding. Notably, both men exhibit various states of undress: Julius, with his pants undone, lounges next to Stefan, who wears nothing but an open bathrobe and a pair of leopard-spot underpants that leave little to the imagination. Throughout the sequence, Stefan's hands are bandaged, the result of a kitchen 'accident' in which Julius—after hearing Stefan talk about Paula—has poured boiling water into the sink where Stefan is washing dishes, burning and symbolically castrating him. As a result of Stefan's injury, he is rendered passive, offering a narrative motivation for Julius to actively care for him, albeit in a way that conflates intimacy and competition.

In a series of long takes, the men argue about Julius's claim that Stefan is a loser whose lack of success stems from his failure to responsibilize and perform appropriately. To prove his point, Julius leaves the room and returns with his own bespoke suit, prompting Stefan to don the suit, slick back his hair, and perform as a model manager. In a two shot, we see the men contemplating Stefan's reflection in the mirror; as Julius reaches both arms around Stefan's waist to adjust his pants, he comments, 'If I were a woman and saw you on the street….' 'You'd immediately fall in love with me!', Stefan replies, completing the sentence. Here, as elsewhere in the sequence, Julius discursively adopts the position of a woman in order to legitimate his expression of desire for Stefan. In response, Stefan dons a hairy gorilla mask that he finds in the wardrobe, at once an avatar of and disguise for his

11. Flexibilized sexuality in Doris Dörrie's *Männer* (*Men,* 1985): Stefan (Uwe Ochsenknecht) and Julius (Heiner Lauterbach) share an intimate moment in bed.

own 'animal' desire; as the soundtrack surges and the pace of the editing accelerates, Stefan chases Julius, who flees in mock fear only to leap into Stefan's embrace, wrapping his arms and legs around the other man, who grunts and groans as he spins Julius around. Here, homosocial bonding verges into overt physical intimacy, as Stefan throws Julius down onto a mattress that is lying on the floor, pressing his body into the other man and kissing him (albeit through the gorilla mask). Laughing and grinding on the mattress, both men ever so briefly give in to their mutual attraction, which subsequently forms the foundation for Stefan's process of becoming (like) Julius (see Illustration 11).

Coined by the sociologist of gender Raewyn Connell, the term 'transnational business masculinity' describes 'the hegemonic form of masculinity in the current world gender order' and the dominant masculinity of neoliberalism, one that is shared by the business executives of global capitalism and the political executives who interact with them.[13] According to Connell, business masculinity is characterized by 'an increasing egocentrism, very conditional loyalties (even to the corporation), and a declining sense of responsibility for others (except for the purposes of image making)'; its exemplary subject is 'a person with no permanent commitments, except (in effect) to the idea of accumulation itself'.[14] Moreover, what specifically differentiates transnational business masculinity from traditional bourgeois

13 Connell, 'Masculinities and Globalization', 16.

14 Connell, 'Masculinities and Globalization', 16.

masculinity in Connell's account is an increasingly flexibilized sexuality, 'with a growing tendency to commodify relations with women'.[15] Unlike the traditional patriarch, then, the neoliberal avatar of business masculinity is not defined by his familial relations or sexual attachments. Just as he views the accumulation of wealth as an end in itself rather than as a way of providing for his heirs, his sexual relations are transactional rather than oriented toward the perpetuation of the family lineage.

Transnational business masculinity, a mode of entrepreneurial selfhood linked to flexibility, choice, and individualism, thus breaks with traditional patriarchal masculinity and enables new forms of intimacy. However, per Woltersdorff's characterization of neoliberal sexualities as precarious and contradictory, the flexibilization associated with transnational business masculinity produces both new opportunities for non-traditional lifestyles and new normativities that result from the demand for 'mobile working subjects who are in a position to construct and disband affective ties effortlessly'.[16] Thus, intimate relations are always subordinated to the primacy of business.

In the case of *Männer*, we find a kind of distributed intimacy that is repeatedly constructed and disbanded in the course of the narrative, as we see varying couples form and break up: Paula and Julius, Paula and Stefan, Stefan and Julius, then Paula and Julius again. While the film draws its comedic force from the contrivances and reversals of the love triangle, ultimately these shifting intimacies all facilitate the production and enforcement of Stefan as a subject of masculine business capitalism. As Holger Römers has suggested, *Männer* makes visible the performative construction of gender: 'By involving her men in a series of masquerades, Dörrie foregrounds the performativity of their masculinity and their identities in general.'[17] For instance, Stefan asks Julius, 'I'm wondering, which is the costume: your suit or your jeans?' To which Julius pointedly replies, 'Both', emphasizing the breakdown of distinctions between work and leisure in the performance of business masculinity.

Costuming and masquerade also play a key role in the pivotal scene when Paula pays a surprise morning visit to the apartment, catching Stefan and Julius off guard. So that she won't recognize him, Julius dons the gorilla mask and a pair of boxing gloves, charmingly flirting with Paula in the guise of a wild beast. As Paula's attention is increasingly drawn to Julius,

15 Connell, 'Masculinities and Globalization', 16.

16 Woltersdorff, 'Paradoxes of Precarious Sexualities', 175.

17 Römers, 'Männer / Men', 210.

Stefan loses his patience and drops his freewheeling attitude, insisting in a rather bourgeois way on good table manners, cleanliness, and proper comportment. While this scene plays with masquerade and role reversal to highlight performative identities, it does so chiefly as a prelude to the broader lesson about business performance that Julius subsequently offers to Stefan.

For as Julius emphatically makes clear, conventional bourgeois masculinity will not fly in the era of business capitalism: 'You can't conform, that is deadly. […] You have to understand that arrogance is the only thing that helps. You have to find your own work fantastic, or at least act like you do. Don't you get it? It's just a game.' In order to drive home the lesson that an unerring belief in one's performance of success will produce results, Julius locks Stefan to his desk and drills him in the discipline of becoming an optimized neoliberal subject, forcing him to cancel dates and obligations in order to work on his portfolio, and allowing him to stop working only to eat and to exercise. Indeed, the gambit pays off and Stefan finally lands a job at Krüger, a company that competes with Julius's firm. While laid-back Stefan had initially appeared to be the opposite of buttoned-up Julius, at the end of the film Paula tells her husband, 'Suddenly he became just like you', affirming the ascent of business masculinity as the new norm and illustrating the postfeminist message that, since all men are alike, one must embrace them just as they are. Indeed, as a successful employee, Stefan is now too tired to continue dating Paula, prompting her to accept the status quo and reunite with Julius when he returns home. At the same time, Stefan's newfound capital enables him to purchase a car, a luxury automobile that he refers to as 'showy, decadent, disgusting – simply the best!' His unbridled glee in consumerism signals Stefan's final turn away from the counterculture associated with 1968 and its eschewal of material possessions in favour of collective experience, and toward a wholehearted embrace of individualism and the pursuit of upward mobility.

Mobility and flexibility function as ambiguous signifiers in *Männer*, and the film charts how these qualities become firmly affixed to the neoliberal status quo, a trajectory that would later become characteristic of the *Beziehungskomödie*. A metaphor and nodal point for this ambiguity is the paternoster elevator at Julius's advertising firm, which also featured prominently in the publicity campaign for Dörrie's film. We learn that Paula first met Stefan in the paternoster, after coming to Julius's workplace to bring him a tie he had forgotten at home; the contrast between her tie-wearing husband and the dishevelled artist within the space of business made Stefan especially attractive to her. Later, the paternoster is overtly

connected to the mobility of gender and the flexibilization of labour, when the elevator forms a bridge between the diegetic final scene of the film and its well-known credit sequence.

Julius returns from his extended vacation to find a new atmosphere at the advertising firm. In contrast to the opening sequence of *Männer*, which portrays the workplace as a site of industrial capitalism with secretaries from the all-female typing pool responding to the male boss's advances, here Julius's suggestive remarks on a female colleague's dress elicit only a blank stare. As he steps on board the paternoster, he encounters the firm's CEO, who tells him that things have changed in his absence: the CEO has hired a promising young man away from the competition who will join Julius's department on the first of the month. When he protests that there is no opening in his department, the CEO tells him that in fact the new colleague will become the next creative director, replacing Julius himself. As the CEO tells Julius, 'You've become a bit unflexible recently', suggesting that the new colleague exhibits traits more befitting of the neoliberal workplace (the CEO himself appears to exemplify the style of the new creative class, proudly sporting a small ponytail and a loud tie covered in lightning bolts).

Exiting the paternoster, the CEO tells Julius he can meet the new colleague right away, who of course turns out to be Stefan. Previously positioned outside of the paternoster, panning up and down to follow the conversation between Julius and his boss, the camera is now repositioned inside the elevator, aligned with Julius's perspective as he first glimpses Stefan, before cutting back to a reverse shot as Julius attempts to hide from his former roommate, who is still in the dark about Julius's true identity. Then, in full frame, we see the illuminated green sign at the bottom of the paternoster's path, which reads in large block letters 'WENDEPUNKT – WEITERFAHRT – UNGEFÄHRLICH' (TURNING POINT – KEEP GOING – NO DANGER). This sign functions as a kind of epigraph for the ideological project of *Männer*, which renders harmless the transition to the new business capitalism.

Julius does keep going, and when the paternoster reaches ground level again, the CEO climbs aboard with an astonished Stefan in tow. As a crowd gathers, the two men – still riding the moving elevator – argue about Stefan's suitability for the job, as Julius takes ownership for everything from Stefan's arts training to the suit on his back. At first, the camera is aligned with the perspective of the CEO, who steps off the paternoster and watches the argument. We see him greet Paula, who arrives in the lobby and climbs aboard the elevator in order to bring Julius his forgotten tie, in a recap of her

initial meeting with Stefan. Paula goes up in the elevator, but this time she encounters neither Julius nor Stefan, instead ascending from view and out of the film's narrative altogether. Meanwhile, first Stefan and then Julius begin to strip off their business attire. As they are revealed wearing nothing but underwear, a reverse angle exposes a tittering crowd of women taking in the spectacle of the two scantily clad men, whom we now see laughing and cracking jokes as the credits begin to roll.

In a film that is mostly unremarkable on a formal-aesthetic level, this sequence stands out for its inventive use of mise-en-scène and cinematography and for its play with the comedic convention of the sight gag, which condenses the film's thematization of masquerade, performativity, and exposure via the concealment and revelation produced through the mechanical motion of the paternoster (resembling the form of the film strip itself). Not only does *Männer* notably dispatch with the extraneous Paula in order finally to reunite the mobile subjects of business masculinity, Julius and Stefan, who strip together in the intimate space of the paternoster, but it also foregrounds the female gaze at their half-naked bodies through the diegetic audience of women viewers.

The paternoster forms a transition point between the final frames of the narrative and the credit sequence. Here, the camera holds on a long close-up of the moving elevator as the cast list unspools, before a cut shows the paternoster again in long shot. As the sequence continues, the credits now display the names of the film crew; at the same time, we see the actual members of the crew rolling by in the cabins of the elevator while holding items pertaining to their behind-the-scenes work (e.g. a camera and film cans for the cinematographers; recording equipment for the sound engineers; scissors for the editing team). In a sequence that brings into view the filmmaking process, women's film authorship is on particular display: we see women members of almost every creative team, concluding with the writer and director Doris Dörrie (dressed in boxing gear) and the film's co-producers Elvira Senft and Denyse Noever. Though *Männer* is notably devoid of women characters, this sequence centres the role of women as creators, demonstrating a certain reflexivity about the film's gender politics.

In fact, this reflexivity is on view at various points throughout the film, via its formal play with gendered forms of looking, not least in a series of episodes where the film cuts to Julius's subjective perspective as he spies on Paula and Stefan through a child's telescope, as well as in the overt positioning of Julius and Stefan as objects to be looked at (often in varying states of undress, including a full frontal nude shot of Stefan, still exceedingly rare

for a man on film). However, this reflexivity about gender is also combined with deliberately sexist comments included in the dialogue between Stefan and Julius, comments that are played for laughs, contributing to the film's reception as a comedy willing to break taboos in the postfeminist age. Indicative of the omnivorousness of cinematic neoliberalism, *Männer* co-opts aspects of the feminist *Frauenfilm*, including attention to the politics of the gaze and a discourse of women's authorship, and redeploys them within the generic frame of the relationship comedy. For it is especially within the context of genre that the disorganized filmic language of *Männer* emerges most demonstrably.

In his compelling reading of German relationship comedies, Randall Halle draws an explicit link between economic neoliberalization and the comedy wave of the 1990s, in terms of both production contexts and narrative developments. As Halle points out, the shift to a profit-oriented funding model in West Germany in the 1980s laid the groundwork for the emergence of the new, audience-friendly popular cinema that gave rise to the comedy wave (for which Halle explicitly cites *Männer* as a precursor film). At the same time, the neoliberal turn shaped characters and storylines focusing on the interplay of endemic precarity and cruel optimism, especially in the aftermath of German unification: 'In this new free market economy, many of the characters work part-time or are self-employed with little sense of security. Many of them place their hopes in the romantic spirit of capitalism, on the imagined financial windfall that will result when their talent is finally discovered. Women's economic conditions appear particularly precarious.'[18] In this regard, relationship comedies provide one of the key generic venues for promoting the neoliberal fantasy that ordinary people may become rich and famous via unusual or extraordinary paths. 'And yet', Halle goes on to point out, 'in all the films of the Comedy Wave these economic anxieties are displaced to low-level background concerns and do not provide the structure of the narrative. The characters seem to experience the same pressures as the films themselves'.[19] Indeed, in what can perhaps be understood as a characteristic strategy of German cinema across film history, economic anxieties are displaced onto anxieties about sex and gender in relationship comedies.

Beginning with *Männer*, the films of the comedy wave share a specific late-20th-century incarnation of this tradition: 'Their conventions derive precisely from a commonality of anxiety—humour based on a crisis of

18 Halle, '"Happy Ends" to Crises of Heterosexual Desire,' 7.
19 Halle, '"Happy Ends" to Crises of Heterosexual Desire,' 8.

heterosexuality.'[20] Halle rightly draws a connection between Germany's decriminalization of same-sex sexuality in 1994 and the rise of the comedy production trend, which centred LGBTQ characters, especially gay men, often featuring a queer milieu and, as we will see in the case of *Der bewegte Mann*, a 'temporary-gay narrative'.[21] If, in the conventional Hollywood screwball comedy, humour arises from a disruption within heterosexuality (the peril of choosing the wrong marriage partner), Halle argues that in German relationship comedies, humour ensues from the way queer elements destabilize heteronormativity, including queer characters and settings as well as improper desires (particularly gay men desiring straight men and vice versa). However, due not least to the marketization of cinema under neoliberalism, relationship comedies operate under the mandate of a 'happy ending', which seems to require the resolution of this disruption via the redirection of desire toward 'proper' objects, since 'the heterosexual male cannot both reciprocate the attraction [to the gay man] and remain heterosexual'.[22] Halle's important analysis of the changed representation of gender melancholia under the new conditions of gay liberation and the removal of prohibitions on homosexuality emphasizes how the films reconfigure certain narrative conventions in order to achieve the required happy end. Notably, happy endings in comedy-wave films do not resolve the crisis of heterosexuality via the re-imposition of heteronormative behaviour. Rather, they offer individual solutions to individual problems by, in Halle's Freudian terms, 'fixing an individual ego-libido' to ensure that it is properly directed toward an appropriate object.[23]

As Halle's analysis suggests, these films focus on the individual, whose unmooring from traditional norms of gender and sexuality and traditional structures of family, employment, and social life they chart, offering a seismograph of the precaritization of life in neoliberalism. In the context of this precaritization, relationship comedies reconsider the traditional promise of the good life with its concomitant attachments to upward mobility, job security, and durable forms of intimacy, portraying the 'unbinding' of their characters from the fantasy that these ideals are mutually attainable and/or making visible the characters' obstinate refusal to relinquish such attachments.[24] Flexibilized and precarious sexualities form the ground for

20 Halle, '"Happy Ends" to Crises of Heterosexual Desire,' 8.
21 Halle, '"Happy Ends" to Crises of Heterosexual Desire,' 12.
22 Halle, '"Happy Ends" to Crises of Heterosexual Desire,' 20.
23 Halle, '"Happy Ends" to Crises of Heterosexual Desire,' 30.
24 Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 7.

these films' mapping of the present and their attention to how a discourse of individual choice and personal responsibility opens up new opportunities for non-normative intimate practices and affiliations that co-exist with traditional sexual identities and gender roles. In the case of *Männer*, we find an overt narrative about the connection between the dismantling of social solidarity, in the form of Stefan's communal apartment and hippie lifestyle, and the crisis of heterosexuality. While ostensibly occasioned by Paula's affair, this crisis is construed as one of the heteronormative family more broadly (completely unsurprised by their family's failure, one of Julius and Paula's children cynically points out at the outset of the film that 'No love lasts forever'.)

Following the model outlined by Halle, the main narrative of *Männer* focuses on the homosocial relationship and queer intimacy between Stefan and Julius that emerges from Paula's renunciation of her marital bond, but in the end, the status quo is reinforced when Paula and Julius reunite and Julius's ego-libido is directed back toward the proper heterosexual object. Notably, however, Stefan's desire is redirected away from both Julius and Paula and cathected not onto a more proper lover, but rather onto the pursuit of financial gain, evidencing the kind of effortless disbanding of affective ties in favour of self-optimized business masculinity that Woltersdorff describes: 'Unlike its predecessor Fordism, neo-liberalism allows for a flexibilization of sexual and gender norms, while it enforces the social narrative of competition and of profit-oriented selfishness'.[25] Clearly exhibiting both of these tendencies, *Männer* does not end with Julius and Paula's reconciliation, but, as we have seen, instead reunites Julius and Stefan, leaving us with a symbolic image of gender and sexual mobility in the form of the two half-naked men in the elevator. This ending is important, not because it subverts convention or points toward a new form of queer futurity, but rather insofar as it provides a template for the disorganized formal and generic language that would continue to characterize the German cinema of neoliberalism, and especially the immensely popular relationship comedies of the 1990s. A woman's film about men that melds aspects of the feminist *Frauenfilm* with screwball conventions and draws its humour from an embrace of the mainstream, *Männer* piles on multiple endings in an effort to have it both (all?) ways. This disorganization of form and genre ultimately defies attempts to codify the comedy wave within received film theoretical paradigms, though it is certainly emblematic of the precarious times—for cinema, for sexuality, and for German society—out of which it emerged.

25 Woltersdorff, 'Paradoxes of Precarious Sexualities', 164.

Intimacy between Men and the Failure of the Heteropatriarchal Family in *Der bewegte Mann*

The nascent queerness of the intimacy between men on view in *Männer* is made explicit in *Der bewegte Mann*, the most popular German film of the 1990s with more than 6.6 million tickets sold domestically. Based on the best-selling comic books by Ralf König *Der bewegte Mann* (The Moved Man, 1987) and *Pretty Baby* (1988), the film adaptation produced by Bernd Eichinger and directed by Sönke Wortmann follows the gay character Norbert (Joachim Król) who falls for the hetero Axel (Til Schweiger). The film's imaging of mobile and flexible sexualities is signalled already by the opening take, a swooping crane shot that moves fluidly through space, performing two 360-degree pans in opposite directions—a cinematic figure eight—while offering a birds-eye view of the crowd dancing in Cologne's Gloria Theatre to the strains of the Palast Orchester. Featuring singer Max Raabe, who plays a cameo in this scene, the Palast Orchester's retro soundtrack for *Der bewegte Mann*, a series of *Schlager* that are threaded throughout the film, evokes both a nostalgic return to the classical genre of the musical comedy and a period (the Weimar era) known for its gender and sexual mobility. The camera comes to rest on the hunky Axel, who works as a waiter at the theatre; a cut back to the dance floor reveals a woman who cranes her neck as she dances in order to get a better view of him. In a shot/countershot sequence typical for the romantic comedy—but performed here with inverted gender roles—the woman openly stares at Axel, so that he turns around to make sure she is looking at him and not at someone else standing behind him. Subsequently, the woman invites Axel into the bathroom, where they have sex in a stall. This opening sequence thus establishes Axel as the object of the gaze, a status he will occupy throughout the film as he becomes the focus of desire for (straight) female and (gay) male characters alike.

When Axel's girlfriend and co-worker Doro (Katja Riemann) discovers him having sex in the bathroom, she kicks him out of her apartment. Finding himself in need of a place to stay, Axel temporarily moves in with a new acquaintance, the gay man Norbert. Like *Männer, Der bewegte Mann* develops an odd-couple narrative about two unlikely roommates; as in the previous film too, the intimacy produced by living at close proximity creates a strong bond between the two men. In *Der bewegte Mann*, however, this intimacy is more overtly sexualized: in the 'temporary gay narrative' (Halle) the film develops, Axel not only participates avidly in the gay milieu that Norbert introduces him to, but he eventually exhibits a strong attraction to Norbert and, in an intimate scene that takes place in bed, almost has sex with him.

If, as we have seen, German relationship comedies chart (and derive their humour from) the crisis of heterosexuality, in *Der bewegte Mann* this crisis develops from the attempt that Axel and Doro undertake to form a heteropatriarchal family, despite their mutual ambivalence about doing so. After she has kicked Axel out of the apartment, Doro discovers that she is pregnant with his baby. Chain smoking as she waits for a home pregnancy test, Doro pronounces the positive result a 'horror'. Though she agonizes over the decision to keep the baby, as a thirtysomething woman, she views the pregnancy as her only opportunity to pursue the normative route toward happiness via heterosexual marriage and childbearing, especially as she has been told by her doctor that having another abortion could harm her future reproductive health. While Axel would prefer to stay with Doro—after all, she provides for him economically and without her he is homeless—he appears to be constitutionally incapable of maintaining a monogamous relationship with her. Insofar as it displays the barriers that stand in the way of their mutual attempt to consolidate a heteronormative relationship (including Axel's promiscuous attraction to everyone but the pregnant Doro, his queer intimacy with Norbert, as well as Doro's own internalized homophobia, which leads to her repeated rejection of the 'temporarily gay' Axel), the film exhibits the destabilization of heterosexuality via queer elements in the ways that Halle identifies as characteristic of the genre. Although in the course of the film Axel and Doro get married and a baby is born, their ultimate failure to form a family underscores the precarity of traditional forms of relationality in the neoliberal age.

Der bewegte Mann makes visible along multiple vectors the coexistence of non-normative and conventional roles and practices that Woltersdorff identifies as characteristic of neoliberal sexualities. One of the film's running gags involves a men's consciousness-raising group consisting of heterosexuals who meet to discuss their sexual practices and critique their sexual fantasies in the ostensible attempt to become more tolerant and enlightened. The group's efforts range from inviting gay men to educate them about queer sexuality to discussing the specifics of vaginal vs. clitoral orgasm. Owing to their effort to develop more respect for women, they purport to abhor pornography, but on a trip to the local porn theatre, Axel catches one of the group's most solemn members, Klaus-Dieter, in the act of watching a sex film. Played for high humour, the men's group (which is comprised of an array of ridiculous-looking and -sounding characters, including one who speaks in an over-the-top regional dialect) satirizes politically-correct gender and sexual discourse, but it also places on display heterosexual men's ambivalent experience of navigating sexuality in the era after feminism

and the consolidation of LGBTQ rights. In this way, *Der bewegte Mann* simultaneously offers an eye-winking acknowledgement of the integration and co-optation of sexual liberation in neoliberal societies and a rather melancholic narrativization of the precarity that has ensued.

The vacillation between these two stances forms a key horizon for the generic innovation of the relationship comedy. On the one hand, the characters in this genre experience a new mobility and fluidity regarding possible sexual partners, practices, and arrangements, but on the other hand they are unmoored from traditional structures and expectations in ways that prove disorienting. This is especially (though not exclusively) the case for the genre's heterosexual characters, while LGBTQ characters and milieus offer a kind of template for the emergent flexibilization of sexuality, a fact that helps to explain their persistent appearance in key roles in the films of the genre. As Woltersdorff argues, insofar as it is organized around the optimization of individual sexual pleasure and a spirit of sexual competition realized via commercial platforms 'the gay scene functions as a sort of forerunner in view of the development of markets of sexual exchange and serves as a transmitter of the market-like organization of sexual interests for the rest of society'.[26] While this mainstreaming leads to the destigmatization of queer sexualities, it also has the effect of undoing the solidarity and political mobilization previously fostered by sexual minorities.

