

GERMAN CINEMA: SEVEN FILMS FOR SEVEN DECADES

by Thomas Elsaesser

INTRODUCTION

Germany looks back on almost as long and important a film history as Italy, France or Great Britain. And yet, during the past seven decades, its cinema has seemed ambivalent even in its achievements, subservient to political pressures, eclipsed by Hollywood, and financially precarious more often than that of any of its European neighbours. The discontinuities and contradictions of German history this century have left their mark on the cinema, but even more so on the way it is perceived. The early Twenties tend to be seen as a unique and isolated pinnacle of film art, but are judged severely for the political message the films conveyed. When the cinema became an instrument of state propaganda, as it did during the Nazi years, films were produced which expressed the regime's ideals while making no mention of its reality. The results are considered worthless artistically, but their success as technically the most perfect, most highly polished entertainment ever to appear on German screens raises issues about form and content that have yet to be resolved.

This economic and political situation in turn created a number of paradoxes around the German cinema(s) of the 1950s and 1960s, the 1970s and 1980s that require a 'revisionist' approach to film history, if they are to remain more than paradoxes. The New German Cinema of the 1970s and early 1980s, for instance, has been celebrated as an extraordinary flourishing of talent, but on closer inspection, the renaissance was short-lived, the films technically primitive, the market-strategies naive, while the efflorescence of creativity had its roots in governmental subsidy. At first praised the world over, the films failed to build audience loyalty or generic identity, and when government policy changed, the miracle became a mirage.

Taken as a whole, the German cinema is both more and less than the sum of its films. When one thinks of individual titles, quite a few, especially from the 1920s and early 1930s, have entered the canon, have become cultural icons the world over. Yet in these very same classics, the brilliant and the dark sides of their genius appear not only close together but inextricable. If we think of The Golem, The Cabinet of Dr Caligari, Nosferatu and Dr Mabuse: these are titles which by themselves evoke the spirit of an age, conjuring up superhuman faculties, demonic figures, madmen, manipulators and dictators. Or consider Fritz Lang's The Nibelungen and Metropolis: one a commercial success the world over, the other even today a potent stylistic influence on post-modern cinema, fashion, architecture and design. Yet not so long ago, both films stood condemned for inspiring the mass ornament of Hitler's parades. These public displays in turn are themselves remembered only because of a film which ever since has given rise

to controversy: Leni Riefenstahl's Triumph of the Will, a document not so much of the pseudo-event it recorded (the Nazi party-rally of 1934) as of a regime's (and a people's) collective narcissism. On the other hand, films like Pandora's Box and The Blue Angel have associated this cinema, via the female star images of Louise Brooks and Marlene Dietrich, with creating the definitive figure of the femme fatale.

If from the 1920s to the 1940s, it was individual films, taken more or less out of context, which typified the German cinema, at least for an international public, the inverse was the case some thirty years later: at first the Young German Film, then the New German Cinema made headlines as national film movements, where a generational or film-political identity imposed themselves more strikingly than individual film titles. As has also been the case with other European film movements (neo-realism, or the nouvelle vague), such identity quickly dissolves, to leave in its wake a number of star personalities and 'auteurs'. Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Werner Herzog, Wim Wenders, Hans Jürgen Syberberg, and maybe Alexander Kluge, Volker Schlöndorff, Margarethe von Trotta, Edgar Reitz and Helma Sanders-Brahms have generated a certain recognition effect for West German cinema in the 1980s.

These names, as is the mark of auteurship, stand for something more than the films they have signed (The Marriage of Maria Braun, Lili Marleen, Aguirre, Kaspar Hauser, Kings of the Road, The American Friend, Hitler-A Film from Germany, The Patriot, The Tin Drum, The German Sisters, Heimat, Germany Pale Mother). To the extent that they became stars and cultural icons, these directors were able to convey images of West Germany vivid and intriguing enough to arouse interest, however briefly, on a wider front: they seemed to engage with debates around representation and history (Kluge, Syberberg, Reitz, Fassbinder and Schlöndorff), representation and female identity (von Trotta, Sanders-Brahms) as well as propose controversial images of masculinity (Fassbinder, Wenders and Herzog).

New cinemas change our views of old cinemas, and thereby rewrite film history: in the 1980s certain consistent themes, common film forms and preoccupations of have become visible in the German cinema which seemed to offer a bridge between the 'renaissance' of the 1970s and the 'golden age' of the 1920s. Not so much because the auteurs of the new generation identified themselves, sometimes rather misleadingly, with famous names from the past: with Fritz Lang, F.W. Murnau or Douglas Sirk. In most cases, there was little direct stylistic or thematic influence. More pertinent was that the filmmakers became conscious of their role as privileged representatives of Germany, and that they knew their work would be seen in the larger perspective of how a nation pictures itself to itself and presents itself to others via the cinema: 'We are once again legitimate German culture' Werner Herzog proclaimed, and at least Wim Wenders and Hans Jürgen Syberberg nodded in agreement, while Rainer Werner Fassbinder showed them his middle finger. But even in his films the darker, problematic and somber sides of Germany and its history are well in evidence, and with it, a sense of collective responsibility in the realm of images and representations. The consequences of geographical division, the concern with political and emotional violence, especially in the

family, crises in psychic or sexual identity typify many works. A subjective, romantic, melancholy streak was unmistakable among the films of the 1970s, and it would have been recognized by the directors of the 1920s and early 1930s. The critical response, too, has in some sense repeated itself. Neo-romantics (also called 'sensibilists' like Wenders, Herzog, Werner Schroeter, Syberberg) have been contrasted with realists (also called 'contentists') like Kluge, Christian Ziewer, Helke Sander, just as alongside the famous 'Expressionist Cinema' (Robert Wiene, Paul Leni, F.W. Murnau, Carl Mayer) there had existed throughout the 1920s and early 1930s the 'Realist Cinema' of E.A. Dupont, Piel Jutzi, Slatan Dudov and Werner Hochbaum, while figures like Fritz Lang or G.W. Pabst were above (or on both sides of) the divide. Similarly, Rainer Werner Fassbinder or Doris Dörrie could be said to have mediated between the two sides of the New German Cinema. What could or did mediate between West German cinema and the cinema of the German Democratic Republic is even more difficult to estimate.

Above all, however, it is the past, and in particular, Fascism and its aftermath -often in the more domestic and local implications on lives and destinies- which gives a common reference point to very diverse directors and styles, and may even come to be seen what East and West German cinema have in common, despite the quite different genealogies. But Nazism's own dependence on visual spectacle and public show made directors of the New German Cinema very conscious and critical of what it means to be part of the cinema in Germany. The first post-war generation of directors, remembering their early childhood, or investigating the lives of their parents, everywhere came across the cinema as itself one of the most important sources of understanding history in personal terms and in a biographic context. How did their parents see themselves, in the films they watched when they were young? The 1930s and 1940s, then, as much as the 1950s belong to the pre-history of the New German Cinema.

As to the German cinema since the 'death' of the New German cinema, and especially since unification in 1990, it is almost impossible to find a common feature or indeed, discover much sign of life and vitality.... A new interest in studio and studio history, a nostalgia for Ufa and Neu-Babelsberg, now that the place is both accessible and threatened by extinction.

Germany: Hollywood

This introduces one final factor which all periods have in common: Hollywood. The history of the German cinema is intertwined with the American film industry economically, technically, and artistically: not unusual perhaps, for any European film nation, but German filmmaking is unique in the extent of its colonization by and of Hollywood. One name can stand as a symbol for the import side of this trade: Ernst Lubitsch. With his comedies, and irreverent historical spectacles he was already in Berlin during the late 1910s considered Germany's American director. When he arrived in Hollywood in 1923 he not only brought his new employer the quite considerable technical proficiency that German studios commanded. He also served as Hollywood ambassador for at least two more generations of German filmmakers. F.W. Murnau, E.A.

Dupont, Paul Leni came in 1927, Ludwig Berger, Wilhelm Dieterle in 1929. Among the actors and actresses: Emil Jannings, Pola Negri, Lya di Putti, Conrad Veidt, Camilla Horn, Marlene Dietrich. The producer Erich Pommer, the cameraman Karl Freund. According to John Baxter, they 'all joined or were joined by what seemed to be the entire work-force of Germany's giant UFA film corporation.' On the export side: American films have dominated German screens at least since 1922, and except for the years between 1933 and 1945, Hollywood has never relinquished its hold on one of its most lucrative export markets. But when after 1935, commercial restrictions and eventually a total embargo slowed the trade in films, America opened its film studios to a veritable flood of emigre and refugee directors, scriptwriters and actors: from Fritz Lang, Billy Wilder, Otto Preminger, Robert Siodmak, Kurt Bernhardt, Wilhelm Thiele, Joe May, to Max Ophüls, Reinhold Schünzel, G.W.Pabst (temporarily), Douglas Sirk, among the directors; Peter Lorre, Paul Henreid, Albert Bassermann, Alexander Granach among the actors. The list seems endless, even without mentioning the writers: Thomas and Heinrich Mann, Alfred Doeblin, Bert Brecht, Bruno Frank, Franz Werfel all were at one time or another during the 1930s and 1940s under contract to a Hollywood studio.

Few of the directors came back to Germany after the war, and among the ones who did, even fewer felt they could continue making films there. The rift between those who had gone to America, and those who had stayed on, was great on both sides, and may have been one of the reasons why the German cinema had its least remarkable period both economically and artistically during the 1950s and early 1960s. These were the years, however, when another generation discovered their love for America and their passion for the Hollywood cinema. The young Wenders and Fassbinder in particular, but scores of other directors, too, found consolation for their adolescence in Hollywood films which they saw at their neighbourhood cinema, 'at least six a week, sometimes two or three a day', against the wishes of their parents, who if they could not prevent their sons' movie madness, would have preferred them to see a Bergman film or one by de Sica. The 1970s, however, were also the decade of women filmmakers more important in numbers and influence than in any other country except France. They took a distanced view of both cinephilia and of America, for their growing up clearly had not taken place in the cinemas, but among the oppressive stereotypes of womanhood that their mothers half suffered, half rebelled against. More than any other section among German filmmakers, they had to create their own tradition and history. If the male cinema returned to Hollywood, it did so in two ways. Directors like Fassbinder, Lemke, Thomé or Wenders made films where one could tell that the situations, locations and even gestures had been carefully copied from the American genre cinema. Fassbinder paid tribute to Douglas Sirk's American films, and Wenders adopted as his fathers Sam Fuller and Nicholas Ray, whose best work dates from the 1950s.