In the case of *Der bewegte Mann*, gay men mentor heterosexual men in the new, flexibilized forms of sexuality and masculinity. Norbert's friend Walter/Waltraud (Rufus Beck) educates the men's group in the exploration of anal eroticism, while Norbert himself trains Axel to be a better consumer, schools him in the domestic arts, and facilitates his career development as a photographer. While critics have viewed *Der bewegte Mann* as emblematic of West Germany's self-satisfied and provincial *Wohlstandsgesellschaft* (affluent society)[27]— although the film debuted just four years after German unification, it exhibits virtually no trace of that epochal event—in fact neither Doro nor Axel, both of whom work in the service economy, is an avatar of the prosperous West. Rather, that position is occupied by the film's gays, especially Norbert, whose painstakingly maintained apartment, replete with well-laid breakfast table, carefully chosen décor, and the latest stereo equipment, is a testament to the new homonormativity, 'a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption', captured by the film.[28]

26 Woltersdorff, 'Paradoxes of Precarious Sexualities', 171.
27 Brockmann, *A Critical History of German Film*, 438.
28 Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality?*, 50.

To be sure, Norbert operates in the service of Axel's character development in ways that are consistent with the conventional portrayal of 'the gay friend', the stock character whose own evolution as a desiring subject is generally subordinated to that of the heterosexual protagonist. Here, the straight man Axel is unable to provide for himself, relying on women and gay men, who are tasked with maintaining structures of caregiving throughout the film. Its heroic positioning of the hapless straight man is matched by the film's rather misogynist depiction of female sexuality (pitting the Madonna-like Doro against the orgasmic Elke (Antonia Lang), who seduces Axel) and especially of pregnancy. Everyone in the film is horrified by pregnancy, the pregnant body, and birth, including Doro herself, Axel (who finds the thought of having sex with the pregnant Doro abhorrent), and Norbert, who is sickened by the blood and bodily fluids when he is compelled to attend Doro's birth. *Der bewegte Mann* certainly does not depart from the stereotypical and often retrograde depictions of gender and sexuality that, as we have seen in Chapter 2, are characteristic of Eichinger's producer's cinema more broadly.

Nonetheless, it is arguably Norbert and Axel's (rather than Doro and Axel's) relationship that this relationship comedy traces and dwells on, following the two men as they meet, move in together, break up, and reconnect in the end. The majority of the film's screen time is devoted to portraying Norbert and Axel together, and while the film permanently defers any visual depiction of the heterosexual couple having sex, the climactic sex scene of *Der bewegte Mann* gives us an extended view of the two men sharing a moment of queer intimacy in bed.

Axel and Norbert go to Doro's apartment to retrieve Axel's slide projector, which they find set up in Doro's bedroom. The two men lie down on Doro's bed and begin clicking through slides from a vacation that Doro and Axel took in the mountains. Norbert looks longingly at Axel, who appears to be absorbed in viewing images of Doro on screen, but who slowly lets his knee drop onto Norbert's leg (see Illustration 12). While he tries to call Norbert's attention to Doro's shapely figure on screen, Norbert (and the camera) dwell instead on Axel himself, who is wearing only a tank top. It is certainly no accident that this sex scene is triggered by scopophilic viewing, for the sequence humorously reflects on the way *Der bewegte Mann* redirects the gaze away from any conventional feminine object of to-be-looked-at-ness and toward Axel (and the actor who plays him, Til Schweiger, unrivalled as a sex symbol in post-unification German cinema), who is not only the main object of visual pleasure for characters within the film's diegesis, but also for audiences of the relationship comedy more broadly. As Christopher

12. Queer intimacy: Axel (Til Schweiger) and Norbert (Joachim Król) in the climactic bed scene of Sönke Wortmann's *Der bewegte Mann* (*Maybe…Maybe Not*, 1994).

Treiblmayr puts it, 'While Doro hardly enters the camera's erotic field of vision, Til Schweiger's body constitutes an explicit erotic spectacle in the film, which is staged for both homosexual men and heterosexual women. The "classic" active/passive split between men and women observed by Mulvey and others is no longer in effect in *Der bewegte Mann*.'[29] Wryly noting that it is awfully hot in the apartment, Norbert begins to strip off his clothes, and soon he is wearing nothing but underwear. When a nude image of Axel appears on screen amidst the vacation photos, Norbert begins to kiss him on the shoulder, prompting Axel to comment rather nonchalantly, 'You took all your clothes off.' Then, Norbert disappears under the covers, presumably to perform oral sex on Axel.

At this precise moment, we hear the sound of a key in the lock, as Doro arrives home. Buttoning up his pants, Axel swiftly hides Norbert in Doro's wardrobe. Noticing that something is amiss, Doro begins looking for the woman she assumes Axel is hiding in the bedroom, instead finding Norbert, who comes out of the closet completely naked, a 'coming out' that is nonetheless drained of any symbolic valence in the normalizing context of the 1990s portrayed by the film. Axel half-heartedly and rather dumbly tries to persuade Doro that he isn't gay (Axel: 'Every person is a little bit bisexual, we've known that at least since Einstein'; Doro: 'You mean Freud'), but Doro doesn't buy it: 'I'm completely baffled. We break up and after two weeks you're gay and I'm pregnant.' Doro's divulgence of her pregnancy to

29 Treiblmayr, *Bewegte Männer*, 330.

Axel here ostensibly precipitates the redirection of erotic energy toward 'proper' objects, since following this climactic scene, Axel and Doro reunite and subsequently marry, and Norbert begins a new relationship with Horst (Armin Rohde).

However, this redirection is not especially successful. *Der bewegte Mann* shows us neither the wedding (we see only a few shots on the steps of the church, where Waltraud and Fränzchen (Nico van der Knaap) show up in full drag with a reluctant Norbert in tow) nor the successful consummation of the marriage, since Axel proves unable to sleep with his pregnant wife. Likewise, the film's normalizing language positions Horst, a leather-wearing butcher who watches horror movies for breakfast, as an improper object for the mild-mannered vegetarian Norbert. When Axel attempts to reassert his heterosexuality by setting up a clandestine liaison (in Norbert's apartment no less) with Elke, a high school girlfriend who achieved her first orgasm with him, things go awry: after they take Bull Power, a hormone meant to boost sexual pleasure, Axel crouches naked on the coffee table believing himself to be a rooster, while Elke instead ends up having energetic sex in the bathtub with the gay butcher Horst.

This persistent 'misdirection' and mobility of desire endures into the final sequence of *Der bewegte Mann*, when Doro goes into labour and is accompanied to the hospital not by her husband but by Norbert (Axel is too high on Bull Power to realize what is happening). While this sequence stages a superficial resolution of the 'temporary gay' narrative—Norbert assures Doro that Axel is decidedly heterosexual and promises Axel that Doro will forgive him eventually for missing the birth—in fact the heteropatriarchal family is never successfully formed. Doro throws Axel out of her hospital room, refusing to speak to him, and it is Norbert who eventually introduces Axel to his infant son. As Axel scrutinizes him, the newborn suddenly morphs into a swaddled dog, ostensibly a humorous aftereffect of the bull hormone, but one that also puts a queer spin on the gaze of the father.

This surrealist dimension harkens back to an earlier dream sequence, in which Norbert envisioned himself pregnant with Axel's baby, eventually giving birth to a bird. Just after the climactic bed scene between the two men, a montage sequence shows us scenes of Norbert alone, pining for Axel; the passage of time is demonstrated by the changing seasons in the shots that comprise the sequence, which is accompanied by the Palast Orchester song 'Kein Schwein ruft mich an' (No one [literally: no swine] is calling me). Abruptly, the soundtrack shifts, and we see a shot of Norbert, in profile, wearing a maternity gown that stretches across his large pregnant belly.

Norbert calls out, 'But Axel, you can't leave me alone in this condition!' Through a dissolve, Axel appears in the dream to tell Norbert that he's sorry but he's getting back together with Doro, before he fades out again. A cut shows us Waltraud and Fränzchen, both dressed as nurses, peering into the camera and asking: 'What's wrong, Norbert, are you going into labour?' Lying against a swirling red backdrop, Norbert grimaces in pain, as Waltraud urges, 'Norbert, you have to push, push now!' Finally, a cut reveals a hand holding a small parakeet, which closely resembles Axel's pet bird Schevardnadze. Waltraud proclaims, 'Such a strapping little lad!' and congratulates Norbert on the successful birth, as the little bird chirps like a newborn crying. Norbert's dream fantasy of giving birth to Axel's queer baby is subsequently mirrored by the final sequence, in which Axel envisions his baby as an adorable puppy, a (queer) fantasy offspring that he might share with Norbert in lieu of the biological infant he never quite claims from Doro.

At least since Halle's persuasive reading of the film, critics have tended to view Norbert as a facilitator of heterosexuality, whose role is to save the relationship between Doro and Axel.[30] At the same time, as Treiblmayr acknowledges, the main intimate moments in *Der bewegte Mann* (albeit in a film that is not exactly noteworthy for its eroticism) take place between men. These include 'when Axel and Norbert lie in bed together during the "closet sequence" and in a later scene when they argue about whether Axel had an erection or not',[31] as well as a kiss scene between two leather-clad men at the gay disco, shown in a tight close-up, which Treiblmayr views as especially noteworthy given the ongoing taboo in mainstream cinema—even in the 1990s—on depicting gay men kissing.

What is more, we never do see Axel and Doro (re)united in this relationship comedy's happy end. As in *Männer*, the female character simply disappears from view at the end of the film, which ultimately pictures Axel and Norbert leaving the hospital together, sharing a joke about the heritability of queerness (and the possibility that the baby might be gay). Treiblymayr reads in this ending a departure from the screwball conventions that have dominated the final third of the film and toward a new adaptation of the buddy movie, which codifies homosociality in a final movement away from male/female to male/male relationships.[32] The film's final shot, included in the credit sequence, consolidates this homosociality by showing

30 Halle, '"Happy Ends" to Crises of Heterosexual Desire', 2; Treiblmayr, *Bewegte Männer*, 328.
31 Treiblmayr, *Bewegte Männer*, 330.
32 Treiblmayr, *Bewegte Männer*, 332.

us Norbert, Axel, and Waltraud, now out of costume, singing in harmony to the Palast Orchester song 'Für einen richtigen Mann gibt es keinen Ersatz' (There's no substitute for a real man), a song that takes on rather campy connotations here.

As Halle argues, 'What makes the films of the Comedy Wave stand out in a history of sexuality is that they do not provide comfortable resolutions, and by no means does the crisis of heterosexual desire get resolved through the triumph of the heterocoital imperative'.[33] I have suggested that this irresolution emerges not least from the genre's grappling with precarious sexualities in neoliberalism. Emblematic for the formally disorganized and ideologically promiscuous films of neoliberal cinema, *Der bewegte Mann* blurs conventions of gendering common to (heteronormative) romantic comedies in its depiction of the precarity of sexual and intimate relations after the breakdown of the traditional family. Ultimately, the film advocates for the neoliberal principle of individual freedom in sexual pursuits articulated by Axel early on in the narrative, when he tells Waltraud that he's not a homophobe because he believes that 'everyone should pursue happiness in his own way'. Axel's standpoint coincides with 'the emergence of a new aspect of modernization wherein tolerance of homosexuality has become a benchmark of social preparedness for admission into the transnational community',[34] and the concomitant co-optation and depoliticization of LGBTQ movements in favour of nonredistributive forms of equality and integration into heteronormative institutions (e.g. marriage and the military). In this regard, the film simultaneously represents both a new stage in the normalization of cinematic depictions of LGBTQ characters and a form of mainstreaming that heralds the mandate for sexual minorities to conform to dominant culture. This nascent homonormativity is brought into sharp relief when we view *Der bewegte Mann* in parallel with *Coming Out*, a film produced during the same time period but arising from a very different context.

Individual Happiness and the Precarity of Intimacy in *Coming Out*

Taking place in Berlin on 9 November 1989, the premiere of Heiner Carow's *Coming Out* unexpectedly coincided with the fall of the Wall, but its contested realization as the first LGBTQ-themed feature film produced by DEFA

33 Halle, '"Happy Ends" to Crises of Heterosexual Desire', 27.
34 Halle, '"Happy Ends" to Crises of Heterosexual Desire', 33.

also reflects the changing aesthetic and political constellations of the late GDR. Carow's film focused on the symbolic process of coming out not only to break the taboo on representing LGBTQ people in state-sanctioned East German culture, but also as a metaphor for the broader problem—reaching its apotheosis in late socialism—of how to reconcile the assertion of individual desire with the mandate for collectivity. However, as Katrin Sieg has put it: 'The contradiction between the individual right to happiness and social reproduction staged by *Coming Out* could [...] no longer be resolved by the system at which this critique was aimed', since German unification and the obsolescence of the East German state quickly followed upon the film's debut.[35]

Coming Out narrates the story of Phillipp (Matthias Freihof), a young teacher who embarks on a heterosexual relationship with his colleague Tanja (Dagmar Manzel). When he runs into a former boyfriend, whom he had parted from as a teenager at the insistence of his parents, Phillipp experiences a reawakening of his disavowed attraction to men. On a secret visit to a gay bar, Phillipp encounters Matthias (Dirk Kummer), whom he eventually meets and sleeps with. Following a similar generic template to the relationship comedies discussed above, the narrative of *Coming Out* develops around this love triangle: Phillipp juggles his two lovers, neither of whom he tells about the other, until Tanja inevitably witnesses him in an intimate embrace with Matthias, and Phillipp is forced to choose.

Parallel to this conventional, invidualized 'love' story is the political narrative pursued by *Coming Out*, which depicts Phillipp's socialization as a gay man—his coming out process—in the context of East Berlin's gay subculture and in defiance of the internalized homophobia of the GDR mainstream, for which the women in the film (Tanja, the director of the school where he works, and his mother) serve as the mouthpiece. As commentators on the film have pointed out, Phillipp experiences his gayness as incompatible with socialism, exposing to viewers the assumed heterosexuality of the collective subject in the GDR.[36] Genre forms a necessary horizon for this exposure, as *Coming Out* relies on the conventional generic structure of the relationship film to orient spectators within a familiar plot scheme and secure sympathy for the film's protagonists in order to then demonstrate the harm perpetuated by precisely these normative conventions.

Though not a comedy, *Coming Out* depicts the crisis of the heteropatriarchal family and the destabilization of heteronormativity via queer elements;

35 Sieg, 'Homosexualität und Dissidenz', 284.
36 Sieg, 'Homosexualität und Dissidenz', 293.

it also marks the becoming visible of gay characters in East German narrative cinema. In both regards, the film occupies a similar status to the West German relationship comedies discussed above. Indeed, *Coming Out* offers a plea for the acceptance and toleration of same-sex desire in ways that sometimes run parallel to the Western discourse of individualism developed in *Der bewegte Mann,* encapsulated by Axel's disavowal of homophobia because 'everyone should pursue happiness in his own way'. At the same time, though, by virtue of its production in the late GDR, *Coming Out* comprises a unique document of a (film) historical moment foreclosed upon by subsequent events, and in this regard it also preserves a different vision of cinema and sexuality than the one offered by West German films of the period.

The path toward LGBTQ representation and emancipation charted by *Coming Out* was subsequently forestalled upon not only by the dismantling of both DEFA and the GDR itself, but also by the concomitant end of the nascent East German gay and lesbian movement as well as the emergence of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in the former eastern states. The undoing of the East German gay and lesbian movement marked the termination of the attempt to create an alternative to the 'commercial ghettoization' of queer culture associated with the West[37], while the threat of HIV/AIDS signalled the decline of an erotic culture of public, unprotected sex between men (the latter notably on view in a key scene of *Coming Out*, which I will return to below). Both of these events thus figure in the dismantling of collectivity and the individualization and privatization of (gay) life associated with neoliberalism.

In this regard, *Coming Out* constitutes a significant archive of disappearing pasts and emergent futures. As David Brandon Dennis argues, 'The film is significant both historically and artistically because it captured the unique moment in East German history when "third ways" seemed desirable and possible, criticizing what was and imagining anew what life could be in the GDR'.[38] In somewhat different terms, Kyle Frackman emphasizes the queer utopianism of *Coming Out*, arguing that, like José Estaban Muñoz's conception of queerness as 'essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world', Carow's film also 'examines the present through its deployment of elements from the past in order to project a possible future'.[39] Both Dennis

37 See Soukop, ed., *Die DDR. Die Schwulen. Der Aufbruch,* 113, qtd. in Dennis, 'Coming Out into Socialism'.

38 Dennis, 'Coming Out into Socialism.'

39 Frackman, 'The East German Film 'Coming Out' (1989)', 458-459.

and Frackman identify the sense in which *Coming Out* occupies a liminal space between a socialist past that it critiques and aims to refigure and the neoliberal future that ultimately came to pass.

In aesthetic terms, *Coming Out* reflects the realist cinematic language that predominated at DEFA and is shaped by an agenda of public enlightenment about the previously taboo subject of homosexuality. Notably, however, while advocating for acceptance and toleration of LGBTQ people, *Coming Out* also resists the mandate to valourize queer communities through 'positive' (homonormative) images that increasingly characterized the transnational project of queer cinema under the sign of gay liberation in the West beginning in the 1980s. Rather, via its interrogation of the contradiction between the individual pursuit of happiness and the social reproduction of the collective, the film considers alternative forms of relationality and community, while also developing a de-idealized depiction of masculinity that dovetails with its anti-patriarchal critique of the heteronormative family. While a comparison to the West German relationship comedies thus helps to establish how *Coming Out* archives the neoliberal transition and documents the failing family, the film's aesthetic form and its imaginary differ significantly from those of Dörrie and Wortmann. Instead, Carow's film anticipates and resonates with representations of intimacy, erotics, and the material world in anti-identitarian forms of political film and media emerging in the context of the Berlin School and contemporary feminism, a connection I will elaborate in the final section of this chapter.

Coming Out begins with a prologue that introduces the stakes of the film's representation of homosexuality in the GDR. It is New Year's Eve and fireworks explode over East Berlin. Amidst the noise emerges the siren of an ambulance rushing Matthias to the hospital after a suicide attempt. In a scene highly reminiscent of the overdose sequence in *Solo Sunny* (see Chapter 3) and which similarly indexes the conflict between individual self-determination and managed collectivity, here we see a team of women doctors threading a tube down Matthias's throat and forcibly pumping his stomach. Shot in an actual clinic in Berlin and featuring real doctors, this extremely realistic scene conveys with immediacy and candour the shame and trauma that have driven Matthias's suicide attempt. As he recovers in the clinic hallway, a doctor asks him why he overdosed, and, in tears, he replies, 'Because I'm gay – I'm homosexual'.

This image of Matthias's anguish is counterposed by our first glimpse of Phillipp, who is introduced riding a bicycle through the streets of the city. In contrast to static close-ups of Matthias in the harshly lit interior of the clinic, we see Phillipp in long shot, moving through sunny exterior spaces;

the association of Phillipp with mobility, light (and indeed enlightenment) is affirmed as he arrives at the school where he teaches and writes his name on the chalkboard: Klarmann (literally: man of clarity). After the introduction of Phillipp, the first third of *Coming Out* initially appears to be unrelated to the prologue, as it follows the conventions of the traditional romance. In a classic meet-cute, Phillipp accidentally bumps into fellow teacher Tanja in the school hallway, and though she is at first annoyed by the bloody nose she receives in the mishap—foreshadowing the ultimate injuriousness of the relationship that ensues—the two spend the evening drinking and dancing together, ending up in Tanja's bed at her initiative.

Here and in several subsequent scenes depicting Tanja and Phillipp in bed together, she is fully clothed while he is naked, the object of her (and our) gaze. In one sequence, Tanja even sits in bed eating pickles from a jar while ogling Phillipp as he lies nude before her. Phillipp's positioning as a sex object on display is underscored when Tanja invites her former neighbour, nicknamed Redford because of his blonde locks, to come over and inspect her new boyfriend. However, when Redford arrives, he turns out to be Jacob (Axel Wandtke), an old acquaintance of Phillipp's. Unsettled by his arrival, Phillipp is unfriendly, even hostile, toward the other man. Beginning to sweat, he leaves the room to rinse his face off under the shower head; as he shakes off the water, Phillipp becomes entangled in the lingerie hung up to dry there, in a symbolic shot that portrays the messy situation his intimacy with Tanja has created for Phillipp.

As we subsequently learn, Jacob and Phillipp shared a relationship as young men, until Phillipp's parents—aiming to prevent their son from expressing his sexuality—blackmailed Jacob into leaving Phillipp by buying him a bicycle and a compass. Subsequently, Phillipp has apparently conformed to their wishes by living as a straight man, but his encounter with Jacob exposes the lie, and Phillipp now begins to explore his repressed queer desire. Visiting a gay bar, Phillipp encounters not only a diverse clientele and a colourful night life that contrasts sharply with the staid world of Tanja's flat and the overall greyness of East Berlin, but also a sphere of sociability and relationality—a form of collectivity based on affinity rather than familial ties or the mandate for biological and social reproduction—that opens up a new world to him.

While the film's previous thirty minutes have told the story of Phillipp and Tanja's romance through largely conventional cinematography, editing, and framing familiar from domestic melodramas, with an understated soundtrack, the gay bar scene marks an abrupt shift in the filmic language of *Coming Out*. Rapid editing, mobile camera, and a pop soundtrack featuring

Frank Schöbel's 1971 *Schlager* hit 'Gold in deinen Augen' portray a vivid mise-en-scène of drag performers in flamboyant costumes, men kissing, and an array of body parts on display. Shot on location in an actual gay bar, the Schoppenstube in Prenzlauer Berg, this and later scenes feature authentic figures from the East German queer scene including most notably the well-known trans personality and founder of Berlin's Gründerzeit Museum, Charlotte von Mahlsdorf. The documentary quality of these sequences is crucial for the political enterprise of *Coming Out*, to make visible the reality of LGBTQ life which had previously remained hidden and taboo in the GDR.

Within the context of the film's narrative, this reality at first appears frightening to Phillipp, since it seems to entail the renunciation of social norms in favour of precarious intimacies. However, the central sequence of the film, in which Phillipp moves out of bed with Tanja and into bed with Matthias, unsettles the alignment of hetero/homo with stable/precarious forms of intimacy, ultimately placing into question received conceptions of intimacy and relationality altogether. At the start of this sequence, Phillipp suggests going out, expressing his dissatisfaction with the domestic routine he and Tanja have established, but she rejects his suggestion since she is tired. We see Phillipp in bed, reading aloud to the dozing Tanja, but soon he arises from bed, turns out the lights, and eventually leaves the apartment, following Matthias's earlier invitation to attend his birthday party taking place that evening. At the gay bar where Matthias and Phillipp first met, a large table has been set up, around which Matthias's entire family sits, celebrating with coffee and cake; the presence of his parents demonstrates that, in contrast to Phillipp, Matthias—whom we first encountered in the film's prologue having attempted suicide—has now successfully navigated the process of coming out and is able to live openly and be accepted by his social circle as a gay man.

A cut from the bar takes us to the interior space of Phillipp's apartment, where he and Matthias touch and kiss. Hesitantly, Phillipp asks Matthias, 'Don't you want a family? To have kids some day?' While Phillipp continues to express reticence about breaking from heteronormative expectations regarding family and reproduction, Matthias demurs, acknowledging that he doesn't want any of that, since he also knows it isn't in the cards for him. Instead, Matthias begins reciting his grandmother's erotic poetry, a recitation which demonstrates intergenerational affinities, placing Matthias within an alternative family genealogy of flouting normative expectations regarding sexuality, while also humorously breaking the ice with Phillipp.

The two men begin to undress, and in extended takes, we view them naked, intertwined in bed, tenderly embracing, caressing, and kissing one

13. Naturalizing queer eroticism: The sex scene between Phillipp (Matthias Freihof) and Matthias (Dirk Kummer) in Heiner Carow's *Coming Out* (1989).

another (see Illustration 13). The open eroticism of this sex scene contrasts sharply with the depiction of Phillipp's intimacy with Tanja—Tanja is always clothed, Tanja and Phillipp's kisses are forced, and we never see the couple embracing in bed—and this contrast serves to naturalize the depiction of gay sex in *Coming Out*. As Dennis puts it, 'This is the first real love scene of the film; those between Phillipp and Tanja show little or no actual intimacy. [...] The message leaves little doubt as to its significance: socialist morality does not require, and should not entail, the valourization of heterosexual reproduction.'[40] While this sequence is indeed pivotal to the film's didactic goal of inculcating acceptance of LGBTQ people in the GDR, its strategy of doing so by naturalizing queer eroticism differs substantially from that of West German films of the period that pursued a similar agenda of acceptance via slapstick comedy, encapsulated by the bed scene in *Der bewegte Mann*. If the latter film, as Treiblmayr observed, was remarkable for its violation of the taboo on gay male sexual expression in mainstream western cinema of the 1990s, *Coming Out* presents a much more frank depiction of gay sex, and one that is even more notable given the dearth of visual representations of queer sexuality of any kind in prior mainstream East German culture.