Yet there was also an import side: the German cinema found its most enthusiastic and loyal spectators not in West Germany, but on university campuses and in metropolitan art cinemas all over the United States. To these audiences, Wenders, Syberberg and Herzog owe their reputation: Fassbinder had a hero's welcome in New

York in 1975, and again for a major retrospective of his work in 1979, when The Marriage of Maria Braun was one of the most commercially successful foreign-language films. The year before, it had been Wenders' The American Friend and Herzog's Stroszek: all three films reflect on the American presence in Germany and of Germany in America. As with Lubitsch, fifty years earlier, the offers from Hollywood were not slow in coming. Herzog's surprise success brought him American distribution guarantee, and with it the opportunity of budgets unthinkable for most German directors who relied on state funding and television co-production. Francis Ford Coppola then the reigning mogul of the New Hollywood, took a liking to all the German directors willing to be courted; he even distributed and marketed Syberberg's seven-hour epic Hitler-A Film from Germany. With Wenders, however, he concluded a contract for an actual film, and Hammett, three years in the making, began Wenders' American career. But the parallels in this case are with Murnau rather than Lubitsch: comparable to Sunrise in 1927, Hammett was not a commercial success. Wenders, after making a fictionalized documentary about the dying Nicholas Ray (Lightning over Water), returned to Europe, to film in Portugal his own fictionalized Hollywood death (The State of Things). After these transatlantic criss-crossings, it is perhaps only fitting that his subsequent project should have been a German film, made in the USA, with a German actress become an American star, set in the West and the South-West, and just called Paris Texas. The German cinema, it seems, will never be quite at home when it is simply staying at home.

The Teens

It is well-known, the cinema was invented in France, where the Lumiere Brothers presented their 'cinematographe' to a paying public for the first time in late December 1895 at the Grand Cafe on the Boulevard des Capucines in Paris. Not so, say the history books: the brothers Max and Emil Skladanowsky gave a show of projected moving images almost two months earlier, at the Berlin Wintergarten on November 1st, 1895. But the German cinema's actual pioneer was Oskar Messter, the first all-round cinema owner-inventor-director-producer-distributor. His catalogue of films from October 1897 lists 84 of his own films: average length one minute. Messter's productions during the following twenty years, after which his companies were absorbed by UFA, covered the entire range of popular film subjects: documentaries and newsreel, like RETURN OF THE TROOPS FROM SPRING MANOEUVRES; thrillers like VENGEANCE IS MINE, TOO LATE, ADDRESS UNKNOWN; social dramas: THE MAN IN THE MIRROR, PROBLEM CASE, domestic melodrama: THE LOVE OF A BLIND GIRL, A HEAVY SACRIFICE, TWO WOMEN, THE MARRIAGE OF LUISE ROHRBACH; historical dramas and *Heimat* films: DEEP IN THE WOODS OF BOHEMIA, ANDREAS HOFER, TIROL IN ARMS, IN THE DALES THERE IS NO SIN; roman-tic comedies: MEISSEN CHINA, THE KISS OF A COUNT, LOVE LETTERS OF A QUEEN, THE QUEEN'S PRIVATE SECRETARY; operas and operettas: SALOME, - LOHENGRIN, HUNGARIAN RHAPSODY. Actors who started with Messter were among the leading names of the German silent era: Henny Porten, Lil Dagover, Ossi Oswalda, Emil Jannings, Harry Liedke, Harry Piel, Reinhold Schünzel, Conrad Veidt. The different

genres -and above all the titles, already so typical of the thrills and pleasures the cinema has to offer- are a reminder that filmmaking in Germany was appealing to audiences wanting entertainment. This fact is sometimes overlooked because in retrospect, one thinks of German films as art cinema: serious, but lacking show values. Art films did exist in the Teens, not least thanks to the import of film talent from Denmark, the nation known for realist outdoor cinema and psychological chamber drama.

Nordisk Film had by 1910 won for itself a considerable share in the German market, but its single most important asset, Asta Nielsen, was signed by Paul Davidson's PAGU company, and became the first international star of the silent German cinema. Directed by her husband Urban Gad, she made with *LITTLE ANGEL* (1914) a film that showed the German cinema seriously competing with the films of D.W.Griffth starring Lillian Gish and Mary Pickford. The cinema in 1910 or 1915, however, was very much a popular and working class pursuit:

They're in the north, the south, the east, the west side of town, in smoke-filled rooms, sheds, disused shops, large halls, wide-fronted theatres...but only the low haunts in the north have the special type, at a level well above the mere artistic. Inside, at the end of a pitch-dark room with a low ceiling, the square of the screen, six foot high, no bigger than a man, shines across the monstrous public, a mass mesmerized and rooted to their seats...Pairs of lovers are squeezed in the corner, but carried away by what they see, their unchaste fingers stop pawing each others' bodies. Consumptive children breathe flat gasps of air, and shiver quietly through every bout of fever. The men, exuding unpleasant smells, stare until their eyes are ready to fall out. The women, in stale-smelling clothes; the painted street whores are bent forward on the edge of their seats, oblivious to the fact that their headscarves have loosened and are sliding down their necks.

Ernst Lubitsch and THE OYSTER PRINCESS

By the time Ernst Lubitsch made *THE OYSTER PRINCESS* in 1919, the cinemas, if not the public, had become considerably refined. And yet Lubitsch, a Berliner through and through, knew his audiences better than any other director of his time. He was Germany's first, and some would say only genuinely popular director, appealing to every age and social class, and (as he was to prove later) all nations. Lubitsch (1892-1947) joined the Max Reinhardt theatre in 1911 as an actor, and two years later had his first starring film part in a farce, *MEYER IN THE HIGHLANDS*. It established him as a household name and became the first in a series of *MEYER* films. A Jewish comedy character causing disaster wherever he goes, Meyer's ruthless if ragged charm always ends up winning him the boss' daughter. The first assignments as a director (*THE PRIDE OF THE FIRM* and *SHOE PALACE PINKUS*) seemed to confine Lubitsch to this milieu and its fantasies of social rise, but their success brought an association with Paul Davidson, a producer with international ambitions and the capital to build Germany's first purpose-built film studio: the Union Atelier in Berlin-Tempelhof. There, while continuing

to make comedy shorts and parodies (DER RODELKAVALIER, DER FALL ROSENTOPF, ROMEO UND JULIA IM SCHNEE) for the domestic market, Lubitsch began to embark on a series of costume dramas (THE EYES OF THE MUMMY MA, THE WIFE OF THE PHARAOH, SUMURUN), historical films (CARMEN, MADAME DUBARRY, ANNE BOLEYN) and full-length comedies (THE OYSTER PRINCESS, THE MOUNTAIN CAT, THE DOLL) which brought him world success. Particularly unusual were his staging of large-scale spectacles (the French Revolution) the mise-en-scene of crowds (the court of Henry VIII), the dramatic use of monumental architecture (as in his Egyptian and Oriental films). The famed "Lubitsch Touch" of his American career was a reticent use of visual information, giving the spectator the pleasure of guessing the rest. The German films, too, worked with innuendo and inference, but they also exploited the chain reaction of a situation being taken ad absurdum. One of the best examples is THE OYSTER PRINCESS (1919), a satire on post-war Germany's newly discovered vogue for America, and on fantasies of affluence such as they could only have been nourished by years of extreme austerity suddenly confronted with raging inflation. Ossie, the temperamental daughter of Mr Quaker, America's Oyster King, wants "at least a prince" for a husband, after reading in the papers of the Shoe-Polish King's daughter's wedding to a duke. A marriage broker locates Prince Nuki, handsome, penniless and wedlock-shy. He sends his servant to sound out the situation who, taken by the splendour of the Quaker residence, announces himself as the prince. Impatient, Ossie takes him for a walk and is married to him on the spot, by the first priest who happens to be to hand. In her capacity as member of a tea-totalling club for daughters of American millionaires, Ossie has to deal with a particularly hard case: it is the real Nuki rescued from a drunken stupor on a park bench. The two fall in love, and Ossi cheats her husband -with her husband. The film is a parody of a popular operetta hit, "The Dollar Princess", satirizing the snobbery of American money about European titles and pedigree. Lubitsch and his script-writer Hans Kräly took this premise as their target, for Nuki is ultimately more the charming windbag Meyer than an Austrian aristocrat fallen on hard times. Comic technique becomes social critique. The Oyster King, in order to smoke a cigar after coffee, needs four servants: to take his cup, blow his nose, light the match and hold the ash-tray. Henry Ford's Taylorized assembly line is here applied to the Weimar Republic and its unemployed. At the wedding banquet behind each guest, for each course, stands a waiter, five lines deep. The comedy derives from the image recalling but the mind repressing the waves of soldiers sacrificed in trench warfare: their tragic waste is suddenly made obvious in the opulence of a dining hall. The Oyster King sits over his morning paper: Ossie, enraged by his impassiveness, tears it away and shreds it. Impassively, her father reaches for another paper from his dressing gown... and another. Only first-hand knowledge of the mad logic of economic inflation could invest these gags of repetition and acceleration with such absurd probability as to give them the stamp of hilarious truth. What makes THE OYSTER PRINCESS a comedy that endures -beyond the historical references, or value as a document of its first audiences' fantasies and anxieties- is the sheer intelligence of its construction as an intricate comedy

music-box. Mistaken identities and surprise twists are fitted together with such precision that the happy end is both inevitable, and when it comes, a satisfyingly elegant solution to the formal and moral problems the plot sets itself initially. The opulent residence of the Oyster King is furthermore an endlessly suggestive excuse for turning ornament and architectural design into visual choreography.