Still, as a film that makes an explicit didactic address to a presumptively heterosexual audience inured to the open homophobia of the GDR, *Coming*

40 Dennis, 'Coming Out into Socialism.'

Out continues to rely on the convention of the love triangle when exploring the barriers to coming out experienced by Phillipp. Indeed, his encounter with Matthias, his first time having sex with a man, is redirected when Phillipp returns to Tanja after learning from a school colleague that she may be pregnant. Again like *Der bewegte Mann*, *Coming Out* engages conventional genre expectations familiar from the relationship film to connect intimacy between men with the crisis of heterosexuality and the failure of the family.

However, by developing an intersectional critique of real-existing socialism's heteronormativity, *Coming Out* ultimately makes clear that the crisis of the heteropatriarchal family comes from within patriarchy rather than from the 'threat' of queerness.[41] Phillipp briefly returns to Tanja, promising that he won't abandon her while she is pregnant. We see him washing the dishes in her kitchen, emphasizing Phillipp's cognizance of the double burden that accrues to women in the GDR, a topic that Phillipp's mother also discusses with him on several occasions throughout the film. We first see his mother, a writer who labours at a typewriter over which hangs a large poster of Bertolt Brecht, asleep at her desk, and when he awakens her, she exhorts him to help her out with the housework. Here, Phillipp vocally recognizes that his mother has been unfairly burdened with reproductive labour, since his father does not participate in caring for the children or the household. Phillipp's critical awareness of women's second shift clearly drives his reluctance to split up with Tanja. Nonetheless, their relationship, already in turmoil, reaches its climactic breaking point when the love triangle is finally exposed.

At a public concert, Phillipp and Matthias find one another during intermission, and Tanja witnesses their intimate embrace. When Phillipp introduces her to Matthias as his wife, Matthias finally grasps the reason for Phillipp's distance, just as Tanja understands the truth of Phillipp's betrayal. Subsequently, Phillipp loses both lovers. He never reunites with Tanja, who disappears from the narrative altogether, and the fact that we never learn the outcome of her potential pregnancy underscores the failure of the family in *Coming Out*. Although he searches for Matthias in hopes of reuniting with him, when Phillipp ultimately finds him, Matthias has a new boyfriend, Phillipp's student Lutz.

In line with its broader social critique, *Coming Out* offers neither a resolution to Phillipp's coming-out process nor a happy ending to the love triangle that drives the narrative, instead reiterating the contradiction

41 For an extended discussion of the way the political critique of *Coming Out* engages with East German feminism, see Sieg, 'Homosexualität und Dissidenz.'

between individual desire and managed collectivity figured by Phillipp's story. However, its critical portrayal of the social contradictions that prevent Phillipp's realization of individual happiness within the confines of a normative relationship underpin both the film's focus on interlocking forms of oppression and the way it opens onto alternative forms of relationality.

In order to demonstrate the linkages among struggles to end class-, sex-, and race-based oppression, linkages that the film posits as integral to the political ideals of socialism, *Coming Out* correlates the Nazi persecution of both Communists and gays with the anti-Black racism and homophobic violence perpetrated by neo-Nazis in the GDR. Crucial to the development of this intersectional critique is another relationship: When Phillipp first visits the gay bar, he encounters not only Matthias, but also the older man Walter (Werner Dissel), who welcomes and encourages him. Phillipp drinks to excess, and Walter and Matthias together escort him home and make sure he is safely in bed. If Matthias, whom we first encounter dressed in a Pierrot costume and wearing a full face of make-up, is associated with the contemporary gay subculture that flourishes in alternative social spaces like the bar, Walter facilitates a historical perspective on queer sociability and relationality. As we have scene, Phillipp embarks on a conflicted relationship with Matthias, but the film does not end by resolving this conflict and uniting the couple; instead, it is intergenerational solidarity with Walter that ultimately plays a pivotal role in Phillipp's coming out.

In the film's penultimate scene, Walter tells the younger man about his experience as a soldier in the second World War, when he and his male lover were exposed by the Nazis, forced to wear the pink triangle, and deported to Sachsenhausen, where his lover was murdered. Articulating in a nutshell the political critique of *Coming Out*, Walter tells Phillipp, 'We worked like crazy. We stopped mankind's exploitation by mankind, now it does not matter if the person you work with is a Jew, or whatever. Except the gays, we forgot them somehow.' However, while Walter's statement highlights the inconsistency of a socialist ideology that has ostensibly succeeded in the fight against fascism while continuing to perpetuate homophobia, the film has already given lie to this account of socialism's triumph against exploitation by foregrounding the prevalence of neo-fascism in the GDR in ways that complicate identity categories, particularly for Phillipp.

In an early sequence, Phillipp is returning home from the opera with his students when they witness a group of skinheads attacking a Black man on the train (actor and director Pierre Sanoussi-Bliss in his first film role). Phillipp intervenes, getting a black eye and a bloody nose in the process. As he throws the skinheads off the train, the camera dwells on the station

sign, 'Marx-Engels-Platz', emphasizing the contradiction between socialism's emancipatory claims and the reality of everyday racism in the GDR. Later, Phillipp witnesses another attack by neo-Nazis, this one directed against a queer white person in the subway passage at Alexanderplatz, but this time he runs away rather than intervening. These parallel sequences establish a correlation between racist and homophobic violence; at the same time, the disparity between Phillipp's active response to racism and his flight from homophobia suggests, in Bradley Boovy's words 'the ways in which bodies of colour have long been made to do labour in the creation of white Western subjects',[42] including the formation of gay male subjectivity. As Boovy's work demonstrates, same-sex attraction has historically been racialized as white in the German context, a point that is made visible and also complicated to some degree in *Coming Out*.

Phillipp initially runs from the violent scene in the subway passage, identifying with rather than defending the victim, and therefore seeking to escape the danger attached to public displays of queer eroticism and intimacy. However, soon thereafter, he sets out for the well-known gay cruising area in the Volkspark Friedrichshain, which the film depicts in a detailed scene that demonstrates the impersonal and ambient forms of intimacy pursued by men who meet in the dark spaces of the park and retreat to the pissoir or the bushes to have sex. Here, Phillipp rejects one man and then accepts a sexual encounter with another man. One of the few commentators on the film to explicitly discuss its representation of cruising, Dennis writes that 'The gloomy park and dimly lit faces cast a colder, anonymous, and impersonal shadow on the subculture. Although the man he picks up in the park looks like Matthias, the sex they have is casual and emotionally unfulfilling'.[43] To be sure, the cool lighting scheme and the medium and long shots in this sequence underscore anonymity in ways that contrast strongly with the warm colours of the gay bar and the close-ups deployed in the film's earlier sex scenes. However, it is this cruising sequence that initiates Phillipp into a form of erotic encounter and queer relationality that differs substantially from the directed and reciprocal relationships he pursues with both Tanja and Matthias, and which ultimately signals an opening toward a form of communal alterity beyond the boundaries of identitarian community. As Dennis points out, 'The last scene in the bar, which features Phillipp's confrontation with Walter, styles the flamboyant cheerfulness of the subculture as a farcical

42 Boovy, 'Belonging in Black and White', 437.
43 Dennis, 'Coming Out into Socialism.'

performance.[44] When Phillipp first returns to the bar, he drunkenly flails around in a physical presentation that enacts his failure or refusal to accede to the norms even of this subculture. When the host threatens to throw him out, however, Walter joins Phillipp in drinking to excess, ordering an entire tray of brandies, which he proceeds to down one by one as he tells the story of his persecution by the Nazis. Excessive drinking—a common trope of refusal in DEFA films, as we have seen in the case of *Solo Sunny*—here figures a form of sociability in defiance of the twin alternatives available to Phillipp, participation in the subculture (implying resignation from the broader quest for collective solidarity within socialism) and homonormative coupledom. This defiant sociability instead positions the intergenerational 'odd couple' Walter and Phillipp as 'affect aliens', who, in Sara Ahmed's terms, refuse the promise of happiness as a coercive form of politics that constructs a normative horizon of expectation predicated on accruing the right elements (marriage, family, career).

Indeed, the final sequence of *Coming Out* notably depicts Phillipp defying this normative horizon once more, this time in the context of his classroom, where he is subjected to an unannounced observation by the school administration after he is outed at work. Refusing to teach his class in the face of this surveillance, Phillipp turns away and looks out the window, as the camera follows his gaze across the littered schoolyard and the audiotrack unspools only discomfiting silence. Increasingly perturbed by Phillipp's antisocial and non-productive behavior, the school director shouts his name, 'Kollege Klarmann!', and Phillipp, looking directly into the camera, replies only, 'Ja'. The blurred affects represented in and triggered by this scene, which combines refusal with affirmation, insecurity with avowal, suggest an opening onto new imaginaries, forms of communal alterity not captured by the available models of collectivity represented in the film. The irresolution suggested here is underscored in the film's final scene, which comes full circle by showing Phillipp cycling once more through the traffic of East Berlin, in a reprisal of the opening shots of *Coming Out*. The circularity and ambiguity of this ending reiterate the central dilemma posed by the film, making visible once more the precariousness that ensues from the tension between collectivity and individuality. Here Phillipp's mobility is left open to interpretation: Is he caught within a circuit defined by homophobia, one that cannot be broken without social change, or does his movement suggest a new measure of self-determination in forging a path toward individual happiness? In hindsight, the ending of *Coming Out*

44 Dennis, 'Coming Out into Socialism.'

appears perhaps even more radically open than it did in 1989, given that the framing of this irresolution no longer obtained just months after the film's premiere.

Disorganizing Genre in *Sehnsucht*

Offering a close observation of rural life in the former East Germany fifteen years after unification, *Sehnsucht* tells the story of a love triangle that develops when locksmith and volunteer firefighter Markus (Andreas Müller) leaves his wife and childhood sweetheart, homemaker Ella (Ilka Welz), for the weekend to attend a fire brigade training in another village, where he begins an affair with the waitress Rose (Anett Dornbusch). Set in the present day, the village and the characters in *Sehnsucht* are caught between a quickly receding past and an uncertain future; the film depicts the nascent impact of intensifying neoliberalization on ordinary life and intimate relationships in a context where traditional culture is disintegrating, creating an increased sense of disorientation. This disorientation is figured both by the film's form—which escalates the viewer's discomfort through a combination of smash cuts that detract from our comprehension of events taking place on screen and long takes portraying awkward or uncomfortable behaviour—and by its approach to genre. *Sehnsucht* draws on traditions of German narrative, including the fairy tale and the *Heimatfilm*, but its protagonists also dance to Europop hits, creating a mash-up of old and new, traditional and contemporary culture befitting of the disorienting times it depicts. The film's epilogue, which takes place at a temporal remove from the diegetic narrative, offers both a metacinematic reflection on storytelling, focusing on the figure of the female narrator, and an explicit invitation to attend to the operations of genre, as we witness teenagers on a playground discussing whether they find the events narrated by the film tragic, comic, or romantic.

Although the crisis of heterosexuality depicted by *Sehnsucht* does not emerge in tandem with homosociality or queerness, its narrative proceeds along similar lines to the other films discussed in this chapter, portraying the unmooring of characters from traditional norms of gender and sexuality and the precariousness that results, especially for the male protagonist Markus. As its title suggests, *Sehnsucht* is a film that takes affect as its central theme: Markus, Ella, and Rose struggle to reconcile traditional village life with contemporary reality, and they all seek and fail to attach their longing to an appropriate object, a failure that is not resolved by the film's open ending. While *Sehnsucht* both invokes and offers metacommentary on the

relationship comedy, its aesthetic vocabulary resonates strongly with the cinematic legacy of DEFA.

As director Grisebach has acknowledged, 'that very unique mixture of realism and fairy-tale world, which was quite believable' captured her imagination as a child in West Berlin, where she regularly saw DEFA films on television; while she cites their influence on her own filmmaking as rather indirect, Grisebach's description of their approach helps to capture the resonance the legacy of East German cinema finds in *Sehnsucht*: 'What continually impresses me about DEFA films is their cognizance of diverse milieus and figures. It has a lot to do with establishing proximity, with taking their subjects seriously, as well as with trusting the substance of "reality." Therein lies for me a kind of appeal, a lead to follow'.[45] Indeed, *Sehnsucht* follows this lead both thematically and formally, through its focus on ordinary lives and average settings and its commitment to realism. As Leila Mukhida succinctly describes it, 'The result is a portrait of the kind of local, former East German working-class community that is largely absent from the landscape of contemporary German film.'[46] While it is indubitably a fiction film, in both style and substance *Sehnsucht* stands at the intersection of documentary and feature filmmaking: it began as a video documentation about the lives of thirty-something Germans, for which Grisebach conducted over 200 interviews in Berlin and Brandenburg during a fellowship from the DEFA Foundation to investigate the life and people of the area. Deriving from this original documentation, *Sehnsucht* was shot on 16mm film and features lay actors whom Grisebach approached at shopping malls and fire brigade picnics, including actual inhabitants of Zühlen, the tiny village that provides the film's setting. These authentic features of its form, along with its observational style of cinematography (by Bernhard Keller)—often using a handheld camera, set up either very close or quite far from the characters, and regularly employing long takes—as well as its foregrounding of ambient sound, lend the film an ethnographic quality.

Like *Coming Out*, *Sehnsucht* archives a form of life that is disappearing due to modernization and the undoing of collectivity, an aspect of the film that also overlaps with its resignification of the *Heimatfilm* genre. While it shifts focus onto intimate relationships in the rural countryside (where the effects of globalization and neoliberalization following unification are less overt than in Berlin), *Sehnsucht* shares with *Coming Out* a critical interrogation of the heteropatriarchal family and masculinity, as

45 Valeska Grisebach, 'Der Wirklichkeit vertrauen', qtd. in Schenk, 'Aus der Mitte des Lebens'.
46 Mukhida, 'Violence in the Age of Digital Reproducibility', 173-174.

well as an exploration of changed forms of intimacy in a storyline where traditional and flexible family structures and gender and sexual norms quite literally collide. Grisebach's film also eschews closure in ways that place into question both established filmic conventions and received forms of relationality.

Sehnsucht begins, in medias res, with the depiction of an unsettling incursion into the village landscape, the car crash of an urban couple who had been travelling at high speed along the rural road. The very first shot presents an extreme close-up of Markus that gives us no information about what is happening except what we can read on his impassive face; it is only when the camera cuts away to a medium shot that we discern this to be the scene of a crash and see that Markus is tending to an injured body. The digressive presentation of the crash via a series of indeterminate shots, which the viewer must piece together to make sense of, alerts us already at the outset to the formal demands the film places on viewers, while also approximating on an affective level the disconcerting quality of this violent incident for the village's inhabitants. A siren sounds, and we see two long shots of children biking and a group of people walking across a field, presumably toward the scene of the accident. Subsequently, three discrete shots present different angles on a car that has smashed up against a large tree. Markus's monosyllabic answers to a police officer who interviews him offer scant information about what has transpired. However, in a scene that will later be mirrored by the epilogue, we hear a group of first responders speculating on the cause of the accident and learn that the couple, who were not wearing seatbelts, likely drove into the tree intentionally, in an apparent suicide pact.

Mukhida argues that *Sehnsucht* 'seeks to heighten viewers' sensitivity toward violent acts in moving images'[47] through the use of an observational camera and an 'unromantic aesthetic' that eschews both stylization and graphic depictions while also foreclosing upon both a voyeuristic pleasure in looking and the possibility of identification with the victims of the violent events it represents. Likewise, Marco Abel argues that Grisebach's 'aesthetic mode of encounter with German reality [...] simultaneously invokes the register of representational realism and its attendant truth-claims, and affectively intensifies this register to such a degree that our perception of the reality (and truth) it seemingly represents is put at stake'.[48] The aim of this aesthetic mode is, in Grisebach's own words, 'a sharpening of our

47 Mukhida, 'Violence in the Age of Digital Reproducibility', 173.
48 Abel, *The Counter-Cinema of the Berlin School*, 234.

regard' for the everyday.[49] As both Mukhida and Abel suggest, Grisebach's formal intervention takes on a political and ethical dimension insofar as it places dominant forms of cinematic representation into question and sensitizes viewers to reality, in particular forms of violence that permeate ordinary life at present. With its focus on self-inflicted violence (as depicted in the suicide attempts that bookend the film) as well as on subtle forms of intimate violence, as in the bed scene discussed below, *Sehnsucht* emphasizes the violent incursions posed by neoliberalization, even if this process of socioeconomic transformation is portrayed digressively rather than head on. Importantly, violence in *Sehnsucht* is always yoked to intimate relationships, and the use of observational cinematography and a dispassionate aesthetic sharpen our regard for the latter as well as the former.

As the first person to arrive on the scene of the car crash, Markus is especially troubled by the interconnection of violence and intimacy figured by the double suicide pact, which presents itself as the force behind his subsequent aberrant behaviour. Markus tells his wife Ella that he feels as though he had played the role of fate, since he inadvertently derailed the couple's plans to die together by saving the man's life. Ella replies with her own interpretation of the event: 'Although it's really horrible, it's also terribly romantic', and her mention of Romeo and Juliet both frames and foreshadows her own tragic love story to follow. As they speak, Markus and Ella sit at the kitchen table in their modest house, whose anachronistic interior spaces form the staging ground for their intimacy. 'I would do anything for you', Markus says, before a cut shows the couple in bed, sleeping in a tight embrace, as the dawn light filters in through the windows. This image of Markus and Ella as representatives of white, working-class, heterosexual intimacy—the most conventional sort of normative relationship—seems to be affirmed by the subsequent sequence that depicts a traditional family dinner, where three generations sit around the kitchen table telling funny stories, and Markus and Ella's affectionate relationship with their nephew suggests their desire for children of their own. However, *Sehnsucht* goes on to depict not the consolidation but rather the crumbling of this normative horizon, tracing the failure of the prospective family Markus and Ella never form.

Following the family dinner, Ella plays 'Eisbär' on the electric piano, while Markus, wearing a toy tiara, looks on. A classic of the *Neue Deutsche Welle* first released by the Swiss band Grauzone in 1980, 'Eisbär' features a short lyric, repeated again and again: 'Ich möchte ein Eisbär sein/ im kalten Polar/ Dann müsste ich nicht mehr schrein/ Alles wär so klar' (I

49 Qtd. in Abel, *The Counter-Cinema of the Berlin School*, 236.

want to be a polar bear/ In the cold Arctic air/ Then I wouldn't have to cry/ Everything would be so clear). The song's melancholy lyrics are a harbinger of the film's subsequent events, but 'Eisbär' also marks the incursion of global pop culture into the traditional village life of eastern Germany. Like the other pop songs that feature prominently in the film, the inclusion of 'Eisbär' ironically highlights the old-fashioned lifestyle of Zühlen's inhabitants while also foreshadowing the untenability of their mode of life. At the same time, 'Eisbär' figures the affective horizon of *Sehnsucht*—the unsettled and blurred feelings that cause the characters to experience the eponymous 'longing' of the film's title—an inchoate desire for clarity and simplicity of emotion in the face of changing norms and expectations.

In depicting the longing unleashed by the clash of old and new, *Sehnsucht* draws on and resignifies the unique German genre of the *Heimatfilm*, one of the key sites for addressing this clash within the context of German culture.[50] Conventional *Heimatfilme* from the heyday of the genre in the 1930s-1950s 'depict a world in which traditional values prevail: love triumphs over social and economic barriers, and the story is usually set in an idyllic German countryside, highlighting maypoles and other folkloric traditions'.[51] As Johannes von Moltke has argued, the genre's ongoing omnipresence in German audiovisual culture can be attributed to its ability to provide 'very flexible imaginary solutions' to ongoing social problems, especially regarding 'the transformations of space brought about by processes of modernisation'.[52] To be sure, *Sehnsucht* bears key traits of the genre's attention to these transformations, including 'often phantasmagoric constructions of place, [a] manifest obsession with questions of displacement and mobility, and [...] 'distanciated relations' that structure the local'.[53] It might even be argued that its archiving of a swiftly disappearing time and place manifests a kind of nostalgia that is highly characteristic of the *Heimatfilm*. On the other hand, however, the film's depiction of the precarity of intimacy in the present—the manifest inability of love to triumph over social and economic barriers, the enervation of folkloric traditions in the face of global pop culture's hegemony, and the affective force of *longing* that does not stick to proper objects—in tandem with its open ending—jumble the recognizable markers of the *Heimatfilm* in *Sehnsucht.*

50 On *Sehnsucht*'s resignification of the *Heimatfilm*, see also Wheatley, 'Not Politics but People'.

51 Elsaesser and Wedel, *The BFI Companion to German Cinema*, 133.

52 von Moltke, 'Evergreens: The Heimat Genre', 23.

53 von Moltke, 'Evergreens: The Heimat Genre', 25.

This disorganized engagement of genre tropes is especially evident in the film's perhaps most noteworthy sequence, which takes place when Markus, away at the fire brigade training course, gets drunk at an evening banquet. The documentary realism of this sequence, which was shot in a local pub and records speeches by the fire chiefs and snippets of conversations among the volunteers over food and drinks, depicts the culture of village life, with its emphasis on community and the preservation of local traditions like the formal exchange of placards and banners to mark the occasion of the group course. However, this emphasis is suddenly interrupted by an extended long take of the drunken Markus dancing by himself to the 2002 Robbie Williams pop song 'Feel', whose lyrics bespeak the emotions Markus is incapable of expressing out loud and provide a possible explanation for his subsequent actions:

I just wanna feel
Real love feel the home that I live in
'Cause I got too much life
Running through my veins
Going to waste
I don't wanna die
But I ain't keen on living either
Before I fall in love
I'm preparing to leave her

The camera holds tight on Markus dancing for over two minutes, a duration that compels us to observe closely the way he performs masculinity. With his traditional uniform, working-class background, local roots in village life, and embodiment of the 'strong silent type', Markus is in many ways the polar opposite of the transnational businessman whom Connell describes as the emblem of hegemonic masculinity in the neoliberal age, except perhaps in the sense that 'transnational business masculinity differs from traditional bourgeois masculinity by its increasingly libertarian sexuality'.[54] That is, the neoliberal flexibilization of gender and sexuality registers in Markus not (yet) via practices of self-fashioning but rather as a diffuse longing suggested by the lyrics of 'Feel' and manifested in his dancing. This registering of flexibilization escalates when the dance sequence is abruptly interrupted by a smash cut to a bedroom where we see a disoriented Markus lying alone in bed. When he stumbles into the kitchen and finds Rose there, Markus

54 Connell, 'Masculinities and Globalization', 16.

doesn't remember what happened the night before, but Rose's awkward, shy smiles make it clear that they have slept together.

In keeping with the normalization of flexible sexuality that is a hallmark of the present (but in contrast to the screwball comedy or domestic melodrama), *Sehnsucht* does not present Rose as the opposite number to Ella, nor does it present Markus's affair as especially illicit. Rose hails from precisely the same small-town rural milieu as Ella, and the resemblance of the two characters disorganizes conventional depictions of women on screen (i.e. typical dichotomies of wife/temptress or virgin/whore) in ways that contribute to the film's critical engagement with gender roles and norms. After they spend the night together, Rose brings Markus to a cookout, where she introduces him to her extended family. Here and elsewhere, the observational cinematography and dispassionate formal language of *Sehnsucht* withhold judgment. While this narrative scenario might lead us to anticipate that Markus will end up with the proper partner, or that the love triangle will facilitate the overt airing of the social contradictions underpinning his inchoate longing, in fact the film's irresolute language thwarts such genre expectations.

The representation of intimacy in *Sehnsucht* is condensed in a pivotal scene where Markus and Ella go to bed together. Like the other bed sequences discussed in this chapter, this one also serves as a locus for the redefinition of gender and sexual roles in the precarious present. The marital bed in this scene becomes the site not of the consummation of heteronormative relationality but rather of the couple's unbinding from the intimate optimism that has driven their bond until now. The scene takes place after Markus has, unbeknownst to Ella, already begun his affair with Rose. Sitting at the kitchen table drinking schnapps, Ella tells him, 'I'm always thinking about you. About us. When I look at you, I actually lose my breath. I imagine things that we don't usually do. That we look at each other while we are touching. That we talk to each other while we are having sex. I desire you so much.' Ella's direct expression of desire and open discussion of sexual practices departs from normative expectations of rural women as passive, figured by the old-fashioned milieu of the village kitchen where she sits. (This milieu is also captured in several documentary-like sequences throughout the film that attest to the persistence of traditional gender norms and values in Zühlen, recorded in the stories of women's romantic partnerships, such as one woman's tale of the home renovation projects her husband surprised her with each time she returned home from giving birth to one of their children). In the face of Ella's confession of desire, Markus once again finds himself at a loss for words, and he can only respond by repeating his wife's name:

'Ella…' They kiss and embrace, and again Ella vocally expresses her desire: 'Sleep with me.' As Michael D. Richardson describes it, 'The ensuing scene is long and uncomfortable: it depicts not two lovers familiar with each other's bodies and physically in sync, but rather a pair of strangers: Ella, his wife, desperately reaching out for Markus, hungrily kissing and groping him as if it were their last night together, and Markus, constantly turning his face away from hers and trying to restrain her and keep their physical contact to a minimum.'[55] Again and again, Markus appears to push Ella away, as if denying her agency, eventually pinning her down as she claws at his head in an expression of intimacy that is ambiguously depicted as aggressive, even violent (see Illustration 14).