The Twenties

The Twenties are generally recognized as the 'golden age' of the German cinema, indeed of world cinema. The films by Fritz Lang, F.W. Murnau, G.W.Pabst, Paul Leni, E.A.-Dupont, Paul Wegener and many others are still regarded as what finally made the cinema a serious art form. But there the agreement ends: as to style and social significance, this period of the German cinema has not been easy to come to terms with. In the public mind, the films have become identified with, indeed come to stand for Expressionism: THE CABINET OF DR CALIGARI, DESTINY, THE GOLEM, THE STUDENT OF PRAGUE, WARNING SHADOWS, WAXWORKS, NOSFERATU. But stylization, fantasy have also been interpreted as a frustrated impulse pointing to social unrest, and foreshadowing ideological turmoil to come out of a troubled political present. Clearly, the cinema was more than the reflection of a style: it was part of the complex and intriguing phenomenon known as Weimar Culture, lasting from 1919 to 1933. Its defining style could also be the New Objectivity, especially for the latter half of the decade. The cynical, gritty, realist films of Pabst (THE JOYLESS STREET THE LOVES OF JEANNE NEY, DIARY OF A LOST GIRL), Fritz Lang's DR MABUSE or his SPIES (a thriller that influenced Hitchcock), E.A. Dupont's VARIETY, whose atmospheric and romantically sordid realism was equalled only by E. von Stroheim, and finally, the proletarian films of Piel Jutzi (MOTHER KRAUSE'S TRIP TO HAPPINESS, HUNGER IN WALDENBURG) and Leo Mittler (BEYOND THE STREET) are in many ways as typical of the Twenties as the "haunted screen" of Expressionism. The Expressionist films, however, were the ones that caught the international public's imagination. Immediately after the war, German films were boycotted in most countries. But growing popularity of the cinema among the educated middle-classes created a demand for art, which it seemed, only the German cinema could satisfy. The "Kunstfilm", although labelled Expressionist, after the stylistically rather untypical CABINET OF DR CALIGARI, was in actual fact dominated by Romantic motifs and settings. Chronicles, fairy-tales and sagas suggested the simplicity and naivety of folk art, while elements of the gothic and the fantastic, which script-writers found mainly in the literature of the Biedermeier period, provided psychological sophistication and visual fascination. Terrifying doubles, the appearance of mysterious strangers, Faustian pacts and deadly wagers, idyllic towns haunted by figures of guilt, seeking atonement: these themes identified the German cinema wrongly but successfully as the nightmares of a troubled nation. The art cinema had actually begun much earlier, in 1913 with THE STUDENT OF PRAGUE. All the motifs of the German fantastic film are present: the pact, the alter ego, top-hatted magicians, sexual rivalry and murder. The figure bridging the Teens and the classic period was the actor-producer

Paul Wegener, also responsible for DER GOLEM in 1914: both films were remade in the 1920s. With Wegener's massive bulk and scowling face, the brooding male entered the German cinema, setting the example for many other German actors: Emil Jannings, Werner Kraus, Fritz Kortner, Heinrich George. Most paradoxical about the period is the discrepancy between the backward-looking films that made it famous, and the dynamic, technically avant-garde industry which produced them. One is a function of the other, however: after the massive concentration of capital and resources which the setting up of UFA at the end of the war represented for the fledgling film industry, Germany became, in economic terms, the only potentially dangerous rival that Hollywood ever had to face on the world market. Erich Pommer Berlin's leading producer, realized that German films could not compete with American films in the popular entertainment genres. He therefore invested the best German talent in the so-called "Grossfilme", prestigious productions with cultural appeal: DESTINY, NOSFERATU, DIE NIBELUNGEN, FAUST, METROPOLIS. He wanted German films to capture the European screens and -with a distribution agreement between UFA,Paramount and MGM- enter the American market. But the gamble failed, for as we saw, Hollywood responded not by buying the films, but the people who made them, recognizing that German filmmakers possessed a unique combination of technical brilliance and cinematic intelligence.

Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau and THE LAST LAUGH

Foremost among the objects of American envy was F.W.Murnau (1889- 1931) whose NOSFERATU, after Bram Stoker's novel Dracula, brought an altogether new way of filming the uncanny and the supernatural Although the subject of Vampires might have suggested an emphatic style in the manner of CALIGARI, Murnau's direction was notable for its understatement and restraint, and the spare, classical, almost empty compositions. Suggesting the dawn atmosphere of sleep less nights, the meticulous attention to visual detail set off the more dramatically the appearance of the vampire himself. Murnau's lyricism was the result of technical mastery applied to emotionally very charged subjects: this combination Hollywood coveted, and after the cinematically even more astonishing THE LAST LAUGH, William Fox invited Murnau to America. THE LAST LAUGH is the story of the head porter at the luxury hotel Atlantic, whose life revolves around his job, symbolized by a gold-braided uniform. One day, staggering under the weight of one of the trunks lifted from a carriage, he is observed by the manager who replaces him by a younger man. The porter, pleading in vain for another chance, is made lavatory attendant. As he struggles out of his uniform, the proud giant of a man turns into a pitiful wreck. The uniform made him what he was also at home: head of the family, stern but benevolent patriarch in the tenement house where he lives with a niece and a house-keeper. At nightfall, he breaks into the manager's office. Secretly he puts on the uniform to go home, secretly he deposits it in the morning at the railway station left luggage. His life has become an anxious sham, and when his housekeeper catches sight of him at his humble job, even the uniform cannot prevent disgrace in front of the neighbours. Down below in his washrooms, the nightwatchman tries to console him, but