This scene serves as a key paradigm for Richardson's diagnosis of the 'bad sex' that permeates Berlin School films: 'Bad sex is but the bodily manifestation of the social alienation that plagues the characters that populate Berlin School cinema.'[56] Richardson is correct in arguing that sex in these films often registers the *longing* for closeness and connection that their protagonists seek and fail to find; the explicit and often awkward depiction of sex indexes the precarity of intimacy in an era characterized by, as he puts it, the desire for 'a renewed community with others, however impossible that may be'.[57] Although the label 'bad sex' implies a somewhat misleading binary (what might cinematic representations of 'good sex' look like?), the point remains that *Sehnsucht* and other Berlin School films are noteworthy for their insistence on portraying nonidealized forms of intimacy as an integral component of ordinary life.

In the case of *Sehnsucht,* the pivotal bed scene registers how their escalating divergence from normative modes of relationality and sexual partnership places Markus and Ella at odds with one another, in ways that fuel Markus's aggression (aggression that he ultimately turns against himself). The general loosening of intimate attachments charted by the film is underscored by two violent scenes with which the film's main narrative culminates. In the first of these, Markus returns to Rose to tell her that he can't see her anymore, but as they share one final night together in his hotel room, Rose accidentally falls from the hotel balcony several stories down to the ground below, in an utterly unexpected calamity that shocks and disorients Markus and the viewer alike. As at the beginning of the film, Markus finds himself once more standing over an injured

55 Richardson, 'Bad Sex', 46.
56 Richardson, 'Bad Sex', 44.
57 Richardson, 'Bad Sex', 49.

14. Unbinding from intimate optimism in the marital bed: The ambiguous representation of sex between Ella (Ilka Welz) and Markus (Andreas Müller) in Valeska Grisebach's *Sehnsucht* (*Longing*, 2006).

body while waiting for an ambulance to arrive; once more he speaks with a police officer in the aftermath of an accident, this time learning that Rose has not authorized the disclosure of her location in hospital because she doesn't want to see Markus, information that somehow implicates him in her injury. As in the film's opening sequence, here again the elliptical editing style of *Sehnsucht* does not offer us enough information to comprehend Rose's accident, and we must piece together a sense of what has happened through the shards of aural and visual information conveyed by these fragmented scenes. The disorienting formal construction of this sequence emphasizes the violent rupture of Markus's intimate bond with Rose.

Markus's subsequent suicide attempt is similarly conveyed in a manner both shocking and oblique. We see him in his garage building a hutch for his nephew's pet rabbit. Markus hugs and strokes the rabbit, placing it in the cage and offering it grass to munch before loading a shotgun and aiming it at his heart. As we see the rabbit eating, we suddenly hear a gunshot and a quick cut reveals Markus's body falling from the stool he had been sitting on. We only catch the briefest glimpse of him before he disappears from the frame, as the camera holds steady on the empty garage. Unexpected and unexplained, Markus's suicide is open to interpretation as a heartbroken act of desperation, a courageous declaration of culpability, a redirection of the violence of the present toward the self, and/or a symbolic gesture registering the effects on Markus of the crisis of heterosexuality and changing norms of masculinity.

Underscoring the ambiguity of this penultimate scene, *Sehnsucht* concludes with an epilogue that explicitly gestures to the multivalent interpretations viewers might bring to its narrative. After Markus is evacuated by helicopter (bringing us back to the opening scene in which the man whom Markus had saved was also loaded into a helicopter), we see a series of static shots depicting trees, buildings, and an empty soccer field. While they are positioned as establishing shots—setting the scene for the action to follow—these images are non-specific, even desolate, serving to unsettle rather than orient us in time and space. The blowing of the wind and the briefly audible call of a cuckoo suggest a moment of transformation, hinting at the fact that Markus will survive.

This sequence provides a segue to the epilogue, which begins with a long shot of a group of adolescents sitting on top of a jungle gym. The camera moves in closer to reveal a girl telling a story, which relates the narrative of the film we have just seen, but in broad strokes that underscore its affinity with the genre of the relationship film. As the girl tells it, a man and a woman are in love, but one day the man, a firefighter, goes off to another town to put out a fire. There, he meets another woman and gets together with her. Although they are happy, he still has feelings for his wife, so he leaves his girlfriend. However, his wife finds out about her husband's affair, and the man is so upset that he shoots himself in the heart (he survives the suicide attempt). At this point, the story breaks off, and the kids respond with different interpretations of the husband's violent act: 'courageous'; 'dumb'; 'romantic'.

A car drives by loudly honking its horn, and a brief cutaway calls our attention to an eye-catching green and yellow fence in the background of the shot, a clue that—although we have never seen the playground in the course of the film—locates the epilogue in the same village where the film's main narrative is set. The girl then concludes the story, 'And now he is back together with one of the women, and guess which one it is', prompting a fierce interchange of guesses among her listeners. One boy proclaims, 'It's fate.' 'Do you even know what fate is?', asks the girl, and he replies, 'Fate is that which one cannot change.' Like the many clichés that pepper the dialogue of the main narrative, this one also fails to capture adequately the events of the story or to clue us into its outcome, an irresolution subsequently affirmed by the film's final shot, which shows the kids walking away from the camera through the quiet streets of the town. As a stand-in for director Grisebach, the girl in the epilogue invites her diegetic audience of friends (and by extension the audience of *Sehnsucht*), to participate in a process of interpretation, while also insisting on the limitations of narrative to capture the exigencies of reality.

Widely recognized as a key trait of Berlin School films, open endings feature prominently in what Brad Prager calls the 'aesthetics of irresolution' they develop via a refusal of logical explanations and a formal language (abrupt cuts, static long takes, an aversion to reverse shots) that requires viewers to fill in the many narrative gaps left by the images on screen. As Prager points out, these unresolved endings often pertain to the fate of couples whose relationships face an uncertain future, yoking formal irresolution to stories about failed intimacy: 'Such instances suggest the Berlin School's conviction that conventional cinema, where it provides sense-making endings and clings to the concept of closure, sells reality short.'[58] Exemplary of this tendency, the playful epilogue of *Sehnsucht* not only denies a clear answer about the outcome of the tragic love triangle but also metacinematically reflects on the enterprise of storytelling and the generic clichés upon which it so often depends, while also winkingly acknowledging the filmmaker's choice to leave the story unresolved. This epilogue demonstrates again how an interrogation of genre forms the ground for a thematic focus on the precarity of intimacy in recent German cinema. Contributing to the aesthetics of irresolution in *Sehnsucht*, the epilogue also condenses the film's broader attention to the politics and conventions of narrative and genre at present, underscoring a tension the film maps between the codes and expectations of dominant global cinema and the possibilities offered by local forms of expression.

Sehnsucht's remixing of characteristics familiar from German genres such as the *Beziehungskomödie* and the *Heimatfilm* together with formal and thematic elements that draw on the legacy of DEFA results in a cinematic language that figures and makes palpable the disorientation that is the focus of its narrative. Like the other films discussed in this chapter, *Sehnsucht* draws on local genres to trace characters' 'becoming more adjusted to the way capitalism works' (per Dörrie's description of *Männer*) through a specific focus on the co-existence of traditional and flexible gender roles and the concomitant precaritization of intimacy in the neoliberal age. Reading *Sehnsucht* together with *Männer*, *Der bewegte Mann*, and *Coming Out* helps to bring into focus how these stylistically divergent films all engage with and often trouble genre while narrating a crisis of heterosexuality that is notably never resolved. While my analysis highlights formal and thematic continuities across this diverse canon of films in order to locate the failing family as a key site for the cinematic engagement with neoliberalism, I do not mean to paper over the substantial differences that obtain among them

58 Prager, 'Endings', 112.

due to the varying production cultures, modes of reception, and aesthetic and political impulses they exhibit.

These differences come into focus through a consideration of the Berlin School (a topic I turn to in more detail in Chapter 6) and the way that *Sehnsucht* in particular was instrumentalized within debates about its legitimacy as a representative form of German cinema after the demise of the national-cultural film project. An early example of 'second-generation' Berlin School cinema, *Sehnsucht* debuted in competition at the Berlin Film Festival in February 2006, shortly after the first articles appeared coining the designations *Berliner Schule* and *nouvelle vague allemande* to describe an emergent constellation of contemporary German films that shared common traits, including renewed attention to film form and aesthetics and a focus on life during the era of late capitalism and globalization.[59] Grisebach's film was widely lauded in the press but failed to capture a wide theatrical audience, not least due to limitations in distribution and advertising resulting from its production context. This, to his mind, outsized critical reception relative to its commercial potential led producer Günter Rohrbach to cite *Sehnsucht* in his polemical essay 'Das Schmollen der Autisten' (The Pouting of the Autistics; see also Chapter 2) as a key example of the wilful failure of German film critics to perform what he believes should comprise their central task: the promotion of (mainstream) German cinema.

For Rohrbach, the fact that critics embraced a low-budget film like *Sehnsucht* while negatively assessing big-budget popular hits like Tom Tykwer's *Das Parfum* (*Perfume*, 2006) or Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's *Das Leben der Anderen* (*The Lives of Others*, 2007, discussed in Chapter 2) presents proof positive of their skewed interests: 'Too frequently they have sent their readers to the wrong movies, too narcissistically they have painted an image of their own cineastic competencies, while forgetting what their central task really is: namely, to offer decision-making assistance for potential

59 See for example Gupta, 'Berliner Schule: Nouvelle Vague Allemande.' The 'first generation' of Berlin School filmmakers comprises Thomas Arslan (b. 1962), Angela Schanelec (b. 1962), and Christian Petzold (b. 1960), who studied directing together at the Deutsche Film- und Fernsehakademie Berlin (dffb), where they were taught by the political filmmakers Hartmut Bitomsky and Harun Farocki. The 'second generation' of Berlin School filmmakers designates a group of slightly younger and less closely affiliated directors whose films share certain affinities, although they did not necessarily study at the dffb, including Grisebach (b. 1968, who studied at the Filmakademie in Vienna), Ulrich Köhler (b. 1969, who studied at the Hochschule der bildenden Künste in Hamburg), and Christoph Hochhäusler (b. 1972) and Maren Ade (b. 1976), both of whom graduated from the Hochschule für Fernsehen und Film in Munich.

viewers. Instead of placing themselves in the service of the films, they have instead placed the films in the service of their own self-promotion.'[60] Rohrbach therefore designates Germany's film critics as 'autistic', which in his inflated, ableist language appears to serve as a synonym for self-absorption. Rohrbach inveighs against critics for refusing to support and legitimize what he positively assesses as 'consensus films', attacking the critics for supporting a differentiated film landscape by sending viewers to the 'wrong movies', such as *Sehnsucht*. Rohrbach's indictment of *Sehnsucht* amounts, in Abel's words, to an attack on the Berlin School as 'the wrong kind of national cinema', one that seemingly operates at cross purposes to the consensus and heritage films promoted by the film establishment.[61] As discussed in Chapter 2, Rohrbach's polemic functions as a kind of manifesto for the German cinema of neoliberalism by naturalizing market orientation as cinema's chief ontology and legitimizing force, simultaneously writing off other functions such as cultural representation or aesthetic experimentation.

The Berlin School has served as a key locus for discussions of the status of contemporary (German) cinema, not only for defenders of the mainstream like Rohrbach, but also, of course, for those who view these films as precisely the 'right' kind of national cinema, one that contests the mainstream. Because Berlin School films generally embrace a rigorous narrative and formal style and eschew recourse to principles of plot, narrative, or characterization, their advocates have generally understood these films as countercinema, 'a mode of filmmaking that questions and resists both the plotting and tempo of conventional narrative cinema and, simultaneously, the lifeworld that gave birth to it'.[62] As Marco Abel argues in his influential study *The Counter-Cinema of the Berlin School*, these films pursue an 'aesthetic of reduction' and an 'arepresentational' mode of realism that contrast sharply with the formal-aesthetic language of the cinema of consensus: 'the Berlin School films tend to force audiences to come to terms with the demand to *resee* that with which they assumed sufficient familiarity'.[63] In this way, they offer an alternative vision of German reality.

Due to their anticonventionalism and austere aesthetics, engagement with genre has generally been seen as an exception in Berlin School films. Indeed, the very explicit embrace of genre by a wide range of

60 Rohrbach, 'Das Schmollen der Autisten.'

61 See Abel, '22 January 2007.'

62 Cook et al., *Berlin School Glossary*, 1.

63 Abel, *The Counter-Cinema of the Berlin School*, 15.

affiliated filmmakers beginning around 2012 was accompanied by proclamations of the demise of the Berlin School itself, suggesting the overall incompatibility of the movement with genre cinema.[64] From another perspective, however, it is clear that concerted engagement with generic forms has been central to the development of the Berlin School since its inception. Widely hailed as contemporary Germany's 'most critically acclaimed auteur' and part of the first generation of Berlin School directors, Christian Petzold has written and directed numerous feature films all of which pair a rigorous interrogation of European art cinema with a resignification of popular genre cinema (see Chapter 6).[65] While Petzold provides perhaps the most prominent example of genre's longstanding centrality to the conception of the Berlin School, it also figures significantly in the films of Thomas Arslan (also discussed in Chapter 6) and, notably, in those of many women directors, including Maren Ade, Barbara Albert, Jessica Hausner, Sonja Heiss, and Grisebach, whose *Sehnsucht* comprises an especially significant early example of the Berlin School's approach to genre.

In contrast to the commercial films endorsed by Rohrbach and other members of the German film establishment, which engage genre as both a mode of entertainment and a stabilizing force in response to neoliberalization, *Sehnsucht* and other Berlin School films work to destabilize contemporary reality and our ways of perceiving and responding to it, through a range of techniques. These include many of the strategies discussed above, such as observational cinematography, long takes, flat or affectless acting styles, minimal dialogue, refusal of closure, and the common strategy of 'representing emotions without emotionalizing'.[66] These aesthetic techniques are a central vector of the films' ambivalent charting of the disorienting changes that permeate ordinary life in the present, but they also prove crucial to the mode of production developed by the Berlin School's practitioners, since using a minimalist style reduces production costs.

As I have argued elsewhere, the films of the Berlin School may be generatively understood as contemporary media assemblages that combine multiple transnational and national film genres and waves (to name just a few: new realisms, slow cinema, New German Cinema, and feminist cinema, as well

64 See for example Christoph Hochhäusler's proclamation that 'school is out' in his contribution to the exhibition catalog for the 2013 Museum of Modern Art exhibition 'The Berlin School: Films from the Berliner Schule.' Hochhäusler, 'On Whose Shoulders.'

65 Fisher, *Christian Petzold*, 1.

66 Leweke, 'Gehen und reden', n.p.

as popular forms and genres such as the thriller, the Western, the heritage film, and especially the *Heimatfilm*) along with multiple production and exhibition formats (analogue and digital; film, television, and streaming) in order to create a broad-based appeal to an international audience of cineastes.[67] Such a model helps to conceptualize how Berlin School films are firmly embedded within commercial, mainstream platforms while simultaneously posing a challenge to them. This hybrid quality also helps to account for both the remarkable status Berlin School films have attained in academic and journalistic contexts and for the vehemence of certain hostile reactions they have elicited, for which Rohrbach's attack on *Sehnsucht* is perhaps the most emblematic.

While critics have tended to address Berlin School films as a closed corpus, viewing them as related to one another (as the emphasis on 'generations' of directors suggests) but as generally separate from and opposed to developments in German cinema more broadly, my analysis in this chapter and the next deliberately reads Berlin School films together with films from which they are usually bracketed off. Doing so draws attention to the significant aesthetic and thematic continuities (as well as differences) that obtain across diverse modes of filmmaking, enabling a better understanding of the intertwined production and viewing contexts of various forms of audiovisual representation in the neoliberal mediascape.

Remakes, reboots, adaptations, and sequels form Global Hollywood's main mode of production today; from *Das Boot* to *Der Untergang* (*Downfall*, 2004) to the *Resident Evil* series (2002-2016), commercial filmmaking from location Germany has also built its profitability on adaptations and sequels. For directors affiliated with the Berlin School and other filmmakers pursuing resistant aesthetic and political projects, engagement with genre has similarly emerged as a key strategy in the ability of independently produced German films to create a transnational appeal to audience familiarity, allowing them to simultaneously take part in and refuse commercial modes of postcinematic representation. At the same time, genre provides a key horizon for these films to disorganize conventions of portraying desire and identity, fantasy and ordinary life in the neoliberal present, as the films discussed in Chapter 6 also attest.

67 See Baer, 'The Berlin School and Women's Cinema.'

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6. Refiguring National Cinema in Films about Labour, Money, and Debt

Abstract
This chapter brings into sharper focus the theme of precarity by analyzing films about labour, money, and debt that train a lens on precarious, racialized bodies made disposable in and by global neoliberalism: Arslan's *Dealer* (1998); Maccarone's *Unveiled* (2005); Akın's *The Edge of Heaven* (2007); and Petzold's *Jerichow* (2008). Considering how these films find a form to depict labour, money, and debt, this chapter develops indebtedness as a trope that binds together their narrative and aesthetic language. These films contribute to the reconfiguration of German national cinema by centering migrant characters, reflecting on their perspectives and experiences, and making visible their subaltern status, while also developing their representation via an explicit engagement with German film history.

Keywords: Thomas Arslan, Angelina Maccarone, Fatih Akın, Christian Petzold, race, precarity

Christian Petzold's *Jerichow* (2008) begins with a prologue that takes place at a funeral. The mother of Thomas (Benno Führmann), an unemployed veteran of the war in Afghanistan, has died, prompting his return to Jerichow, the eastern German town of the film's title, to move into and renovate his childhood home. Thomas's hopes for a fresh start in Jerichow are dashed when a pair of sinister-looking men show up at the funeral and escort him back to the house, insisting that he pay them back the money they have loaned him for a failed business attempt. Introduced in this opening sequence, debt dictates the course of Thomas's life as well as those of Ali (Hilmi Sözer), the Turkish German owner of a chain of snack bars in the exurban region of the Prignitz, and Laura (Nina Hoss), his white, ethnic German wife, whose marriage to Ali is shaped by a prenuptial contract stipulating his agreement to take over a substantial financial debt she has incurred that

Baer, H., *German Cinema in the Age of Neoliberalism*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021. DOI: 10.5117/9789463727334_CH06

previously led to a prison sentence. The love triangle narrated by *Jerichow* brings together Germany's internal others (racialized minorities, eastern Germans, women) in a circuit that is overdetermined by the mandate to service debt by performing labour in the pursuit of money, goods, or favour. Debt, and its central role in unbinding subjects from economic and intimate optimism, forms the nexus of *Jerichow*'s mapping of the historical present. As in *Jerichow*, whose characters are encumbered by debts and contracts that obligate them to act and relate in specific ways, indebtedness forms a ubiquitous trope in recent German cinema.

Rising indebtedness is closely linked to and results from the dismantling of welfare systems and public services, the privatization of social risk, the precaritization of labour, and the ensuing surge in insecurity and inequality. In the neoliberal age, debt poses a particular threat for racialized minorities, especially migrants (including those of the second and third generation), who are increasingly held responsible and accountable for their own integration into German society. The politics of migration have transformed across the period of neoliberal intensification in response to economic and social change as well as global political developments. Whereas the labour migration treaties that first recruited so-called *Gastarbeiter* (guest workers) to Germany in response to postwar shortages of working-age men guaranteed these migrants contract work, deindustrialization and the flexibilization of labour in post-Fordism have led to both exclusionary hiring practices and the relegation of workers 'with a migration background' to the unskilled labour force. Changes to once-liberal asylum laws in the aftermath of 11 September 2001 and the ongoing racist attacks on asylum seekers in Germany also resulted in the increasing precaritization of migrants' lives. At the same time, neoliberal rhetoric promoting a 'postracial' society individualizes racism as a personal prejudice, evacuating conceptions of structural racism and co-opting and depoliticizing antiracist claims on behalf of diversity. In this context, the responsibilization of migrants for their own integration inevitably leads to the labelling of those who succeed as 'good' and those who fail as 'bad', with the latter group often criminalized for their failure.

The films discussed in this chapter make structures of racial capitalism visible through their imaging of labour, money, and debt. In Thomas Arslan's *Dealer* (1998), small-time street dealer Can (Tamer Yigit) is trapped within the hierarchy of credits and debts that drive the illegal drug trade; his attempt to escape this circuit of indebtedness and parlay his labour as a dealer into a less risky line of work that will allow him to support his family with legitimate earnings culminates in his entrapment and confinement by the carceral state. In Angelina Maccarone's *Fremde Haut* (Foreign Skin,

2005; released in English as *Unveiled*), Fariba (Jasmin Tabatabai), an Iranian refugee, assumes the identity of her dead acquaintance Siamak in order to stay in Germany after she is denied temporary resident status as an asylum seeker. Living precariously—as a queer migrant woman passing as a (dead) man and largely confined to a home for asylum seekers, banned from labour and travel—Fariba/Siamak's sheer survival relies on debts incurred in the quest to procure illegal work to earn enough money to purchase a counterfeit passport. Fatih Akın's *Auf der anderen Seite* (On the Other Side, 2007; released in English as *The Edge of Heaven*) traces the interlocking stories of a series of characters whose relationships to one another are affected by symbolic debts they incur, debts that are shaped by familial, romantic, and/or political bonds, and that compel the characters to cross national and linguistic borders in the quest to repay them. In each of the films addressed in this chapter, class, gender, sexuality, and especially race and ethnicity figure prominently in the cycle of indebtedness, demonstrating the imbrication of these categories with forms of liability. Ultimately, these films reflect the way indebtedness compounds the dispossession and inequality of racialized minorities, foregrounding the uneven and variable effects of neoliberalism.

Labour, money, and debt have long posed difficult subjects for cinematic representation, a problem exacerbated by the era of immaterial labour and financialization. The four films considered here develop new formal and narrative means for depicting indebtedness by training a lens on precarious, racialized bodies made disposable in and by global neoliberalism. In their depiction of indebtedness, these films demonstrate a central operation of neoliberal governmentalities, which hold Europe's racial others culpable not only for the social and economic risk they are forced to assume by virtue of the dismantling of the welfare state, but also, more crucially and perversely, for the end of the welfare state itself. This operation is characteristic of the paradoxes of the neoliberal repertoire. On the one hand, the intertwining of discourses of privatization and entrepreneurship with a postracial rhetoric of colour-blindness culminates in a cruelly optimistic vision of multicultural individuals ostensibly empowered to succeed (or fail) unhindered by racism. On the other hand, as Fatima El-Tayeb has incisively argued, Europe's shift away from state responsibility for minimizing inequality has led to very specific consequences for racialized minorities: 'This shift meant a sharp rise in temporary employment, cuts in social programmes, unemployment benefits, and health care plans, and a new emphasis on individual responsibility and on the looming destruction of the welfare state by irresponsible and undeserving groups. [T]he latter were first identified as migrants in general and then more specifically as

the nation's Muslim community."[1] As El-Tayeb goes on to argue, the crisis caused by neoliberalization's emptying out of concepts that had been closely linked to western Europe's identity (social responsibility, shared risk, a commitment to human rights)

> was solved by a discursive scapegoating of the continent's Muslim population onto which a reactionary identity was projected that reaffirmed Western liberal ideals in crisis and at the same time justified their rejection by posing excessive liberalism, multiculturalism, and state support of minorities as having enabled reactionary, antidemocratic, misogynist, homophobic, nonwhite, non-Western Muslim groups threatening the liberal West much more than economic neoliberalism ever could.[2]

As a consequence, in El-Tayeb's formulation, European minorities ultimately 'function as the glue that holds Europe together precisely by being excluded'.[3]

By making visible the operations of this exclusionary discourse—which underpins European identity as part and parcel of a simultaneous embrace and disavowal of neoliberalism—the films discussed in this chapter all contribute to the reconfiguration of German national cinema. All four films centre migrant characters, reflect on their perspectives and experiences, and make visible their subaltern status, while also configuring the terms of their representation via an explicit engagement with German film history. On the diegetic level, they form deliberate intertextual relationships with specific films (especially the oeuvre of Rainer Werner Fassbinder), genres (including the Berlin film and the *Heimatfilm*), and traditions (particularly the New German Cinema), often disorganizing the tropes and forms associated with these. However, unlike the global blockbusters discussed in Chapter 2, which co-opt and neutralize the legacy of German cinema while affirming neoliberal agendas, the films discussed here seek to resignify this legacy for resistant aesthetic and political projects. As Gozde Naiboglu has argued, 'Turkish German Cinema has provided a sustained critique of the changing forms of work and life in Germany, as the films have expressed the need to reformulate issues of ethics, subjectivity, labour and reproduction in the passage to global capitalism'.[4] Building on her expansive analysis, I consider how this legacy of Turkish German cinema (broadly construed to

1 El-Tayeb, *European Others*, 97.
2 El-Tayeb, *European Others*, 98.
3 El-Tayeb, *European Others*, 159.
4 Naiboglu, *Post-Unification Turkish German Cinema*, 4.

encompass the cinema of migration in Germany focused on asylum seekers as well as migrants) also extends to a critique of racial capitalism. While they develop this critique in varied ways, all of the films analysed in this chapter engage the viewer in a representation of neoliberal subjectivities that envisions contemporary life as a dilemma rather than affirming it.

Crucial to this engagement, I contend, is the mode of production developed by the filmmakers whose work I consider here. As we have seen, the era of neoliberal media regimes is characterized by the concentration of film production—in Germany and across the globe—in the hands of a few media conglomerates. Downsizing of staff and streamlining of content have led to the side-lining of minorities and women, with the effect of limiting the diversity of perspectives and styles available in audiovisual media. At the same time, the strategies of experimental culture and art cinema, including defamiliarization techniques, distanciation, contemplative aesthetics, self-referentiality, and subversion, among others, have been thoroughly recuperated for the mainstream, draining these forms of their oppositional valence.

In this context, not only representational choices but also production modalities significantly underpin the way films make images of the present.[5] The films discussed in this chapter were all independently produced, drawing on a combination of funding through regional film boards, international co-production deals, private investment, distribution deals, and/or television financing. Debuts at international film festivals played a crucial role in garnering publicity and international attention for these mostly low-budget films; though they did not draw huge audiences to theatres (several of them played only in limited theatrical release), they have all enjoyed significant and widespread audience attention via television, home video, and digital platforms, especially streaming services, both domestically and abroad. Thus, these films reflect a transnational, postcinematic, and intermedial mode of production and reception, and they are firmly embedded within the same commercial, mainstream platforms whose hegemony they also challenge.

As we have seen, it has become a critical commonplace to categorize the films of the Berlin School as a new form of countercinema. Critics have viewed Berlin School films as a revitalization of the New German Cinema's revolutionary experiments with aesthetic form and collective approach to filmmaking, considering these films emblematic of what Jaimey Fisher and Brad Prager refer to as the 'collapse of the conventional' in millennial

5 See Seeßlen, 'Die Anti-Erzählmaschine.'

German cinema.[6] However, following the countercinema paradigm not only overlooks the successful production model of Berlin School films, but it can also lead to neglect of a central quality of these films, namely the way that they straddle binaries (high/low, cinema/media, art/commerce, intellectual/popular, international/national, oppositional/hegemonic) to exhibit seemingly opposed qualities simultaneously. This blurring of received categories is a central facet of the films' ability to assert themselves within the neoliberal mediascape while also critically intervening in it. As I have argued throughout this book, the central trope of disorganization helps to conceptualize the way that these films resignify cinematic legacies in the postcinematic age to map contemporary reality.

Extending the discussion of Berlin School cinema begun in Chapter 5, this chapter examines this disorganized cinematic practice by considering two key Berlin School films by 'first-generation' directors, *Dealer* and *Jerichow*, together with two films that do not fall within the parameters of the Berlin School but that arguably exhibit similar formal-aesthetic strategies, *Fremde Haut* and *Auf der anderen Seite*. My analysis specifically draws out the way all four films engage the legacies of feminist and queer cinema in their ongoing quest to make us see, feel, and think differently, even in the impasse of the present. While attention has constellated around the Berlin School's reanimation of cinema as an aesthetic and political project for the 21st century, reading these films together helps to demonstrate how this project extends beyond the boundaries of that constellation, offering a vision for refiguring German cinema in the neoliberal age.

Mobility and the Impasse in *Dealer*

Thomas Arslan's *Dealer* narrates the break-up between Can (the eponymous dealer) and his wife Jale (Idil Üner), both second-generation Turkish Germans living in Berlin-Schöneberg.[7] When Can fails to transition from the shadow economy of small-time drug dealing to more legitimate employment, Jale leaves him, taking their young daughter Meral (Lea Stefanel) with her and moving in with a friend. Can works for Hakan (Hussi Kutlucan), a mid-level

6 Fisher and Prager, eds., *The Collapse of the Conventional*.

7 Critics have often mistakenly located the setting of *Dealer* in Berlin-Kreuzberg. However, the recognizable shooting locations in Berlin-Schöneberg appear significant for Arslan's project to depict the interactions of Turkish Germans in different spaces of the city across the 'Berlin Trilogy'.

dealer who is looking for investment opportunities in lawful businesses that can operate as fronts for his illegal activities. Hoping to get off the streets, where he is constantly pursued by the police officer Erdal (Birol Ünel), who tries to turn him as an informant, Can petitions Hakan for a different assignment, and Hakan promises him a job running a bar. However, when Hakan is murdered before Can's eyes for failing to repay a debt to his Turkish creditors, Can's capital (accrued through his loyalty to Hakan), and with it his sole option for upward mobility, is lost. Hoping to win back Jale, Can briefly goes to work as a dishwasher at a restaurant owned by the uncle of his school friend Metin (Erhan Emre)—the only job he can find—but the low wages he is offered do not provide adequate compensation for the gruelling labour he is required to perform. Seeking to escape his precarious employment status once and for all, Can decides to procure a nest egg by selling off the remaining supply of drugs in his possession and keeping the full profit from the sale. Instead, he is busted by Erdal. In the final scene of *Dealer*, Jale visits Can in prison, where they discuss the likelihood that he will be deported to Turkey upon his release. The poetic ending of *Dealer* presents a series of six static shots depicting spaces we have seen throughout the film, all now empty, devoid of the characters who had previously inhabited and occupied them.

This synopsis of the film's narrative demonstrates how *Dealer* engages with familiar tropes of the cinema of migration, including genre markers of the crime film and images of the 'ghetto', along with elements of social realism, such as the focus on a protagonist who seeks and fails to transcend the petty criminal milieu, as well as the thematization of gender and labour. However, this familiar story is told via a minimalist 'aesthetic of reduction', a laconic and detached cinematic language that is characterized by slow narrative exposition, minimal editing, observational cinematography, and an affectless acting style, a formal language that links Arslan's work to other films of the Berlin School.[8] A mash-up of art cinema and genre film, social realist migrant drama and gangster movie, Arslan's disorganized filmic language in *Dealer* figures the precarity of the world he depicts; it also disrupts conventional forms of viewing in ways that open up modes of interpretation.

Arslan's mix of genre conventions and austere aesthetics proved crucial to the success of *Dealer* upon its debut in the Forum section of the Berlin Film Festival, where it won several prizes, and to its widespread critical acclaim. *Dealer* is the second instalment in Arslan's 'Berlin Trilogy', which

8 On Thomas Arslan's 'aesthetic of reduction', see Schick, 'Stillstand in Bewegung.'

also includes *Geschwister/Kardeşler* (Siblings, 1996) and *Der schöne Tag* (A Fine Day, 2001), films that all emphasize the trope of mobility as both possibility and limit for Turkish Germans.[9] In their ambiguous deployment of this trope, Arslan's films resignify the 'topics of exclusion, alienation, discrimination, and identity politics'[10] that have continued to overdetermine both depictions of migration and discussions of cinema's presumed duty to represent minority culture authentically, or what Kobena Mercer has termed the 'burden of representation'.[11] Their open, ambiguous quality allows Arslan's films to resist this burden, while also avoiding co-optation and instrumentalization within the affirmative context of an ostensibly postracial culture that expects 'the cultural product to solve the very problem that it represents'.[12] The ambiguous way in which the films of the 'Berlin Trilogy' both engage and defy the representation of Turkish Germans also helps to account for the rather divergent critical takes they have engendered.

For instance, in a series of influential essays, Deniz Göktürk has identified Arslan's films as exemplary of a 'new mode of depicting immigrants and their hybrid offspring' which departs from the essentialized images of migrants as victims that had characterized the 'cinema of duty'.[13] Göktürk emphasizes not only the ways in which the films offer more complex depictions of Turkish Germans, but also the sense in which they defy conventional codes of gender and space that characterized an earlier era of substate filmmaking. If such earlier films typically took an ethnographic stance toward documenting and explaining Turkish Germans as a social group and often depicted migrants (especially women) 'trapped in claustrophobic spaces and scenarios of imprisonment', then Arslan's protagonists (including his female characters) freely traverse the urban landscape.[14]

However, Jessica Gallagher finds that, despite their notable relocation of characters out of the domestic sphere and into urban space, 'the protagonists in at least the first two films of Arslan's trilogy continue to struggle with the same or similar problems as their predecessors in the *Gastarbeiterkino*

9 On Arslan's *Der schöne Tag*, see also Baer, 'Affectless Economies.'

10 Naiboglu, *Post-Unification Turkish German Cinema*, 28.

11 See Mercer, 'Black Art and the Burden of Representation.'

12 Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision*, 3.

13 Göktürk, 'Turkish Women on German Streets', 65. See also Göktürk, 'Turkish Delight – German Fright' and 'Beyond Paternalism.' The term 'cinema of duty' comes from Malik, 'Beyond the "Cinema of Duty"?'.

14 Göktürk, 'Turkish Women on German Streets', 64.

[guest-worker cinema], in terms of spaces available to them'.[15] For Gallagher, *Dealer* depicts the streets of Berlin as a prison for Can, which limits his mobility and his possibilities nearly as much as the overt incarceration he faces at the end of the film. Likewise, the urban spaces available to Jale 'are not so far removed from the restrictive and claustrophobic spaces' of earlier Turkish German cinema.[16]

As these two approaches suggest, Arslan's films are sometimes read as breaking free of confining images of Turkish Germans and at other times as reproducing them; in fact, they do both simultaneously. This simultaneity is reflected in Arslan's attention—shared with other Berlin School filmmakers—to the ambiguous *Zwischenräume* or liminal spaces characteristic of contemporary society, including subways, trains, taxis, airports, parks and other public non-places, which seem to foster mobility and transition.[17] His attention to in-between spaces coincides with an exploration of in-between times—adolescence, vacation, the break-up of a long-term relationship—when characters find themselves on the brink of a transition. Indeed, the formal and aesthetic focus on such transitional non-places and times coincides with Arslan's narrative focus on the search for new identities and modes of living in the 'new world order' of neoliberalism. However, while the films focus precisely on the search as process, reflected in repeated shots of characters moving through space as well as regular images of crossroads, they most often end at an impasse.

Dealer begins with an image of family intimacy, as the camera pans down from a bright blue curtain across yellow wallpaper past Can to the sleeping bodies of Jale and Meral, before panning back again to Can, who sits up in bed and looks out the window. A cut reveals what he sees: a cityscape of tall apartment buildings surrounded by leafy trees. The bright colours of this scene set the palette for the film, which is awash in blues, yellows, reds, and greens, the latter often associated with Can, who wears a green sweater and often gazes meditatively at the trees in the parks around his neighbourhood. This green signals a hopefulness that is reflected in Can's expression as he faces the day at the outset of *Dealer*, but this first shot is also the last one to portray his family together in one frame.

Dealer is punctuated by Can's voiceover, brief statements that—in contrast to conventional use of first-person narration—do not provide a great deal of

15 Gallagher, 'The Limitation of Urban Space in Thomas Arslan's *Berlin Trilogy*', 339.
16 Gallagher, 'The Limitation of Urban Space in Thomas Arslan's *Berlin Trilogy*', 348.
17 See Augé, *Non-Places*.

insight into either the protagonist's subjective perspective or the valence of the images we see on screen. Nonetheless, these statements are significant for the film's critical project, functioning almost like captions or mottos to underscore key themes, while also disorganizing both the ostensible objectivity of the visual track's social realism and the conventional assumption of interiority attendant to subjective narration. Though the film begins with the image of a bed, *Dealer* swiftly shifts away from images of intimacy. Can's first line, 'My work day begins around noon', instead introduces the film's depiction of the ordinary, daily routine he and his fellow dealers follow, while also underscoring the film's main narrative focus: work. As Naiboglu aptly puts it, '*Dealer* is about work and the complexities of performing labour in an advanced, capitalist society, the multiple dilemmas of transforming one's subjectivity, position in society, identity and class, while searching to establish agency and authority amidst slippery and overwhelming patterns of capitalist exploitation.'[18] While Can attempts to find this agency through the codes of behaviour that organize the illicit drug trade—'I had a rule: never to take any of the drugs that I was selling'—the pressure he experiences at the hands of the police (as a Turkish passport holder engaged in illegal activities), from Hakan (to deflect the attention of the police), and from Jale (to find a less risky line of work) conspire to undo the limited authority he possesses.

Dealer is structured around a series of transactions in which money changes hands: Can receives money in exchange for drugs; he passes the money he and the other street dealers earn to Hakan; he pays Eva for providing care for Meral; and when he goes to work in the restaurant, he is paid in cash, receiving a stack of bills at the end of the shift in return for his labour. When Jale asks Can what he did the previous day, he tells her, 'I earned money for us', but ultimately their relationship falters because they lack a legitimate and reliable source of money, demonstrating, like the other films in this chapter, the cruel optimism of pursuing love for those who are disenfranchised. Though *Dealer* focuses on Can's financial dealings with Hakan as he attempts to parlay his work as a dealer into a safer and more lucrative position running a bar, the film ultimately demonstrates that Can's true debt is not to Hakan but to the system of racial capitalism that holds him accountable for his own precarity.

Portrayed in unsensational terms, Hakan's murder nonetheless functions as the turning point of *Dealer*, since the terms of Can's debt shift in the face of his boss's death. No longer operating within a hierarchy

18 Naiboglu, *Post-Unification Turkish German Cinema*, 43.

that will reward him for assuming the risk of placing his hands in the service of illegal transactions, Can faces the possibility of performing manual labour of a different sort, since the only jobs he appears qualified for are menial ones. Here, *Dealer* makes visible the precarity that is the heritage of Turkish German labour migration in the context of post-Fordist flexibilization. While an older generation of Turkish German characters have established themselves in traditional professions, presumably having saved to launch themselves as entrepreneurs while performing industrial contract labour as *Gastarbeiter*—such as the friend's uncle whose restaurant Can goes to work in or the man (apparently his father) who owns the fabric store Can visits—Can himself explains in voiceover, 'I wanted to change my life, but I did not know how.' This remark, which can be understood as a motto for the film, registers the responsibilization of the migrant embodied by Can.

In *Dealer*, both Can and Jale have internalized the neoliberal promise of entitlement to social mobility, personal freedom, and choice, expressed in Can's aversion to wage labour and Jale's decision to leave her husband and craft a different life for herself and her child. However, in the course of the film, both characters run up against the limits of this promise, in ways that speak to the intersecting politics of race and gender in advanced capitalism. As a racialized minority, Can is policed and regulated in the public non-places of the housing projects where he deals drugs; forming a testament to his economic marginalization and racial exclusion, this surveillance extends more and more into the private sphere of his apartment over the course of the film. (Notably, the key representative of the surveillance state, the cop Erdal, is a childhood schoolmate of Can who is also Turkish German, a choice that defies the stereotype of the migrant as criminal while also attesting to the implication of racialized minorities in structures of violence along multiple vectors.) By contrast, Jale, who works as a cashier in a department store, succeeds at balancing parenthood and employment, but only at the cost of leaving Can and becoming a single mother, severing her ties with the milieu of racialized masculinity epitomized by her husband to found an alternative household with Eva, a white woman (notably played by Berlin School director Angela Schanelec) who cares for Meral.

Arslan's films have often been read as developing a correlation, at the levels of both form and content, between freedom of movement and freedom of choice in the construction of identities for a new, empowered generation of Turkish German characters. Joanne Leal and Klaus-Dieter Rossade have argued that the films of the 'Berlin Trilogy' contrast a passive male character

with an 'active female counterpart' who appears 'successful in determining her own existence with the help and support of other women'.[19] Rob Burns likewise finds that Arslan complicates stereotypes about the 'immigrant criminal' in *Dealer* by trying 'to show what part is played in Can's fate by social factors and how much is his own responsibility. […] long before he ends up in prison, it is apparent that Can is partly "the prisoner of his own indecisiveness".'[20] It is certainly true that Arslan's films depict a world in which discourses of personal responsibility have replaced traditional structures of extended family, religion, and social welfare, as Burns suggests. Far from blaming his characters for indecision or failure to transcend the false binary of otherness/assimilation by making the right choices, however, *Dealer* and the other films in the 'Berlin Trilogy' rather make visible how these characters are forced to choose between irreconcilable alternatives.

In the neoliberal social order on display in *Dealer*, the only evidence of the state are the police and carceral regimes that promote Can's imprisonment; measures that might have assisted Can and Jale in securing better employment or a stable living situation are wholly absent. Like Arslan's other films, *Dealer* portrays the privatization of social risk and the concomitant retrenchment of gender roles in the present, where 'having a well-planned life emerges as a social norm of femininity' that determines a woman's ability to achieve equality in domestic affairs and childcare.[21] Jale seeks to achieve the goal of a well-planned life, but she never gets there in the narrative trajectory of the film: she flatly refuses Can's suggestion to wait for his release from prison and reunite their family in Turkey, but her tender caress of his face in the subsequent shot attests to her continued affection for him. Ultimately unmasking the promise of mobility as a farce, *Dealer* traces, to recall Lauren Berlant's formulation, the unbinding of both Can and Jale from economic and intimate optimism.

This unbinding is registered throughout via Can's voiceover, which concludes following Jale's departure from the prison with the laconic statement, 'Strange how everything changes.' The final shots of the film, which lead to and follow upon this voiceover, are both formally assertive and poetic, disorganizing cinematic conventions and opening up a space of interpretation similar to the 'aesthetics of irresolution' that also mark

19 Leal and Rossade, 'Negotiating Gender, Sexuality and Ethnicity in Fatih Akın's and Thomas Arslan's Urban Spaces', 77.

20 Burns, 'The Politics of Cultural Representation', 373.

21 McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism*, 77.

15 & 16. Mobility as farce in racial capitalism: Two consecutive shots of Jale (Idil Üner) and Can (Tamer Yigit) in the prison visiting room demonstrate the disorganization of cinematic conventions in Thomas Arslan's *Dealer* (1998).

Grisebach's *Sehnsucht*, discussed in Chapter 5.[22] As Can and Jale converse in the prison about Can's likely deportation, a long take shows them in medium shot, with Can seated on the left at the end of a table and Jale next to him in the centre of the screen (see Illustration 15). As Jale prepares to leave, the subsequent shot reverses this spatial orientation completely, violating the 180-degree rule to show Can, now seated on the right, with Jale standing

22 Prager, 'Endings', 112.

behind him as she caresses his face (see Illustration 16). The door slams behind Jale with a loud clicking sound; a strain of piano music begins, and the camera cuts to a static shot of a park, panning across a field of leafy, green trees as Can's voice utters the final words of the film.

Subsequently, we see a series of five further shots, all of which depict spaces familiar from the narrative we have just watched, now thoroughly depopulated and made uncanny by their emptiness. We see a door with peeling paint outside the apartment block where Can and his fellow dealers sold drugs; a shot from inside the entryway, looking out toward the street, where a young mother had castigated Can for bringing criminal activity into the building; the kitchen of the restaurant where Can worked; the inside of his now vacant apartment; and a shot of the night city from the bedroom window, a reprise of Can's view in the opening scene of the film, now at dusk instead of dawn and unmoored from his perspective. These shots mark the absence not only of the film's specific characters from the spaces they had previously inhabited, but also, in a more general sense, of Europe's others, registering the disposability and expulsion of racialized subjects from the cosmopolitan centre of Berlin. The uncanniness of these final shots thus serves as a suggestive figure of the debts that shape the narrative of *Dealer* and the trajectory of Can, debt itself comprising a spectre of past borrowing that haunts the financial present.

In their depiction of migrant lives in Europe, Arslan's films overlap along various lines with the independent transnational film genre identified by Hamid Naficy, a genre characterized by its mobilization of the intersections between transnational subjectivity in general and specific migrant (auto)biographies in particular. Naficy highlights the production context of independent transnational films by diasporic filmmakers who, like Arslan, 'not only inhabit interstitial spaces of the host society but also work on the margins of the mainstream film industry'.[23] Arslan is himself bicultural and bilingual, having grown up in both Germany and Turkey before studying directing at the Deutsche Film- und Fernsehakademie Berlin (dffb), where he cooperated with fellow students Petzold and Schanelec. As we have seen, under the pioneering influence of these three directors, filmmakers associated with the Berlin School have pursued an independent production model that has been remarkably successful in allowing them to develop an aesthetically rigorous and politically engaged form of cinema in an era defined by media conglomeration. *Dealer* is emblematic of early Berlin School productions: this low-budget film was financed by a combination of

23 Naficy, 'Phobic Spaces and Liminal Panics', 125.

funding through the Filmboard Berlin-Brandenburg and the long-running television sponsor of German cinema, ZDF's *Das kleine Fernsehspiel*, which has played a crucial role, since its debut in 1963, in bringing independent and experimental films to audiences, not least through its own production wing. Shot on 35mm, *Dealer* played in international cinematic release before running successfully on television, and it has enjoyed a wide viewership via home video formats.

In terms of form, Naficy's discussion of the independent transnational genre shares commonalities with the feminist film project as described by Teresa de Lauretis and other feminist film theorists who argued in the 1970s and 1980s that in order to achieve a new space of representation, feminist film production must mobilize precisely the contradictions between woman as image or sign and women as historical subjects.[24] Drawing on the legacy of both independent transnational and feminist filmmaking, Arslan employs a similar strategy to mobilize the intersections or contradictions between his characters as signs and images, on the one hand, and as historical subjects, on the other.

Arslan has specifically described his oeuvre as an attempt to find ways of reworking received images, clichés, and stereotypes. One way in which he does this is by creating deliberate connections across his films so that they can be viewed in cyclical relation to one another, as in a cycle of poems. Specific themes and shots (such as static images of trees) reappear across his films, allowing viewers to reinterpret similar ideas in new ways. In the case of *Dealer*, he explains that 'My task was not to abandon the clichés altogether—because then you can't narrate anything at all—but rather to dissolve them in the course of the film, in order to make another reality visible'.[25] Significant here are Arslan's casting choices, which in addition to nonprofessional actors who bring their own experiences as first- or second-generation migrants to their roles, also include prominent musicians and filmmakers, especially but not exclusively those with Turkish German backgrounds (such as filmmakers Neco Çelik and Schanelec, who appear in *Dealer*). Repeatedly casting the same actors in different roles across his films (such as Tamer Yigit, who plays Erol in *Geschwister/Kardeşler* and Can in *Dealer*), Arslan creates characters whom he describes as 'empty pages—projection screens for the spectator'.[26] This description echoes what de Lauretis has called the 'aesthetic of reception' developed

24 See de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't*.
25 Holz, 'Kein Zugang zum Glück', n.p.
26 Interview with Thomas Arslan.

by feminist filmmakers like Helke Sander and Chantal Akerman (cited by Arslan as a direct influence on his work), 'where the spectator is the film's primary concern—primary in the sense that it is there from the beginning, inscribed in the filmmaker's project and even in the making of the film'.[27] The result is an open-ended, polysemic cinema that demands the spectator's participation.

This polysemic quality is produced not least by the films' affectless aesthetic, which drains emotion both from the filmic text itself (through the affectless line delivery of the actors, fragmentary narrative, refusal of closure, and so on) and from the address to the viewer (by foreclosing on identification and resisting emotionalization). Describing the choice to restrict his characters' affect in order to open up spaces of reception, Arslan explains: 'Making a film always poses the question of how to produce vitality aesthetically. This artistic process does not work for me by setting up life in all its intensity in front of the camera, but rather by activating something comparable in the audience. You have to leave the viewer some leeway to participate [*Spielraum*: literally, room to play]. That doesn't happen if the actors perform every emotion.'[28] As in Grisebach's *Sehnsucht*, this affectless aesthetic is a central vector not only of the representation of everyday life and ambiguous appeal to the viewer in Arslan's films, but also of their mode of production, since using nonprofessional actors and a minimalist style reduces costs.