the porter is ready to take his own life. Here, the authors take pity and let chance intervene: an American millionaire guest leaves him a fortune, and in a gesture to redeem a hundred humiliations, the porter and his nightwatchman have dinner at the hotel, making every single waiter and maid attend to their whims. A carriage finally takes them off, not before they handsomely tip the entire staff.

THE LAST LAUGH (1924) is a key film of its decade. Three tendencies of the German cinema converge to form a new synthesis: expressionist acting, realism in detail and decor, and the "Kammerspiel" plot with its self-tormented characters. These were writer Carl Mayer's particular forte, developed in SHATTERED, BACKSTAIRS and SYLVESTER, each script giving precise directions for lighting, camera angles and close ups. Mayer's ambition was to tell a story without intertitles or explanatory comment, adding to the concentration on facial play, typical of silent cinema, a pathos of inarticulacy and silent suffering thematized in the protagonists' plight. The anxious emotional muteness is offset in Murnau's film, however, by what THE LAST LAUGH is most famous for: the 'liberated' camera. Its fluid, mobile and (in the context of the film's theme) eloquent command of the character's hidden feeling make the space it traverses so effortlessly, a wholly interiorized landscape of the soul, while losing nothing of its biting social satire. Emil Jannings as the porter incarnates the joviality and self-complacency with as much gusto as he undergoes the humiliations, and through him, the real star becomes the uniform itself. Subject and pathos make THE LAST LAUGH a typical Depression film, with its anxiety over age that makes loss of work a social disgrace. But the fairy tale reversal at the end is also a kind of sadistic revenge on the porter's own masochism. Murnau and Mayer have given a comic portrayal of the emotional chaos raging within the 'authoritarian personality', clinging to office and status symbols more desperately than to life itself. The porter of the Atlantis hotel becomes an icon of the Weimar Republic, in his way more fantastic than Caligari, more realistic than Lola-Lola. As Raymond Durnat remarked, after THE LAST LAUGH, German Expressionism and realism had reached a compromise, exemplified by E.A. Dupont's VARIETY, by Pabst's PANDORA'S BOX, Joe May's ASPHALT, Fritz Lang's M, all of which, more or less acceptable as 'realistic', use a visual language derived almost entirely from Expressionism.

The Thirties

Just as the Twenties begin in 1919, the Thirties start in 1929 with the coming of sound. The German film industry had developed its own system, the Tri-Ergon Klangfilm, and after a brief period of patent wars, an agreement with the American film industry gave German firms the right to manufacture much of the equipment for the sound-systems in Europe, while Americans supplied the rest of the world. Sound brought decisive changes to the style of German films, making them by necessity less subjectivist and introspective, but not altogether dispelling the predilection for emotional pathos and social pathology. There is little sign of decline, and the films made between 1930 and 1932 read like a roll call of classics: G.W. Pabst's WESTFRONT 1918, THE THREEPENNY

OPERA, KAMERADSCHAFT, Josef Sternberg's THE BLUE ANGEL, Fritz Lang's M, Leontine Sagan's MAEDCHEN IN UNIFORM, Wilhelm Thiele's DIE DREI VON DER TANKSTELLE, Gerhard Lamprecht's EMIL UND DIE DETEKTIVE, Piel Jutzi's BERLIN ALEXANDERPLATZ, Erik Charell's THE CONGRESS DANCES, Richard Oswald's THE CAPTAIN OF KOEPENICK, Max Ophuls' THE BARTERED BRIDE, Slatan Dudow's KUHLE WAMPE, Carl Dreyer's VAMPYR.

Already by the mid-Twenties it was apparent that the "Grossfilm" could not compete with Hollywood spectacles. No German star rivalled the popularity of Douglas Fairbanks, Mary Pickford or Charles Chaplin. Nonetheless, the German film industry was the strongest in Europe, with over five hundred films produced between 1930 and 1933. At the start of the decade, and after the swift introduction of sound, the cinema looked like one of the healthiest sectors of the economy. As in the United States, the queues outside the cinemas were longer than the breadlines outside the soup-kitchen. Unemployment and the mounting political crisis only seemed to fuel the cinema craze. Producers such as Erich Pommer (back in Berlin after three years in Hollywood) or Seymour Nebenzahl could sell their films not only to France and Italy, but to Eastern Europe, Hungary and Latin America. Production had switched to high-quality entertainment films, taking their cue from American comedies. Contemporaneous with the famous Busby Berkeley Depression musicals, the UFA revue films (starting with DIE DREI VON DER TANKSTELLE, EIN BLONDER TRAUM, VIKTOR UND VIKTORIA) were fast-paced and witty, carrying an image of Germany as youthful, sporty and vital into the world. With their successful hit songs, they were among the most popular genres, not least because featuring the performers and current stars of the Berlin theatres, cabaret and variety-shows. A BLOND DREAM, scripted by Billie Wilder and Walter Reisch, for instance, united with Lilian Harvey, Willi Forst and Willi Fritsch three of the most popular actors of the Thirties. It was sophisticated comedy and the revue film which became the main casualties of emigration, graphically illustrated by the fact that by 1938 virtually the entire cast, technical and artistic crew of a world success like THE CONGRESS DANCES had fled abroad. But when the National Socialists began reorganizing the film industry by the end of 1933, they were careful not to kill the goose that laid the golden eggs. Revue films and light entertainment continued to be made throughout the Thirties, and although they were often paler versions of earlier successes, they were useful ideologically and financially profitable. The style one thinks of today as 'Brechtian': underworld and demi-monde characters, irreverent dialogue, cynical plots interspersed with songs and numbers, was essentially Berlin show-biz into film.

Before 1933, it could be found in now almost forgotten films, like Werner Hochbaum's RAZZIA IN ST PAULI as well as more famous ones like THE BLUE ANGEL. Other entertainment genres compared well with American standards: psychological thrillers, elaborate costume dramas, the mountain films (where Leni Riefenstahl made her debut as director), science fiction films (often copying from Lang's METROPOLIS), adventure films with Hans Albers, tragic love stories like Robert Siodmak's ABSCHIED or Max Ophuls' LIEBELEI.

Fritz Lang and M

Perhaps the boldest, most remarkable film from these years was *M*, making a sensational newspaper story into a topical problem film, with the atmosphere of a psychological thriller and the suspense of a horror film. And yet, *M* is none of these, or rather, it takes the forms and themes of Weimar cinema as something of a pretext: a portrait of the period, as critically engaged as Brecht's *Threepenny Opera*, and as invaluable a documentary as one could wish, to study the disintegration of Germany's body-politic. A child murderer is at large, the city lives in fear. There is public outcry, neighbour turns against neighbour, the press accuses the authorities of complacency. With elections imminent, the politicians put pressure on the police, but the murder cocks a snook at them, even writing scornful letters to the newspaper. Beggars and pickpockets are enlisted to hunt the man who is responsible for the police putting the heat on them. The murderer has found another victim -will he be caught in time? The criminals are vastly more successful than the police: they mark their man, and soon have him cornered in a huge office building. An elaborate robbery becomes the cover-up for their manhunt, and the murderer is found in the attic store-room, betrayed by the scratching sound of his pen-knife trying to open the fire-door. The underworld gives him a summary trial, but before they can execute their sentence, the police arrives. What makes this Fritz Lang's (1890-1976) most exciting film, and the high water mark of the German cinema as popular entertainment as well as 'art', is the virtuosity and pleasure communicated about the magic but also the mechanics of his purely filmic effects. Celebrating the cinema's artifice (the neat and dovetailing symmetries of the intrigue dizzy the mind), *M* nonetheless involves the spectator in the film's physical world almost to excess: all the senses are activated and continuously kept alert. Sight, hearing, touching, tasting, and even one's sense of smell follow the steaming soup terrine or the soap-suds in a tin bath; the hectic whistling of a snatch from Grieg's 'Peer Gynt' is hardly less enervating than the shrill police siren, or the rasping voice of the gangster boss. A huge blow-up of a finger print becomes as menacing as a black-gloved hand suddenly spreading over the city map. One peers at the shavings of a pencil on a window ledge as anxiously for clues as the inspector, and sweats with Peter Lorre, the murderer, as his pen-knife breaks in the door-lock.

The Forties

How to write about the Forties? Do they begin in 1933 and end in 1945? Is the history of the German cinema during this period made in Paris and Hollywood, rather than Berlin? It would be too convenient to say that from 1933, for twelve years, no German films of note were being made. Nor is it possible to ignore that the German filmmaking community after 1933 was not the same as before. When Fritz Lang was asked by Goebbels to take over the Film Section of the Propaganda Ministry and decided that same evening of March 28, 1933 to leave Germany, it was the signal for an unprecedented exodus. Directors, producers, actors, writers, technicians left Germany

by the hundreds: for some France was their first stop (Lang, Ophuls, Wilder, Siodmak, Pabst); by the Forties, California was the home of virtually all the directors so far mentioned, with the exception of Pabst, who after a brief and unsuccessful time in Hollywood, returned to Austria. But enthusiasm for the cinema among German audiences continued unabated. Most of their favourite actors were still there on the screen (Emil Jannings, Werner Kraus, Heinrich George, Hans Albers, Rudolf Forster, Willi Forst, Heinz Rühmann, Theo Lingen, Zarah Leander, Luise Ullrich, Magda Schneider, Kathe Gold, Marika Röck, Adele Sandrock), and new ones were being 'discovered' (Kristina Soderbaum, Sybille Schmitz, Ilse Werner, Marianne Hoppe). The illusion that nothing had happened was rather easy to maintain, and for the public that wanted to, easy to believe in. Veit Harlan, Wolfgang Liebeneiner, Karl Hartl, Hans Steinhoff, Gustav Ucicky, Gustav Gründgens were directors who cultivated a professionalism in production standards, acting and directing, to the point where dedication to their chosen metier became difficult to tell from dedicated opportunism or merely opportune blindness.