Arslan's strategies—deploying and then dissolving clichés, and avoiding overtly emotionalized presentations of contemporary life—disorganize conventional modes of viewing, including those predicated on identification, voyeurism, or hermeneutics. Like other Berlin School directors, Arslan does not describe the viewer's participation as a process of making meaning from his films. Rather, he leaves open to the viewer possibilities for sensing the scenarios of contemporary life they display. As Marco Abel describes it, 'The effect is that Arslan's films do not merely represent the ordinariness of his protagonists' lives but render it sensible for the viewer'.[29] Abel persuasively argues that critical approaches to Arslan's films have tended toward reductionism, understanding their political valence only in terms of identitarian forms of representation; rather, Abel insists, 'The political quality of Arslan's films is [...] less defined by what they are about, by what they depict, than by how they work and what, as a result, they are capable of

27 de Lauretis, 'Rethinking Women's Cinema', 141.
28 Hanich, 'Ein Recht auf Liebe gibt es nicht', n.p.
29 Abel, 'The Minor Cinema of Thomas Arslan', 47.

doing.'[30] Abel rightly suggests that Arslan's films demand that we suspend conventional metaphorical and representational approaches in favour of a novel analytical lens to considering their materialist depiction of bodies in space. At the same time, however, Abel's turn away from 'accounting for these bodies in terms of ethnicity or nationality' risks dovetailing with a postracial rhetoric that papers over the specific ways that race operates as a system for designating the other in capitalism, something that the films of Arslan's 'Berlin Trilogy', and especially *Dealer*, also make visible.[31]

Drawing on Abel's work, Naiboglu demonstrates that a materialist approach to Arslan's films is not incompatible with attention to racialized bodies, and she specifically emphasizes how film is uniquely suited to express 'situated yet transversal experiences of work, labour, social reproduction and precarity in relation to migration and displacement'.[32] In the case of *Dealer*, she points out that, 'Ethnic difference and the questions of identity are among the molar crux of the film [...]. Most of the cast members are Turkish German actors, yet, other than their names, there is little direct reference to their diegetic ethnic identities', a quality that contributes to the film's resistance of representationalism.[33] In this way, Arslan's films disorganize not only formal-aesthetic cinematic conventions but also normative expectations of depictions of race and ethnicity on screen.

With reference to queer of colour critique, El-Tayeb argues that Europeans of colour are 'impossible' and therefore queer subjects within heteronormative discourses of migration and nation: 'In response, without necessarily reflecting it theoretically, minority subjects use queer performance strategies in continuously rearranging the components of the supposedly stable but incompatible identities assigned to them [...], creating cracks in the circular logic of normative European identities.'[34] Not least in the way he both deploys and empties out diegetic ethnic identities, Arslan's disorganized cinematic practice shares something in common with this strategic rearrangement of identity components, 'queering' ethnicity in El-Tayeb's sense in order to make visible the impasse of identity in Europe today. As we shall see, while on the surface they are very different sorts of films, *Dealer* shares in common with *Fremde Haut* a strategic deployment of 'queer' ethnicity to expose the othering logic of racial capitalism.

30 Abel, 'The Minor Cinema of Thomas Arslan', 55.
31 Abel, 'The Minor Cinema of Thomas Arslan', 54.
32 Naiboglu, *Post-Unification Turkish German Cinema*, 2.
33 Naiboglu, *Post-Unification Turkish German Cinema*, 43.
34 El-Tayeb, *European Others*, xxxv.

Precarious Identities in *Fremde Haut*

Like *Dealer*, Angelina Maccarone's *Fremde Haut* addresses the promises and limitations of mobility for Europe's others, engaging an analogy between the mobility of migration and gender/sexual mobility that quite literally queers ethnicity. The film follows the story of Fariba Tabrizi, a lesbian who is persecuted in Iran for having an affair with a married woman, and who subsequently assumes the identity of a man in order to stay in Germany. Foregrounding both mobility and liminality, *Fremde Haut* begins in transit. The film's opening shot shows the exterior of an airplane accompanied by the optimistic strains of a peppy soundtrack; a cut to the interior space of the plane reveals Fariba and other women on board removing their hijabs upon the pilot's announcement that the aircraft has just left Iranian airspace. Arriving at the Frankfurt airport, Fariba requests temporary resident status, but she is eventually denied entry as a refugee when she is unable to provide proof of political persecution in Iran (she does not out herself as a lesbian to the authorities).

In an airport bathroom, Fariba meets Siamak Mostafai (Navid Akhavan), a fellow Iranian who is granted the right to seek asylum in Germany because of his political work as a student activist. Distraught over the consequences of his actions for his family in Iran, which have led to his brother's imprisonment and subsequent death, Siamak commits suicide. When Fariba discovers his dead body, she decides to adopt Siamak's identity, cutting her hair, donning his clothing and glasses, and making use of his immigration documents. As Siamak, Fariba is assigned to a hostel for asylum seekers in the Swabian village of Sielmingen; having hidden Siamak's body in a suitcase, Fariba repays her debt to Siamak by burying him, reciting prayers over his grave, and writing letters to his parents in Siamak's voice, which we hear in voiceover narration during the course of the film.

In Sielmingen, Fariba/Siamak is officially banned from either holding a job or travelling outside the town limits, demonstrating the im/mobility of the asylum seeker. In order to obtain a counterfeit passport, s/he incurs debts to a range of individuals who help him/her find illegal work and navigate his/her precarious status. Working at a sauerkraut factory, where s/he passes as a man, Fariba/Siamak meets Anne (Anneke Kim Sarnau), a fellow factory worker and single mother. As part of a wager with another co-worker to procure a bicycle she can't afford for her son's birthday, Anne agrees to go on a date with Fariba/Siamak, and after spending time together, the two fall in love.

Although Anne at first believes Fariba/Siamak to be a man, the film portrays, in unsensational terms, her slow process of understanding Fariba/Siamak's gender. Anne's acceptance of Fariba/Siamak is contrasted with the hostility exhibited by her friends Sabine (Nina Vorbrodt), Andi (Jens Münchow), and Uwe (Hinnerk Schönemann), also workers at the factory, who subject Fariba/Siamak to racist hazing and Islamophobic slurs. When Andi and Uwe enter Anne's house unannounced, discovering the relationship between Anne and Fariba and seeing Fariba dressed only in a tank top and underwear, this hostility culminates in a violent homophobic and xenophobic attack, which leads to Fariba's arrest and deportation. The film's ambiguous ending, which mirrors the opening scene, shows Fariba in transit. This time, when the pilot announces that the aircraft has crossed into Iranian airspace, we watch as Fariba enters the plane's restroom, flushes her own identity papers down the toilet, retrieves Siamak's passport from a hiding place in her boot, and transforms herself into the dead man once more. This circuitous ending, which attests to the impasse faced by Fariba—whose existence as a lesbian Muslim is disallowed in both Germany and Iran—leaves open whether her decision to enter Iran as Siamak will culminate in her ability to achieve sovereignty by living as a man or in her intensified persecution as a recognized opponent of the regime (or, indeed, in her arrest as a cross-dressing woman, a crime in Iran). While operating somewhat differently than the ending of *Dealer*, with its austere cinematic language and disruption of identification, *Fremde Haut* nonetheless insists on a similar aesthetics of irresolution in its depiction of migrant lives.

Like other films discussed throughout this book, *Fremde Haut* notably blurs genre conventions and expectations in its search for a cinematic language to depict the precarity of the present. Maccarone, an experienced director of genre pieces including the film comedy *Alles wird gut* (Everything Will Be Fine, 1998)—co-written with the theorist Fatima El-Tayeb, who was her partner at the time—and multiple episodes of the long-playing television crime serial *Tatort*, draws on the affective and visual vocabulary of these and other genres in *Fremde Haut*. As with the other films discussed here and in Chapter 5, this engagement of genre underpins the amphibic form of *Fremde Haut*, which, like *Dealer*, was co-financed by German television, and which played very successfully at international film festivals, beginning with its debut in competition at Karlovy Vary. Acquired by Wolfe, the largest exclusive distributor of LGBTQ films for home video in North America, *Fremde Haut* has circulated widely under its English title *Unveiled*, which notably markets the film via a doubled cliché of exposure, emphasizing

how the neoliberal mediascape facilitates the market-oriented success of queer cinema for an affluent international audience.

In the blurred generic language of *Fremde Haut,* Fariba's passing as Siamak is rendered via sight gags and misunderstandings that are often played for laughs, but that also generate suspense and fear. The film's dark comedy is signalled by an early scene when a border patrol officer heaves Fariba's suitcase into a van and jokingly asks if she's hiding her husband inside, a comment that reveals his heteronormative and misogynist mindset, but that also foreshadows Fariba's actual use of the same suitcase to transport Siamak's corpse later on. The budding relationship between Fariba/Siamak and Anne is conveyed through conventions of the romantic comedy: they are both attractive and sympathetic characters, whose potential relationship faces a series of obstacles, including linguistic and cultural difference, the objections of Anne's friends, and Fariba/Siamak's economic problems, which they eventually surmount in order to consummate their relationship. However, this romance does not culminate in a rom-com-style happy ending, but rather in the climactic scene of violence that results in Fariba's forced deportation. As these examples demonstrate, genre blurring in *Fremde Haut* leads to a disorganized viewing experience for audiences, whose expectations are regularly deferred.

In the queer narrative world of *Fremde Haut*, the deferral of genre expectations figures the destabilization of identity categories, foiling assumptions about gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and language, and refusing normative binaries of sameness/difference. This point is foregrounded in a striking shot at the outset of the credit sequence, in which Fariba's face, reflected in the glass of the passport control booth, is superimposed onto and blurs together with the face of the border guard who sits behind the glass pane, visually undoing binaries of man/woman and European/other, while also emphasizing the material effects deriving from the (here very literal) policing of these borders. When Fariba meets with immigration authorities to present her asylum case, she is automatically provided with an interpreter, but she subverts assumptions about Muslim women by speaking fluent German; as a translator, she is conversant not only with the German language, but also with cultural and literary traditions, as demonstrated when she provides a border guard the solution to his crossword clue: Romantic poet = Novalis.

Like *Dealer*, *Fremde Haut* draws on formal-aesthetic strategies of feminist and queer filmmaking to encourage an open-ended and polysemic form of viewing and in its critical engagement with dominant cinematic codes, especially codes that underpin the representation of Fariba/Siamak. As

Faye Stewart puts it, 'Maccarone's *Fremde Haut* is a rich and complex visual text that ultimately asks more questions than it answers, leaving matters of identity unresolved and open for viewers to decode.'[35] Emily Jeremiah specifically examines the way the film draws on feminist and lesbian cinematic practices that unsettle codes of looking in dominant cinema, arguing that '*Fremde Haut* participates in such queer challenges to notions of the gaze as (necessarily) masculine and objectifying; and to gender and desire as simply or casually connected to sex.'[36] While both Stewart and Jeremiah are careful to point out that Fariba pursues crossdressing as a strategy of survival and not because she identifies as a man or experiences gender dysphoria, Jack Halberstam reads Fariba/Siamak as a decidedly 'trans*' character (trans* being his term for highlighting the provisional quality of gender variability). As Halberstam argues:

> Balanced as s/he is between nations, identities, and legibility, the asylum seeker traces a trans* orbit as s/he [...] passes back and forth between legal and illegal, man and woman, citizen and foreigner. By naming this space inbetween as trans*, we begin to see the importance of mutual articulations of race, nation, migration, and sexuality. [...] The trans* embodiment that Fariba/Siamak represents in *Fremde Haut* is a reminder that identities and modes of embodiment shift in meaning and form as people cross boundaries and find themselves subject to new and different kinds of regulation.[37]

For Halberstam, reading Fariba/Siamak as trans* helps to conceptualize how identity is by definition provisional and contingent for all refugees, who are made responsible to perform in certain ways (i.e. assimilate, integrate, conform). This is especially so for racialized Muslims in Germany, interpellated as they are by contradictory discourses of, on the one hand, European openness and tolerance (in contrast to 'intolerant' Islamic societies like Iran) and, on the other, ethnonationalism (which scapegoats Muslim migrants and holds them accountable for the processes of neoliberalization). Through the trans* figure of Fariba/Siamak, *Fremde Haut* makes visible the constitutive and intersecting forces of homophobia, transphobia, racism, and xenophobia in constructing European identity, troubling the alignment

35 Stewart, 'Filming Faith and Desire', 176.

36 Jeremiah, 'Gender, Germanness, and the Gaze in Angelina Maccarone's *Fremde Haut* (2005)', 598.

37 Halberstam, *Trans**, 40; 42.

of emancipatory politics, including feminism, pro-LGBTQ attitudes, and antiracism, with European values.

Key to the film's imaging of these intersections, debt underpins virtually every relationship in *Fremde Haut*, demonstrating how those living precariously cannot survive without becoming liable. Debts large and small structure Fariba's quest to remain in Germany. When she first meets him in the airport bathroom, she gives the troubled Siamak her last cigarette, initiating a relationship of exchange that lays the groundwork for her subsequent decision to assume his identity. Fariba/Siamak is likewise indebted to Maxim (Yevgeni Sitokhin), her/his roommate at the refugee hostel, who recommends her/him for a job at the sauerkraut factory in exchange for warm meals. Fariba/Siamak also incurs debts to Anne, who hides her/him from immigration officials who raid the sauerkraut factory and later assists her/him in obtaining money to procure a false passport, debts that Fariba/Siamak can only repay affectively, with gestures of kindness and tenderness.

Debt in *Fremde Haut* highlights the shared precarity that determines the living conditions of most of the film's characters, including Anne, who is indebted to her co-worker Waltraud, who gives her the bicycle for her son Melvin's birthday that she can't afford as a factory worker, and to Andi, Sabine, and especially Uwe, who help her to raise and care for Melvin in his father's absence. All of these characters are portrayed performing the hard manual labour required by their employment at the sauerkraut factory, picking cabbages in the field, processing them on the assembly line, and fermenting the cabbage in large batches, a detailed depiction of factory work reminiscent of DEFA films like *Alle meine Mädchen* (see Chapter 1). This labour is portrayed as back breaking (and stinky), but not as especially exploitative: the factory is a family-run enterprise, and its reliance on the low-wage labour of illegal migrants is depicted as a fact of life for a German-owned business that still produces inexpensive consumer goods in the era of globalization and outsourcing. In this regard, it is no accident that the factory, a relic of Fordism, makes sauerkraut, that traditional emblem of Germanness. The irony of the fact that the production of this symbolic food requires the labour of illegal migrant workers highlights the longstanding (but often hidden and disavowed) centrality of migrants to labour and production in Germany while also destabilizing claims to the 'purity' of German identity, instead exposing its hybridity. In a pivotal scene for the film's blurring of affects, which combines slapstick humour and visual jokes with fear and suspense over the fate of Fariba/Siamak and the other migrant workers, the factory is raided by immigration police. Anne hides Fariba/Siamak in a huge vat of fermenting cabbage, literally

17. Precarious labour and contingent identities: Fariba/Siamak (Jasmin Tabatabai) hides in a vat of fermenting cabbage in Angelina Maccarone's *Fremde Haut* (*Unveiled*, 2005).

mixing her/him into the kraut, a potent signifier for this hybridity (see Illustration 17).

Debt in *Fremde Haut* serves as an important figure for the film's intersectional critique of neoliberalism, demonstrating the impact of changing structures of labour and money on everyone, but emphasizing their particular effects for racialized subjects and migrants. These uneven relations are figured through a series of three shots in which Fariba/Siamak exchanges looks with a white man in the rearview mirror of a car, shots that form a motif in the film linking the exchange of the gaze to relations of indebtedness. Central to the film's critical intervention, these scenes are notable for the way they draw on strategies of feminist and queer cinema to problematize dominant looking relations in mainstream cinema. *Fremde Haut* was co-written by director Maccarone and cinematographer Judith Kaufmann, one of the few active women cinematographers in contemporary German film, who brought a cinematographer's view to the script that is especially evident in these three pivotal scenes in which the rearview mirror mediates structures of looking.

The first of these takes place upon Fariba's arrival in Germany, when a border patrol agent drives her to the refugee hostel where she meets Siamak. As she rides in the back seat of his van, Fariba notices the agent adjusting his rearview mirror so that he can get a better look at her. Framed in close-up via an over-the-shoulder shot, the rearview mirror reflects Fariba as she returns his objectifying gaze, looking directly at him in the mirror before donning sunglasses that block his ability to see her eyes and face.

In a parallel scene later in the film, Anne snuggles up to Fariba/Siamak and begins to kiss her/him while riding in the back seat of Uwe's car. Watching them in the rearview mirror, Uwe disrupts their kiss by slamming on the brakes, jostling everyone in the car. This gesture, which foreshadows this character's violent attack on Anne and Fariba later in the film, is part of a pattern that eventually causes the police to pull Uwe over for driving erratically. Though his aggression and alcohol consumption have led to his poor driving, it is not Uwe but Fariba/Siamak who ultimately receives a citation in the amount of €40 for having travelled outside the district to which s/he is confined as a temporary resident.

During this scene, a conversation takes place between Anne and Sabine that underscores how debt defines the racialized minority subject. The pregnant Sabine tells Anne that her budding relationship with Fariba/Siamak has 'no future'. When Anne resists the futural orientation imposed by Sabine on this nascent relationship, asking, 'But what about the present?', Sabine retorts that in the present, Fariba/Siamak is a seasonal contract worker whom her father pays €4/hour to work in the sauerkraut factory, a wage that is not even sufficient for the present (this insufficiency is subsequently confirmed by the equation we are required to make between Fariba/Siamak's hourly wage and the ticket s/he will have to pay, representing 10 hours of labour). Here, Sabine defines Fariba/Siamak exclusively through her/his labour and (meagre) earning capacity, emphasizing how s/he is already in debt to the future. Nonetheless Anne insists that she wants 'to get to know someone who is different, who comes from somewhere different, who thinks differently', a statement that destabilizes the firm links between economic potential and reproductive futurity articulated by Sabine in favour of a queer desire for difference and presence.

While the film therefore expresses a hopeful vision of an alternative imaginary regarding sexuality and cultural difference, it also demonstrates how this vision is undermined by the realities of racial capitalism for refugees like Fariba. This is confirmed in a final scene featuring the exchange of gazes in a rearview mirror. Here, a cut takes us from an exterior shot of a car to a close-up of the rearview mirror in its interior, framing a reflection of Fariba/Siamak, who once again sits in the back seat. As s/he looks intently in the mirror, the film cuts to another extreme close-up, also of the rearview mirror, now reflecting the white man she is looking at, the forger from whom s/he seeks to buy a passport in Fariba's name. Having learned that Siamak's asylum request has been denied because of the changing political landscape in Iran, where his student activist group is no longer banned, Fariba must now find a way to stay in Germany without Siamak's borrowed

identity. However, her/his attempts to earn sufficient funds by working at the sauerkraut factory during the day and washing windows at a car rental agency at night have not provided enough wages to pay off the forger. Lacking contact to anyone who could afford to lend her money and devoid of resources other than her/his own labouring body, Fariba/Siamak appeals to the human decency of the counterfeiter to extend credit to her/him. Looking back at her/him in the rearview mirror, the forger emphasizes the irony of the request s/he has just made to him: 'You want *me* to lend *you* money, so *you* can pay *me*.' His flat refusal to help and Fariba/Siamak's lack of recourse to other options demonstrate, as in *Dealer*, the responsibilization of the migrant/refugee character in the context of racial capitalism. When her/his last hope for financial assistance is rebuffed, Fariba/Siamak proceeds to ask the forger if he knows anyone who buys cars, indicating her/his turn, having exhausted all other options, to criminal activity.

It is no accident that these three critical scenes take place in cars, and that Fariba/Siamak steals a car from the rental agency where s/he works as a last-ditch effort to raise the funds to buy the passport. As Lutz Koepnick has pointed out, cars have been crucial to the development of both modern capitalism and narrative cinema, serving as key signifiers of social mobility throughout film history. Still omnipresent in the Berlin School films that Koepnick discusses, automobiles may continue to 'index dormant desires for unfettered movement and individual transformation, for breaking out of the mould of given spaces and positions, for questioning conventional regimes of representation. […] [H]owever, Berlin School automobilism has little patience for successful narratives of progress and change, of individual autonomy and forward movement'. Instead, these films image a world where 'capitalism reigns triumphant' and the promise of cars appears as a form of cruel optimism, since nobody is actually going anywhere.[38] In *Fremde Haut*, we see shots that index mobility again and again, including numerous images of airplanes, a strikingly beautiful shot of birds circling in flight, several sequences in which Anne and Fariba/Siamak ride together on Anne's motorbike, and various characters riding on bicycles and in cars. However, as the circular logic of the opening and closing scenes of transit emphasizes, vehicles in *Fremde Haut*, like those in Berlin School films, ultimately suggest the impasse of mobility in the neoliberal age.

Taken together, the three rearview mirror scenes figure the critical intervention of *Fremde Haut* by making visible the way Fariba/Siamak is held accountable for her/his own precarity, while being interpellated by,

38 Koepnick, 'Cars…', 76.

respectively, the sexist/objectifying gaze of the border guard, the racist/xenophobic gaze of Uwe, and the responsibilizing gaze of the counterfeiter. Though in each scene Fariba looks back, exchanging gazes with these men, this visual reciprocity does not lead to empathy or identification. In this way, the film explicitly problematizes the alignment of Europe with support for queer rights and with feminism, demonstrating racism, homophobia, and misogyny as internal problems in Germany. Via its emphasis on labour, money, and debt, *Fremde Haut* further demonstrates the intersections of these internal problems with post-Fordist capitalism, exposing how the latter co-opts queer rights and feminism for a supposedly liberal and tolerant European identity.

The Incommensurability of Exchange in *Auf der anderen Seite*

The limits of European tolerance also form the explicit subject of Fatih Akın's *Auf der anderen Seite*, one that is explored, as in *Fremde Haut*, via a queer intercultural relationship that stands at the heart of the film's interconnected storylines. An ensemble film with a non-linear narrative structure, *Auf der anderen Seite* is organized into three chapters that follow three parent-child pairs (two sets of mothers and daughters and one father and son) whose lives become irrevocably intertwined through a series of fateful events. These events, which revise German (film) history in light of the profound effects of Turkish labour migration, repeatedly place the characters in relations of symbolic indebtedness, figured through the trajectories of exchange that dominate the narrative, linguistic, and formal-aesthetic registers of the film. These trajectories of exchange are signalled already by the film's German title, literally 'on the other side' but also meaning 'on the other hand', which suggests notions of deferral and displacement as well as the holding together of incommensurable perspectives.

The six main characters of *Auf der anderen Seite* repeatedly cross paths and exchange places with one another (sometimes unknowingly), while passing across the borders of countries, regions, and languages but also across the threshold of life and death, in what Barbara Mennel has referred to as 'criss-crossing in global space and time.'[39] This emphasis on crossing and exchange is evident on a visual level in the film's repetition, across its three chapters, of the same individual shots but with a slight difference—for instance, they track movement in different directions, crossing from left

39 See Mennel, 'Criss-Crossing in Global Space and Time.'

to right or vice versa, or they reveal new information through a small shift in focus. Thus, the film makes visible the multidirectional movement of bodies and things in the global age, but its use of repetition with a difference also foregrounds the sense in which this movement is overdetermined by asymmetrical relations of exchange.

The second instalment of Akın's 'Love, Death, and the Devil Trilogy', *Auf der anderen Seite* joins *Gegen die Wand* (*Head-On*, 2004) and *The Cut* (2014) in addressing these universal themes in the context of the specific intertwined histories of Germany and Turkey, with each film zooming in on one particular theme as its organizing principle. While *Gegen die Wand* tackles romantic and familial love through the story of the doomed pair Cahit (Birol Ünel) and Sibel (Sibel Kikelli), and *The Cut* focuses on evil in narrating the history of the Armenian genocide, *Auf der anderen Seite* takes on death, portraying the sudden and shocking deaths of two of its protagonists and dwelling on the aftermath of these deaths for those who remain. However, the central role played by the romance between the German-born Lotte (Patrycia Ziolkowska) and the Turkish-born Ayten (Nurgül Yeşilçay), which forms the nodal point connecting all the film's characters, establishes love and intimacy as equally significant to death in *Auf der anderen Seite*. This romance also serves to queer ethnicity, in El-Tayeb's sense, since it makes visible precisely how Europeans of colour are produced as impossible subjects in a context where 'the unifying Europe [...] seems less open and pluralist than shaped by ethnonationalist structures excluding racial and religious minorities by assigning them a permanently transitory migrant status', a description that strongly resonates with the depiction not only of asylum-seeker Ayten but also of other migrant characters in the film.[40]

Moreover, on a formal-aesthetic level, *Auf der anderen Seite* reflects 'The constant mixing of genres and styles' that El-Tayeb notes as a key characteristic of the emphasis placed by minority cultural production on identity as a process, a disorganized mixing that 'reflects a resistance to notions of purity and uncomplicated belonging based on the positionality of racialized Europeans, but resonating with larger questions facing minority communities and activists worldwide'.[41] A film that thematizes minority activism in its diegetic narrative, *Auf der anderen Seite* was shot in both Germany and Turkey, with an international cast of actors from both countries speaking in multiple languages and dialects. Through his casting choices and through narrative conventions, Akın —who was born in

40 El-Tayeb, 'European Others', xxxiii.

41 El-Tayeb, 'European Others', xxx-xxxi.

Hamburg in 1973 as the son of Turkish labour migrants—notably resignifies the histories of both German and Turkish cinema while also mixing in aspects of the cinema of migration and global queer cinema. For instance, Hanna Schygulla, a major star of the New German Cinema, came out of retirement to play the German mother, Susanne Staub, in *Auf der anderen Seite*, and her presence in the film emphasizes the resonance in Akın's work of Rainer Werner Fassbinder's films, such as *Die Ehe der Maria Braun* (*The Marriage of Maria Braun*, 1979), in which Schygulla played the eponymous role. This resonance also extends to the positioning of the 'Love, Death, and the Devil Trilogy' as a reprise of Fassbinder's 'FRG Trilogy' (as well as Akın's own self-styling as an auteur in the mould of Fassbinder), and to references to Fassbinder's well-known film addressing labour migration, *Ali – Angst essen Seele auf* (*Ali – Fear Eats the Soul*, 1974) in *Auf der anderen Seite*.[42] Likewise, Tuncel Kurtiz, who plays the central character Ali, represents another resonant casting choice, having starred in more than 70 Turkish film and television productions.

These multivalent qualities of *Auf der anderen Seite* underpin not only its critical approach to the nation and national cinema, but also its international success, at the Cannes Film Festival, where it debuted in competition and won the Best Screenplay prize; in both Turkey and Germany, where it won significant directing prizes; and with audiences around the world as one of the most successful German-produced films of the 21st century. The significant scholarship on the film is a further testament to its success, with ample critical attention to its transnational aesthetics, multilingualism, and critique of globalization, among others.[43] While *Auf der anderen Seite* has sometimes been criticized as an affirmative film that advocates for a politics of reconciliation through a universalizing narrative and widely appealing cinematic style, my reading of money and debt attends to the intersections of Akın's film with other resistant cinematic projects in the present, including that of the Berlin School.

Auf der anderen Seite begins with a prologue that takes place at a gas station, a generic nonplace that is however firmly located in time and space via dialogue and mise-en-scène when the characters wish each other Happy Byram and converse inside the convenience store about the diegetic music,

42 Fassbinder's 'FRG Trilogy' consists of three films that focus on postwar West German history and trace the intersections of gender, nation, and economy: *Die Ehe der Maria Braun*; *Lola* (1981); and *Die Sehnsucht der Veronika Voss* (*Veronika Voss*, 1982).

43 See for example Breger, 'Configuring Affect'; Elsaesser, 'Ethical Calculus'; Gramling, 'On the Other Side of Monolingualism'; Isenberg, 'Fatih Akin's Cinema of Intersections'; and Mennel, 'Criss-Crossing in Global Space and Time.'

recorded by the artist Kazım Koyuncu, who is locally popular in Turkey's Black Sea Coast region. Here, a man whom we will subsequently encounter as Nejat (Baki Davrak) pays for gas and food before driving on into the countryside, establishing the centrality of transactional exchanges in the plot of *Auf der anderen Seite*. Introduced by an intertitle, 'Yeter's Death', the first chapter of the film commences with several establishing shots that displace the action to the northern German town of Bremen on May Day, where a worker's rights protest is taking place. Here we meet Ali, a labour migrant of Turkish heritage, who pays for sex with the prostitute Jessy (Nursel Köse), a woman who subsequently reveals that her real name is Yeter and she is also of Turkish heritage. Ali lives alone as a pensioner and is regularly visited by his son Nejat, a professor of German literature at the university in Hamburg. In an early sequence, the two attend a horse race, where Ali wins money on a bet. Spurred on by his windfall, he proposes that Yeter give up sex work to move in and sleep exclusively with him; in return he will pay her the same wage she earns in the brothel. Though the €700 he won at the track is hardly sufficient to cover Yeter's wages (she tells Ali that she nets €3000 per month), Ali promises that his pension and earnings on some properties he owns in Turkey provide enough to finance their contract, and that if all else fails, he can rely on Nejat for money too. Yeter, in turn, agrees to Ali's proposal not least because she has been threatened by two men who, having heard her speaking Turkish on the street in the red-light district where she works, follow her onto the tram and insist that she repent of her immoral ways. Soon after Yeter moves in with Ali, he suffers a debilitating heart attack, and later (accidentally) kills Yeter in a violent outburst. As a result, Ali is jailed in Germany and eventually deported to Turkey. Meanwhile Nejat has learned that Yeter has a daughter in Turkey, a student whom she supports financially. Deeply ashamed by his father's violent act and seeking to atone for Yeter's death, Nejat travels to Istanbul for her funeral and searches for her daughter, whose education he hopes to finance. Although he fails to find Ayten, Nejat decides to stay in Istanbul, where he purchases a German-language bookstore from an ex-pat who has decided to return to Germany.

As Claudia Breger points out, this opening chapter is replete with numerous clichés familiar from German cultural representations of labour migration (e.g. the character named Ali; the framing of Ali and Yeter in tight, claustrophobic spaces; the depiction of gendered violence) as well as Islamophobic stereotypes endemic to dominant media representations of Muslims in Europe, 'but the potentially clichéd plot opening and the potentially clichéd character portrait are, as the film continues, subtly displaced

through their development in(to) a configuration that makes room for the complexities of fictional experience in a world of overdetermined events and multidimensional actors, connected by an artful play of differences and similarities'.[44] Akın's employment and subtle displacement of clichés recalls Arslan's strategy of deploying and dissolving clichés in his 'Berlin Trilogy'; as Breger also suggests, although it integrates documentary-style aesthetics with 'a form of storytelling that unabashedly foregrounds its status as an act of narrative composition', *Auf der anderen Seite* nonetheless shares something in common with the cinema of the Berlin School, in particular via its mode of depicting space and movement.[45]

Like its first chapter, the film's second chapter 'Lotte's Death' begins on May Day, but this time in Istanbul, where a workers' protest is also taking place. This protest, however, takes on more violent dimensions than the one we have seen in Bremen, as gunshots ring out and the police chase masked demonstrators through the city. Ayten, a political activist belonging to a revolutionary cell of the Kurdish resistance movement, manages to avoid being caught and hides the smoking gun, but, having lost her cell phone during the chase, she flees to Germany to escape arrest. Arriving in Hamburg, Ayten is greeted by a network of Kurdish activists in exile and their supporters, one of whom owns a restaurant. He asks Ayten if she has any money, and suggests that she work for him, telling her, 'You look like a waitress'. Infuriated by his gender stereotyping and lack of solidarity, Ayten borrows €100 from the man, which she plans to pay back once she finds her mother, whom she believes to be working in a shoe store in Bremen. However, when her search for her mother—whom we know to be Yeter—proves fruitless, Ayten is unable to repay this debt. Living precariously in Hamburg, she relies on the facilities at the university; we see her, in a shot that is repeated from the first chapter but now with a focus on Ayten, asleep in Nejat's lecture hall, both characters unaware of the connection they share to Yeter. Outside the cafeteria, Ayten asks Lotte, a student of English and Spanish, for money to buy food, which Lotte freely gives her; when Ayten promises to pay her back, Lotte declines, telling Ayten that she can return the favour the next time they eat together. Lotte offers hospitality to Ayten, giving her money and clothes to wear, and inviting her to stay in her mother's home. With Ayten wearing Lotte's clothes, the two women go out dancing together, and in an erotically charged scene they dance and kiss before ending up together in Lotte's bed. The next

44 Breger, 'Configuring Affect', 74.
45 Breger, 'Configuring Affect', 71.

morning, the outspoken Ayten vocally spars with Lotte's mother Susanne about the colonialist politics of globalization and the false promises of the European Union, with Susanne repeatedly insisting that Ayten's political resistance is futile, since things will get better as soon as Turkey becomes part of the EU. Susanne, pitting cherries for a pie at the kitchen table, here epitomizes the cliché of white western privilege as much as Ali in the previous chapter represented the stereotypical Turkish labour migrant. Channelling Maria Braun, the emblem of the German nation's postwar reconstruction, Susanne Staub (whose surname, meaning dust, aptly registers her outmoded attitudes) serves as a mouthpiece here for the fantasy of Europe as an inclusive space, even a panacea for entrenched political conflicts. When Ayten responds, 'Fuck the European Union!', Susanne—who has already made clear that she resents Lotte's choice to extend hospitality to Ayten—responds, 'I don't want you to talk like that in my house. You can talk like that in your house, ok?' Susanne's comment registers the incommensurable power relations that inhere in hospitality, with the host (whether in the home or the nation at large) dictating the conditions under which the guest has the right to remain.

Later, Lotte returns to find Ayten crying on the front stoop: made to feel unwelcome by Susanne, she enlists Lotte's help in the search for Yeter. Though an extended shot depicts Lotte and Ayten driving in a car right next to the tram in which Nejat and Yeter are riding, Ayten never succeeds in finding her mother. Instead, in a scene reminiscent of *Fremde Haut*, a routine traffic stop puts an abrupt end to Ayten's covert status in Germany when Lotte is pulled over by the police, who ask to see Ayten's identity papers. Ayten requests political asylum, but after a protracted legal battle that, we later learn, was financed by Susanne, this request is denied on the grounds that, due to Turkey's accession negotiations with the EU, Ayten is unlikely to be subjected to political persecution or violence in her country of origin, a decision that clearly exposes the limits of the European promise defended by Susanne, particularly given the fact that the position of the Kurdish population for whom Ayten is fighting formed a point of contention in the Turkish government's negotiations for entry into the EU.

Like the film's first chapter, 'Lotte's death' also depicts a deportation and its consequences: Ayten is deported to Turkey, where she is jailed, and Lotte follows her to Istanbul. Speaking on the telephone with her daughter, Susanne pleads with Lotte to come home, but when Lotte refuses, Susanne cuts off her financial support with the rhetorical question, 'Do you know how much your girlfriend has already cost me?' Still hoping to help Ayten, Lotte consults texts she finds at Nejat's bookstore; although she ends up

renting a room from him, Nejat never discovers that Lotte's lover is Yeter's daughter, the same woman he has been searching for. When Lotte is finally allowed to visit Ayten and offers to help her in any way possible, Ayten asks Lotte to retrieve the hidden gun so that it can be passed on to other activists. Having located the gun, Lotte is tragically shot with it, in another accidental but overdetermined act of violence, when she chases down the young boys who have stolen her purse and they turn the weapon they find inside it on her. This chapter ends with an image of Lotte's coffin moving across the screen on a conveyor belt as it is loaded onto an airplane, exactly repeating, with only a change in direction, a previous shot of Yeter's coffin being unloaded from the airplane.

In the final chapter of *Auf der anderen Seite*, also titled 'On the other side', Susanne travels to Turkey to collect Lotte's belongings from Nejat and to visit Ayten. In the airport, Susanne unknowingly crosses paths with Ali, whose deportation from Germany coincides with her own arrival in Istanbul. In a striking sequence that is marked by a strong formal-aesthetic divergence from the other scenes of the film, Susanne experiences inconsolable grief for the loss of her daughter while staying in a hotel room. Her grief is conveyed through a series of static takes, linked together through dissolves, that track the passing of time in a sequence reminiscent of time-lapse photography. Shot from one awkward camera angle, with the camera positioned high on the wall like a surveillance device, revealing a fish-eye view of the hotel room, the scene is noteworthy for both Susanne's highly expressive outpouring of sadness (unique even within a film about death that is riddled with tragic events) and for the unusually distanced way in which this sadness is represented, through the single, skewed camera angle that draws attention to the cinematic apparatus. With its use of observational cinematography that recalls the formal rigor of the Berlin School, this scene depicts emotions without emotionalizing, eschewing strategies of the cinema of identification and opening up an ambiguous space of representation through the tension between form and content. Susanne's protracted mourning for Lotte contrasts sharply with the notable absence of such expressions of grief over Yeter's death—since the one person who would mourn her loss, Ayten, never learns of her death—highlighting the asymmetrical relations that determine the grievability of life.[46] Through this scene, the white child Lotte appears to function as a cipher for the grief that is not expressed over racialized bodies like Yeter's that have been made disposable by the precariousness of life in global capitalism.

46 See Butler, *Frames of War.*

The whiteness of Susanne and Lotte is further marked by a subsequent scene taking place in Nejat's apartment, where Susanne spends the night in the room Lotte had rented. Clearly riddled with guilt for arguing with Lotte and withdrawing financial support from her during their last conversation, Susanne now reads Lotte's diary and discovers her daughter's recognition of their similarities and empathy for Susanne's position. Waking up in Lotte's room in the morning, Susanne conjures the image of her white, blonde-haired daughter positioned against the whitewashed walls of the sunlit room. The apparition of Lotte, returned from the dead, appears not so much to haunt Susanne as to dissolve her trauma and unbind her from grief, opening up a pathway forward. Ultimately, Susanne's undoing in these scenes conveys the dissolution of the cliché of the white German mother that she has embodied so far in the film. The marked change in her demeanour and the film's final narrative events suggest that Susanne's original standpoint as a white European is displaced by her experience of loss and the connections she makes in Istanbul.

After a convivial dinner with Nejat, Susanne asks him how much rent her daughter paid, and proposes that she take over Lotte's contract as Nejat's tenant. Having previously defended the values (and boundaries) of Europe, Susanne now decides to stay in Istanbul, stepping into her daughter's shoes—in another instance of repetition with a difference—and aiming to repay the debts incurred throughout the narrative of *Auf der anderen Seite* by facilitating reconciliation along multiple registers. When Susanne visits Ayten in jail, she uses the same words that Lotte had spoken, 'I want to help you', offering Ayten whatever she needs: money, lawyers, food. In a striking shot, Ayten's reflection in the glass pane of the prison visiting booth is superimposed on Susanne, who sits behind it, so that the two women's faces overlap but never merge (see Illustration 18). Reminiscent of a similar shot at the outset of *Fremde Haut* that aligns Fariba's face with the border patrol officer as she enters Germany, this shot also strongly recalls a well-known image from Margarete von Trotta's classic feminist film *Die bleierne Zeit* (The Leaden Years, released in English as *Marianne and Juliane*, 1981) about domestic terrorism in Germany in the 1970s. That shot, taking place when Juliane (Jutta Lampe) visits Marianne (Barbara Sukowa) in jail, superimposes at a similarly skewed angle the faces of the two sisters, stand-ins for Christiane Ensslin and her sister, founding member of the Red Army Faction Gudrun Ensslin. In *Die bleierne Zeit* this shot notably highlights the sisters' similarities across political difference, with Christiane representing liberal feminism and her sister an advocate of violent resistance against the state, but it also indexes the incommensurability of their positions on opposite sides of the prison's walls.

18. The incommensurable positionalities of Susanne (Hanna Schygulla) and Ayten (Nurgül Yeşilçay) in Fatih Akin's *Auf der anderen Seite* (*The Edge of Heaven*, 2007).

In *Auf der anderen Seite*, the superimposed faces of Ayten and Susanne similarly register incommensurable positionalities (in terms of political affiliation, generation, class, race, religion, and citizenship, as well as incarceration) but also similarity across difference, not least in terms of their shared grief for Lotte, vocally expressed by the weeping Ayten in this scene. Subsequently, her meeting with Susanne animates Ayten's decision to follow up on a previous offer to recant her radical political stance in order to secure release from jail. Thus, Susanne's rejection of Ayten's assumption of responsibility for Lotte's death and her reiteration of Lotte's attempts to help Ayten ultimately lead to redemption, and this is one reason underlying critiques of the film's affirmative politics. However, whereas Susanne had originally reproached Lotte for offering Ayten hospitality and bristled at Ayten's presence in her home, now Susanne helps Ayten, eventually offering her a place to sleep, emphasizing that Susanne's change of attitude actually vindicates Ayten's political critique of the hypocrisy of European values.

Susanne also facilitates Nejat's reconciliation with his father, whom he had previously cut off contact from, not wanting to be associated with a murderer. But once again this reconciliation is also contingent. Nejat and Susanne watch from the apartment window as men stream through the streets to visit the mosque in the early morning of Bayram, the Festival of Sacrifice celebrating the prophet Ibrahim's willingness to sacrifice his son to demonstrate his loyalty to Allah. As Nejat relates the story, Susanne notes that the same story is also part of the Judeo-Christian tradition, emphasizing

once more the trope of similarity across difference. Nejat recalls that as a child, the story scared him, but his father had insisted that he would protect his son even at the cost of making an enemy of God. When Susanne asks him about his father, Nejat's childhood recollection causes him to reconsider his choice to renounce Ali, and he decides to travel to the family's ancestral home of Trabzon on the Black Sea Coast to find him.

Conjoining religious with familial reconciliation, this scene is a prelude to the film's final sequence, which returns us to the prologue of *Auf der anderen Seite*, repeating (now with a difference in our comprehension of its significance) Nejat's stop at the convenience store where he hears the music of Kazım Koyuncu, but this time following him as he travels on to Trabzon. However, in line with the missed connections that abound in *Auf der anderen Seite*, Nejat never finds his father. Instead, in an extended long take, Nejat sits on the beach waiting for Ali to return from a fishing trip. Though Nejat has learned that the sea is becoming choppy and Ali should be returning soon, he never does; as Nejat waits on the beach, the credits roll, and we watch him waiting until the screen fades to black.

Like the other films discussed in this chapter, *Auf der anderen Seite* thus concludes with an open ending that registers an absence, and one that does not provide closure. As Breger argues, Akın's polysemic film 'invites audiences to consider the presented configurations with critical curiosity rather than submitting to the force of naturalized evidence produced by "classical" form', but unlike postmodern fictions, Akın's film does not indulge in resignation, nor does it employ a Brechtian form of narration that should result in a clear critical analysis.[47] Rather, as Breger argues: 'The film's procedure through doublings and repetitions with a difference, which actively unfolds narrative's potential for engaging specificity and contrast along with relation and similarity, thus attains significance as a means of breaking the hold of, while not forgetting, the legacies of hatred and inequality that stand in the way of good feelings.'[48] Breger highlights how *Auf der anderen Seite* holds together ostensibly incommensurable political commitments 'to both critiquing the weight of socio-symbolic regimes of difference and affirming a horizon of transnational, transfaith interconnection', figured through its disorganized engagement of multivalent forms (an emphasis on narrative and storytelling that also strives for critical distance and eschews conventional forms of identification).[49] Mennel also emphasizes

47 Breger, 'Configuring Affect', 86.
48 Breger, 'Configuring Affect', 87.
49 Breger, 'Configuring Affect', 86.

how *Auf der anderen Seite* 'exceeds the different academic categories of national, European, or minority cinema. With its multilingual dialogues, actors and actresses, and its multinational locations and relationships, the film questions the category of national cinema'.[50] In this regard, it is noteworthy that all the film's characters end up in Turkey, including and especially Susanne, the German mother and resignified Maria Braun, whose character literally deterritorializes German cinema, while also in El-Tayeb's sense, creating cracks in the circular logic of normative European identities. Ultimately, while the film gestures at reconciliation, the debts accrued throughout *Auf der anderen Seite* are left unpaid—indeed, the film demonstrates how the language of debt is ultimately insufficient for doing justice to the incommensurability of exchange in a world defined by unequal and asymmetrical relations of race, class, and nation.

Resignifying Genre in *Jerichow*

Christian Petzold's *Jerichow* tracks the love triangle between the Turkish German owner of a chain of snack bars in the Prignitz, a rural region of northeastern Germany, who, like the character from *Auf der anderen Seite*, bears the overburdened name Ali; his white, ethnic German wife Laura, whose marriage to Ali is shaped by contracts and debts; and Thomas, an unemployed veteran of the war in Afghanistan, also a white ethnic German, who has come to the Prignitz to occupy and renovate the home he has inherited. A film in which money plays a prominent role in nearly every scene, *Jerichow* makes visible the economization of everything in the age of neoliberalism. *Jerichow* also attends to the othering logic of racial capitalism via similar strategies to those deployed in the three films discussed here thus far, including the deployment and dissolution of clichés, repetition with a difference, the resignification of familiar tropes from film history, and a narrative emphasis on labour and debt.

A loose adaptation of *The Postman Always Rings Twice, Jerichow* engages along multiple vectors with the influential story first introduced in James M. Cain's 1934 crime novel and later reworked for the screen numerous times from the 1930s onward.[51] Drawing on *Postman*, Petzold pursues in *Jerichow*

50 Mennel, 'Criss-Crossing in Global Space and Time', 5.

51 *The Postman Always Rings Twice* has provided generative material for multiple adaptations across national cinemas and in both popular and art film contexts. The most well-known adaptations include Pierre Chenal's *Le Dernier Tournant* (The Last Turn, France, 1939); Luchino

a number of themes that have long characterized his cinema, including new corporealities, the shifting terrain of material and immaterial labour, and the intertwining of erotic and economic desires. *Jerichow* also develops a new emphasis within Petzold's *oeuvre*—one suggested by the *Postman* material, especially Cain's novel—on race and ethnicity, as they intersect with class, gender, and sexuality.

In *Jerichow*, the generic iconography of *Postman*, and of Hollywood noir more broadly, overlaps with other genre precursors, including popular German *Heimatfilme* of the 1950s, as well as several Fassbinder films. In fact, Petzold's *oeuvre*—what Jaimey Fisher calls his 'art-house genre cinema'—is defined by engagement with a wide range of genre precursors, which Petzold notably cites, adapts, and remixes in his films, another example of how genre has been crucial to the development of the Berlin School's aesthetics.[52] In his early features, this took the shape of Hitchcock citations, particularly from *Vertigo* (1958), as well as references to noir films, especially those with a connection to German film history, such as Edgar G. Ulmer's *Detour* (1945). In his intermediate work, including the acclaimed 'Ghost Trilogy', Petzold began a much more explicit and concerted reworking of genre precursors, paraphrasing Kathryn Bigelow's vampire Western *Near Dark* (1987) in the breakthrough *Die innere Sicherheit* (*The State I Am In*, 2000); engaging with Weimar classics, including Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922) in *Gespenster* (*Ghosts*, 2005); and reworking Herk Harvey's cult horror classic *Carnival of Souls* (1962) in *Yella* (2007). In each case, the narrative arc, motifs, and bodily gestures of the precursor film forms the staging ground for Petzold's central preoccupation as a filmmaker: exploring the economic and political underpinnings of the neoliberal present.

Coming on the heels of the 'Ghost Trilogy', *Jerichow* further develops Petzold's emphasis on both the phantomlike aftereffects of German national history and the workings of post-Fordist capitalism in the present. The context of the Berlin School has largely determined Petzold's critical reception, and *Jerichow,* the most recent in a series of prestigious European films to rework *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, would seem to confirm his place within the pantheon of European arthouse directors. However, Petzold's reworking of the *Postman* material differs substantially from that of Visconti, just as his engagement with Hollywood genre cinema functions differently from

Visconti's *Ossessione* (*Obsession*, Italy, 1943); Tay Garnett's Hollywood adaptation *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1946) and a later Hollywood remake, adapted for the screen by David Mamet and directed by Bob Rafelson, also called *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1981).

52 See Fisher, *Christian Petzold.*

the deconstructive aims of his new wave antecedents, including Fassbinder. Petzold's much-cited description of his relation to genre—'I have the feeling that I make films in the cemetery of genre cinema, from the remainders that are still there for the taking'—underscores the spectral quality of his films, which archive the aesthetic and political remnants of the past in the present.[53] But this 'archaeology of genre' is also crucial to Petzold's larger project of finding suitable images to describe the transformations that mark the contemporary world.[54] Indeed, Petzold's films aim to redo genre, mining film history for usable remnants that can be recombined and resignified into images of the present. The disorganized formal language that emerges in *Jerichow* is crucial to the film's exposure of neoliberalism and to its mapping of the present, making *Jerichow* an exemplary film for the tendencies discussed in this chapter and throughout this book.

In *Jerichow,* Petzold uses the *Postman* template to resignify the German *Heimatfilm*, emphasizing the deindustrialized landscape of the former East Germany and the individualization and privatization of conceptions of home and identity in the Berlin Republic. In its focus on the intertwining of economic and intimate forms of subjugation in advanced capitalism, *Jerichow* also builds on the representation of entrepreneurship and marriage in Fassbinder's critique of the West German Economic Miracle, *Händler der vier Jahreszeiten* (*Merchant of the Four Seasons*, 1971). Finally, like *Auf der anderen Seite*, *Jerichow* highlights the transformation of labour and the changing status of migrants in Germany by reworking aspects of Fassbinder's *Ali – Angst essen Seele auf.* Underpinning Petzold's approach to this material in *Jerichow* is a sustained focus on the way economic transactions shape and are shaped by changing formations of race, class, gender, and sexuality in the neoliberal age.

In contrast to the other *Postman* films—most of which repress the ethnicity of the Nick Papadakis character—*Jerichow* desublimates the novel's attention to everyday racism and its imbrication with economic and erotic desires. In fact, *Jerichow* suggests that a key reason for the persistence of *Postman* derives not least from the way that it offers a generic template for investigating the intersectionality of these categories at moments of historical and socioeconomic transition. Generic traits of the *Postman* films taken up in *Jerichow* include its low-key lighting scheme and night-time scenes, its tripartite narrative structure echoing the theme of the love triangle, its story focusing on intertwined forms of deception, its images of the body

53 Abel, 'The Cinema of Identification Gets on My Nerves.'

54 Fisher, *Christian Petzold*, 14.

at work, and its emphasis on both the ocean and motor vehicles as spaces of mobility, desire, and death. As in the *Postman* precursors, a returning veteran comes to the aid of a small business owner, who employs him in a relationship with both economic and homoerotic resonances. When the veteran and the business owner's attractive wife meet, they begin an affair which culminates in their plot to murder her husband.

However, here the plot similarities end. Instead of echoing the narrative development of *Postman*, *Jerichow* intervenes in it at every turn, responding to our generic expectations with plot swerves and inversions, and remixing *Postman*'s iconography in ways that aim to heighten our awareness of the historical present. As Michael Sicinski has suggested, 'genre reinscription or repetition-with-difference' functions as a form of affective mapping in Petzold's cinema, allowing us to grasp and consider aspects of the present that remain otherwise imperceptible.[55] In this way, Petzold's redoing of *Postman* can be described as a resignification of the novel and its various filmic incarnations that inflects the material with gestures and motifs of the present; this repetition with difference specifically draws our attention to the shifting landscapes and the changing corporealities of today.

Jerichow begins with a prologue of sorts that inverts the plot of *Postman* to situate a mother's funeral at the outset of the film. It is Thomas's mother who has died, and the army veteran has returned to the Prignitz to live in his dilapidated childhood home, which he plans to remodel. However, when Leon (André M. Hennicke), Thomas's former business partner, turns up at the funeral demanding repayment of a debt he owes on a failed café they opened together, which subsequently went bankrupt, Thomas is forced to turn over his meagre savings, voiding his hopes for a new beginning in Jerichow. From the outset, then, *Jerichow* makes visible the centrality of debt to the experience of the present.

The role of place is established as intrinsic to *Jerichow*'s presentation of labour, money, and debt. In contrast to heritage-style films that engage in nostalgia for the GDR past through painstakingly authentic mise-en-scène (see Chapter 2), however, *Jerichow* presents the historical space of the former GDR more elliptically. Denuded of any explicit visual signifiers of the East German past, Jerichow is marked as eastern first by inference, since the film's title refers to an actual, biblical-sounding town in eastern Germany whose name carries with it the valence of resurrection, and then by reference, when Leon refers to Thomas's childhood in the GDR. His casual mention of the discrete frames of reference that continue to mark

55 Sicinski, 'Once the Wall Has Tumbled', 9.

the mindsets of eastern vs. western Germans establishes the asymmetrical power relationship that pertains between (eastern) debtors and (western) creditors, a key aspect of the film's assertion of how remnants of the past continue to haunt the present.

As in *Postman*, the *rural* setting of an uncharted area newly accessible by motor vehicle is especially crucial to the way the hopes and dreams of the disenfranchised take shape and are (quite literally) dashed in *Jerichow*. Petzold has emphasized that he views Tay Garnett's 1946 *Postman* as one of the only Hollywood movies to explicitly engage with class struggle; as critics have argued, a key innovation of *Postman* was its removal of the film noir out of the city and into the deindustrialized countryside where class dynamics appear in sharp relief.[56]

The first half of *Jerichow*, focalized through the perspective of Thomas, follows his developing relationship with Ali, an alcoholic prone to drunk driving, who hires Thomas to serve as his driver after he loses his license. It is through Thomas's perspective—and thus through the eyes of the disoriented East German—that we learn about Ali's business practices and come to see the economization of the landscape. Like *Fremde Haut* and *Auf der anderen Seite, Jerichow* abounds with vehicular scenes, which capture the driver and the passenger from behind, in an over-the-shoulder perspective; throughout Petzold's cinema, cars serve as liminal spaces that emphasize the breakdown of the public/private divide.[57] Thus, *Jerichow* disperses *Postman*'s mid-century dream of a gas station, a stable place in a mobile landscape, onto the neoliberal non-places—intersections, parking lots, discount retailers, and strip malls—that proliferate in the former GDR.

On the one hand, the space of eastern Germany represents the possibility of building something new. As Petzold has described it, Thomas and Ali are united in *Jerichow* by the common project of '*Heimat*-Building', of the attempt to forge an identity and a sense of home in this rural landscape, albeit one that is individualized and privatized, thoroughly uncoupled from any collective notion of regional identity formerly suggested by the term *Heimat*.[58] On the other hand, *Jerichow* unmasks the landscape as one haunted by the failed utopias of the past and the present—of both East

56 See Uehling, 'Wiederauferstehung in der Prignitz.' In this interview, Petzold credits his mentor Harun Farocki with pointing him to Garnett's *The Postman Always Rings Twice* as a Hollywood film addressing class struggle.

57 On the significance of automobiles in Petzold's films, see also Koepnick, 'Cars…'

58 Kothenschulte, 'Die blaue Stunde der einsamen Heimat'; see also King, 'The Province Always Rings Twice' and Abel, *The Counter-Cinema of the Berlin School*, 69-110.

Bloc socialism and finance capitalism—since Ali's business and private life are both marked by forms of exploitation and deception that constellate around money and debt.

Unlike the drifter Frank in the other versions of *Postman*, the veteran Thomas is explicitly positioned as a man returning to his own native region, and indeed his own house, in *Jerichow*. Nonetheless, in crucial ways he is a stranger in his own *Heimat*, which has changed radically in the years while Thomas was away. Not only does Thomas lack money, employment, and a car, but he is also thoroughly disoriented by the conventions that shape social and economic life in contemporary Germany. When Thomas visits the employment office in search of a job, a close up shows his hand crushing a waiting room ticket bearing the number 89, a rather overt reference to the cruel optimism retrospectively signified by 1989 and to the precarity characteristic of life in the 'new German states' today. The agent at the employment office castigates Thomas for his style of dress, his demeanour, and his lack of marketable skills; when he tries to use food stamps at the grocery store, the cashier admonishes him for failing to do so properly. Rather ironically, the only kind of work Thomas can find is day labour as a vegetable harvester, and we see him performing the backbreaking work of picking cucumbers on a huge combine—the kind of labour that in the GDR provided a solid form of employment and in West Germany was often the province of migrant workers. In *Jerichow,* this precarious labour is performed by the leagues of unemployed white ethnic Germans who populate the Prignitz, whereas the Turkish-born migrant Ali has found success as an entrepreneur, seizing on the opportunity of German unification to build up his franchise.

The inversion of status marked by the ethnic German Thomas's disenfranchisement and the racial other Ali's financial success suggests the eclipse of traditional class- and race-based socioeconomic categories, and the triumph of neoliberal conceptions of the entrepreneurial self. But *Jerichow* offers neither a celebratory vision of a postracial Germany, nor an image of the migrant as victim of discrimination; rather its depiction of race and ethnicity is shifting, inconsistent, and fluid, failing to add up to a coherent whole. Like *Dealer, Jerichow* disorganizes normative representations, suggesting how race and class no longer form the basis for an identity-based oppositional politics in the contemporary context and yet continue to inform the subjective lives of individuals and their ways of inhabiting the world.

In the second half of *Jerichow*, the narrative perspective shifts from Thomas to Laura, though this subtle shift from male to female perspective is not explicitly marked through formal or stylistic means in the film. In

19. Resisting traditional conventions of marking gender: Laura (Nina Hoss) works off her debt in Christian Petzold's *Jerichow* (2008).

contrast to some of the *Postman* precursors which foreground the character of the femme fatale, such conventions do not mark Laura's representation in *Jerichow*. When she does become the object of the camera, this is virtually always attended by an amplified structure of looking, as we watch Ali watch Thomas watch Laura. More often, it is not Laura whom we look at but Thomas, whose sculpted torso is repeatedly bared and whose attractive profile the camera lingers on. If Thomas occupies a feminized position, Laura is largely pictured in long shot, in postures of work that deemphasize her specularity, or in chiaroscuro images that obscure her face and body (see Illustration 19). While the narrative shift to Laura's perspective does not change this inverted specularity, it does shift attention to the ongoing economization of gender relations, sexual politics, and family life and to the specific status of women in neoliberalism.

Laura is encumbered by a mountain of debt that she is desperate to pay off in order to free herself from dependency on Ali. As in the other *Postman* iterations, Laura married Ali because of his financial stability and his promise to liberate her from a work environment marked by sexual harassment. When they married, Ali took over Laura's debt, but a prenuptial contract ensures that the debt will revert to her in the case of divorce. Laura's financial deception—she has a deal with the beverage wholesaler to overcharge Ali and split the surplus—is motivated by her desire to escape both her indebtedness to Ali and his beatings. Unmoored from any social structures or communities of solidarity that could help or protect her, Laura is literally the only woman in *Jerichow*. Through its narrative of sexual violence, *Jerichow* foregrounds the asymmetry of gender relations

and female disempowerment, even as it resists traditional conventions of marking gender on a formal level. This disorganized presentation of gender and sexuality makes visible the paradoxical destabilizing and strengthening of heteronormativity in neoliberalism, where the flexibilization of gender roles and family structures ostensibly offers 'choices', but where economic precarity limits the availability of these options to individuals. As Laura tells Thomas in the film's pivotal scene, 'You can't be in love if you don't have any money.'

Jerichow demonstrates, in Berlant's sense, the collapse of good-life fantasies of gainful employment, job security, and enduring intimacy, as well as the ongoing attachment of Thomas, Laura, and Ali to normativities that do them harm. Offered the opportunity to participate in Ali's business, Thomas pursues an intimate attachment to Laura, which undermines his relationship to Ali. Despite the fact that he beats her, Laura remains bound to Ali and the hope that he will pay off her debts. But it is the cruel optimism of Ali that the film demonstrates most relentlessly. Ali is brutally aware of his status in Germany—as he says at one point, 'I live in a land that doesn't want me with a wife I bought', emphasizing the double-edged responsibilization of the migrant, whose success in business is ultimately no guarantee of integration. Indeed, *Jerichow* is at pains to demonstrate at what cost Ali's success comes. Like Fassbinder's Ali, Petzold's Ali attaches to racial, sexual, familial, and economic normativities that quite literally break his heart. Predicated on a franchise system that allows him to profit doubly by avoiding social contributions for his employees while also requiring them to purchase wholesale products exclusively through his supply chain, Ali's business model exploits recent immigrants to Germany who are more economically vulnerable than himself. His employees are constantly scheming new ways of gaming Ali's system to circumvent his exploitative monopoly and pocket the profit, whether selling drinks purchased elsewhere or simply neglecting to enter expensive purchases into the cash register. *Jerichow*'s detailed representation of the deception and exploitation that pervade all levels of business dealing capture in microcosm the corruption at the heart of capitalist enterprise. As in Fassbinder's films, the pressure Ali experiences by participating in this system of exploitation erupts both externally, in racist mistreatment of his employees and sexual violence against his wife, and internally, in his alcoholism and, ultimately, his heart failure.

Throughout the film, Ali's interpellation into systems of white privilege, heteronormativity, and misogyny is manifested in ways that make his otherwise sympathetic character anathema to the viewer, paving the way

for the murder plot. *Jerichow*'s ultimate inversion of *Postman*—a narrative secret withheld from Thomas and Laura, as well as from the viewer, until the film's penultimate scene—is the fact that, long before this murder plot emerges, Ali is already a dead man. With the knowledge that he is dying of a heart ailment, Ali has actually been grooming Thomas to be his wife's next business and sexual partner, cultivating his knowledge of the snack bar chain and encouraging his attraction to Laura. While apparently motivated by his desire to maintain a structure of caregiving for Laura after his death, without knowledge of his illness, Ali's orchestration of a relationship between Thomas and Laura plays upon normative assumptions about who belongs to and with whom, disorganizing generic conventions in order to make visible and palpable the normativities that underpin our apprehension of the present. As Sincinski has argued, 'Petzold is aligning genre with Western bigotry, in order to demonstrate how neatly they line up [...] *Jerichow* becomes an occasion for coaxing us into old, harmful habits of seeing in order to shift those habits in surprising, productive new directions.'[59] In this way, the film's ending, in which the harmfulness of unconscious racism is unmasked, resignifies the formal language of *Jerichow*'s various precursor films.

After Ali reveals his illness to Laura, as well as his plans to pay off her debts and provide for her after he is gone, she tries to call off the murder plot, but not before Ali gets wind of it. Furious, he drives off the cliff, taking his death into his own hands and undoing the possibility of economic or intimate resolution. *Jerichow* echoes the conventional *Heimatfilm* ending, in which an outsider is expunged from the community in order to ensure the union of ethnically and regionally compatible characters. But the *Postman* antecedents, which guarantee the unhappiness of such a union, intercede against this problematic closure. Unlike *Postman*, in which the femme fatale is generally punished with death after successfully killing off her husband, in *Jerichow* Thomas and Laura are both left standing, mute witnesses to their unbinding from optimism. Ali's suicide calls attention to the self-harm caused by attachment to normativities, but as in Fassbinder's films, this temporary insight changes nothing; in fact, when Ali's Range Rover goes over the cliff, we don't even see it explode. Thus, like the other films discussed here, *Jerichow* concludes with an open ending marking an absence, and one that makes patently visible how, by virtue of their exclusion, Europeans of colour are the glue that holds Europe together.

In 2006, while he was developing *Jerichow*, Petzold engaged in a public email exchange on the topic of the Berlin School with two other prominent

59 Sicinski, 'Once the Wall Has Tumbled', 8-9.

German filmmakers, Dominik Graf and Christoph Hochhäusler. The email exchange, which was later published in the Berlin School's film journal, *Revolver*, played a prominent role in the public discussions taking place at the time about whether the Berlin School should be considered a legitimate and representative form of German national cinema for the 21st century (see also Chapter 5). In the email exchange, Graf articulates a vision of genre as the path forward for the perpetually vexed German film industry, arguing that genre provides a horizon for uniting the disparate agendas of art and entertainment that German cinema has rarely succeeded in bringing together. Graf specifically highlights the one uniquely German contribution to the history of genre: 'We dreamt up the *Heimatfilm*—who knows what it might still be capable of.'[60] Petzold proves highly receptive to Graf's plea for genre, responding that 'German genre films would definitely interest me', and suggesting that for his own work the Berlin School itself has functioned as something like a genre, 'for genre means neighborhood, series, differences, and similarities'.[61] The email exchange proved particularly formative for Petzold's approach to creating 'a German genre film' in *Jerichow*, an approach that has also characterized his subsequent films, including his retort to the German heritage film, the thriller *Barbara* (2012) and his reboot of the rubble film, *Phoenix* (2014). Petzold's engagement with genre is, as I have suggested, a cornerstone of his, and the Berlin School's, transnational appeal and successful postcinematic mode of production and reception.

As a concerted attempt to create a cinematic neighbourhood, the aesthetic and political project of *Jerichow* overlaps not only with Berlin School films like *Dealer*, but also with other contemporary films that make visible how racialized minorities are simultaneously held responsible for and made disposable by global neoliberalism, including *Fremde Haut* and *Auf der anderen Seite*. Their common strategy of 'repetition with a difference' in the presentation of clichés and stereotypes, the depiction of debt and exchange, and the citation of generic conventions, extends to the way all of these films draw on the formal strategies of German cinema, especially those inspired by feminist and queer cinema and the enduring influence of Fassbinder. Repetition with a difference helps to capture how all four films discussed here offer a vision for refiguring German cinema in and for the neoliberal age, as an unfixed, polysemic, multilingual, and transnational entity rife with paradoxes but also with legacies worthy of resignification.

60 Graf, Hochhäusler, and Petzold, 'Mailwechsel.'
61 Graf, Hochhäusler, and Petzold, 'Mailwechsel.'

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Conclusion: German Cinema in the Age of Neoliberalism

In a key scene toward the end of Maren Ade's *Toni Erdmann* (2016), Ines (Sandra Hüller), a management consultant in Bucharest, hosts a brunch party to celebrate her birthday. An exemplary neoliberal subject, Ines knows only work and the constant quest for self-optimization; accordingly, her birthday brunch has been organized as a team-building event for her management group, whose mission to modernize a Romanian oil company through the massive outsourcing of jobs has caused strife among her colleagues. However, when the doorbell rings just as she is struggling with a wardrobe malfunction, Ines answers the door naked, and spontaneously decides only to admit guests to the party who agree to shed their clothes as well. Initially repelled by the naked party, several of her colleagues surmise that it must be part of the team-building exercise and awkwardly stand around Ines's living room sipping wine in the nude.

Toni Erdmann chronicles the attempts of Ines's father Winfried (Peter Simonischek), a retired music teacher with a penchant for practical jokes, to puncture the glossy façade of Ines's life, which, as he suspects, belies her insecurity, obstructed agency, and ultimate emptiness. He does this by adopting an array of wigs, prostheses, masks, and personae—notably that of the 'life coach' Toni Erdmann—that call attention to the performance of the self enacted by Ines and her business-world colleagues, a mode of self-fashioning whose ostensibly blank style makes it otherwise illegible as performance. At the naked brunch, Winfried arrives in his most extravagant get-up yet: clothed as a Kukeri, he wears a traditional Bulgarian costume designed to ward away evil spirits that consists of a full-body suit covered in long, dark hair, replete with a massive mask decorated in bright pom-poms. His strange and troubling presence at the party, where no one can determine his identity beneath the hairy mask, further disturbs the already immensely uncomfortable guests. Awkward, unsettling, and hilarious, this scene employs slapstick comedy and visual jokes to generate an affective response among viewers that conjoins laughter with discomfort. Like *Toni Erdmann* as a whole, the naked brunch scene makes visible the illusion of

Baer, H., *German Cinema in the Age of Neoliberalism*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021. DOI: 10.5117/9789463727334_CONCL

20. Figuring insecurity and the lack of social solidarity in neoliberalism. Ines (Sandra Hüller) hosts a naked brunch in Maren Ade's *Toni Erdmann* (2016). Image courtesy of Komplizen Film.

neutrality that characterizes neoliberal subjectivity and unmasks insecurity as the dominant contemporary structure of experience; with its send-up of 'team-building', the naked brunch points specifically to the lack of social solidarity in Ines's life and in today's world more broadly.

Toni Erdmann is a film that aims to depict the contemporary economy in all of its facets: we see oil production, the 'business case' of attempts to modernize an outdated conglomerate, interactions between CEOs and management consultants, conspicuous consumption at 'the largest mall in Europe', and a wide range of trades, barters, and gifts. Money and transactional exchanges play a prominent role in nearly every scene, foregrounding the ubiquitous economization that characterizes millennial capitalism. Shifting class structures in the aftermath of state socialism and globalization underpin the film's representation of characters from the international business class, Romanians adapting to or threatened by emergent capitalism and those barely subsisting, as well as the two German protagonists, whose status as middle-class Western Europeans continues to inform their privilege, even as this class status seems increasingly out of the ordinary. With its narrative of workplace sexism, Ade's film also lays bare the coexistence of flexible gender roles and new forms of mobility with entrenched patriarchal conventions and social hierarchies, exposing the discourse of responsibilization that blames the individual, rather than social structures, for failure to get ahead. In its remarkable depiction of all of these facets of the present, *Toni Erdmann* constitutes a landmark in the cinematic representation of neoliberalism.

A culmination of many of the emergent tendencies of German cinema in the age of neoliberalism traced in this book, *Toni Erdmann* might also be

viewed as emblematic of a new stage in the interrelated developments of neoliberalization and German film history. Following the financial crisis of 2008, which exacerbated endemic insecurity and gave new visibility to the repertoire of advanced capitalism, neoliberalism came to form a more explicit and direct focus of films made in its wake. Exemplary among these, *Toni Erdmann* employs—like many of the films discussed throughout this book—a disorganized aesthetic language that indexes, on a formal level, the precarity that forms the matrix of its narrative, while indelibly revealing the incommensurability that shapes life in the present.

Toni Erdmann also boasts the highest ticket sales of any film to date made by a director associated with the Berlin School, a fact that results not least from its intervention into the comedy genre and its marketing campaign, especially abroad, where it was widely promoted under the banner of that oxymoronic entity, a German comedy. With its comparably large budget, verge into genre cinema, departure from the austere formal language and affectless acting style typically associated with Berlin School films, not to speak of its remarkable popular success, *Toni Erdmann* heralds new possibilities; as a German comedy that travels *and* as a blockbuster art film, Ade's film also reverses the characteristic dynamic of popular German cinema in the age of neoliberalism, which has typically succeeded, as we have seen, by cannibalizing the aesthetics and politics of art cinema in the service of market-driven, affirmative culture. In this regard, it is even more remarkable that *Toni Erdmann* made the short list of Oscar nominees for Best Foreign Language Film and was subsequently optioned for a Hollywood remake.

Scholarship on contemporary German cinema has tended to reiterate longstanding categories and oppositions that have structured our apprehension of film history, categories that the marketization of culture and the omnivorousness of global neoliberalism render problematic. In response, I have sought throughout this book to develop new strategies of analysis that emphasize formal-aesthetic and thematic continuities across ostensibly opposed registers, styles, and classifications of film. Focusing on the period of neoliberalism's emergence and intensification (1980-2010), I have traced the way films from East, West, and post-unification Germany have both participated in and resisted the neoliberal project, sometimes encompassing both impulses at once, while also comprising an archive of what is being lost due to globalization, gentrification, labour flexibilization, and the demise of collective utopias, among other associated developments.

In considering the commonalities among the diverse spectrum of films addressed here, and the way they defy conventional categorization, I have engaged with varied theoretical frames across the chapters of this book.

Chapters 1 and 2 address the neoliberal transition in dialogue with Gilles Deleuze's theory of cinema, especially the concept of the crystal-image, a figure that helps to conceptualize the changing cinematic relationship between time and money and the eclipse of postwar art cinema by commercial imperatives in the 1980s and beyond. Chapters 3 and 4 draw on feminist/queer affect theory, especially the work of Lauren Berlant and Sara Ahmed, in examining political and cultural re-orientation in the context of the transformation of everyday life driven by neoliberalization. Chapters 5 and 6 consider questions of genre in dialogue with feminist, queer, and critical race theory, including the work of Volker Woltersdorff and Fatima El-Tayeb, focusing on changing understandings of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, and citizenship in neoliberal times. Throughout the book, my close readings of individual films also engage with a range of critical approaches in German film studies. An integral aspect of this project is my feminist analysis of how neoliberal social and economic policies contribute to the recasting of gender and national identities around the new millennium, developments that the films discussed here make uniquely visible.

Ultimately, my analysis shows how contemporary German film productions respond to the changed context in which cinema operates today, when the contradiction between the commercial and cultural functions of film—which shaped German film history in the 20th century so profoundly—has been largely resolved in favour of the mandate for profitability. However, as the example of *Toni Erdmann* suggests, this context has led not only to affirmative, conciliatory, and consensus-driven filmmaking, but also to new aesthetic constellations and imaginaries.

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This book presents a new history of German film from 1980-2010, a period that witnessed rapid transformations, including intensified globalization, a restructured world economy, geopolitical realignment, and technological change, all of which have affected cinema in fundamental ways. Rethinking the conventional periodization of German film history, Baer posits 1980 – rather than 1989 – as a crucial turning point for German cinema's embrace of a new market orientation and move away from the state-sponsored film culture that characterized both DEFA and the New German Cinema. Reading films from East, West, and post-unification Germany together, Baer argues that contemporary German cinema is characterized most strongly by its origins in and responses to advanced capitalism. Informed by a feminist approach and in dialogue with prominent theories of contemporary film, the book places a special focus on how German films make visible the neoliberal recasting of gender and national identities around the new millennium.

Hester Baer is Associate Professor of German and Cinema and Media Studies at the University of Maryland, College Park. She is the author of *Dismantling the Dream Factory: Gender, German Cinema, and the Postwar Quest for a New Film Language*. She currently serves as co-editor of the journal *Feminist German Studies*.

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This book theorizes neoliberalism beyond a reductive sole emphasis on economics. Instead, it convincingly demonstrates the gendering of neoliberalism through the reading of key films illuminating German cinema with robust, sophisticated, and in-depth scholarship.

BARBARA MENNEL, ROTHMAN CHAIR AND PROFESSOR OF GERMAN STUDIES AND FILM STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

This book provides an original and bold way to rethink German film history since the 1980s. Baer's comparative close readings, which pair films often not thought of in the same context, are provocative and eye-opening, challenging traditional wisdom and producing fresh insights where observers may have thought that all has been said. This is revisionist film history at its best.

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