The themes of Nazi cinema have often been described: individual heroism, a willingness to sacrifice personal happiness for someone else's sake, the natural emergence of a dominant personality in crisis situations, and a death-wish, glorified either in the devil-may-care adventurer (such as Hans Albers played him), or by a more melancholy, 'metaphysical' conviction that death alone is what gives meaning to life (as in many of Rudolf Forster's roles). As a form of emotional and psychic regression, with an idealist rationale to justify single-minded devotion, the motifs of Nazi cinema did not have to spell out explicitly any political ideology or message. For instance, the challenge presented by the forces of nature seemed more important in such masochistic scenarios than the Nation or the Volk: war subjects were preferably treated as dramas of air and sea, and the mountain films of Arnold Fanck were a good example of how the spectacle of grandiose nature and daring exploits conformed to a dramaturgy of the will which suited the regime even though it lent support to none of its social or political ideas. Many of the genres cultivated in the Thirties contained subversive moments: Luis Trenker, a disciple of Fanck, maintained a more dualistic and ironic vision when, in Der verlorene Sohn, he contrasts the Bavarian mountains with New York skyscrapers, and his candid camera scenes shot in Lower Manhattan and the Bowery have a documentary sobriety which makes one think of Bernice Abbott rather than Leni Riefenstahl.

The late Thirties also produced film comedians of exceptional talent, such as Hans Moser, Theo Lingen and Heinz Rühmann whose gift for social satire was more in evidence in their pre-war films than after 1945. The Nazi cinema was a thoroughly organized fair-weather dream factory, and with few exceptions as sealed off from reality as perhaps no cinema had ever been, producing lavish spectacles, gripping drama, delicate or tragic romances that were secretly in league with hope beyond reason and the desire for happiness forever undamaged by experience. It was as if the cinema itself seemed to have a charmed life: no sign of battle no frost or hunger, no politics, no

Führer, no Reich: a missed date or the dress for the ball were still the events that shaped destinies. The harder the heroine shut her eyes to wish on a shooting star, the more wide-awake in the dark the audience could picture what truly mattered in life. By its intense emotional idealism, the Nazi cinema may well have contributed in no small measure to that social amnesia and political naivety with which Germans after the war tried to explain their ignorance about the true nature of the regime that many of them had welcomed and then supported through twelve long years.

One particular feature of the cinema in the Forties is the scope it gave for the representation of women. In itself, of course, this is hardly surprising, since they constituted the largest part of the audience while the men were at the front. Again, for evidently ideological reasons, the role women played in the films stood in a demonstrable relation to the function they fulfilled within a war economy and on the home front. Most conspicuous female virtue was not only willingness but a dedication to suffering. All the energy, ingenuity and satisfaction that a later generation of women would invest in their self-realization went into self-sacrifice, though significantly enough not in the areas where the regime actually employed women: in the factories or as bearers of children, but in the rose-gardens of romance. Out of this constellation, the women's film of the Third Reich presents the paradox of strong and radiant female characters, but whose strength consists in affirming the traditional values of the family, and of showing fortitude exclusively in the realm of the passive emotions. A good deal of subjective realism thus enters into the films, but reinforcing a very narrow band of female experience, and invariably implying an idea of happiness that made marriage seem a safe haven from the heart's confusion and the labyrinth of feelings. The most popular narratives to dramatize such conflicts were modelled either on Flaubert's 'Madame Bovary' or placed the woman between two equally worthy men. Into this tradition belong many of the films of Helmut Käutner (1908-1980), who began directing in 1939, and produced during the Forties some of the most deeply felt female melodramas since Max Ophüls and Willi Forst had identified the genre with a certain Viennese sensibility in the early 1930s, and Detlef Sirk had taken it to such exotic locations as Australia (Zu Neuen Ufern) and the Caribbean (La Habenera). Especially notable are Käutner's Auf Wiedersehen Francisca (1941), Romanze in Moll (1943) and his masterpiece, inspired by Jean Vigo's L'Atalante, Unter den Brücken (1945). Käutner's particular style was a refinement of the Kammerspiel of the late 1920s and early 1930s; while not straying outside the confines laid down by the regime's conception of femininity, he deepened the emotional resonance of each scene.

UNTER DEN BRUECKEN is the story of two river bargemen, who one day see a young woman above them on the bridge throwing money into the river. They return it to her, and invite her onto the barge. Both are attracted to her, and they decide that whoever gets her will have to quit the barge. Insulted by this bargain, the woman leaves them, but peace does not return to their life. One of the men goes in search of the woman. He finds her, and realizes that she loves his friend. Conquering his jealousy, he brings the two together, but instead of insisting on the deal, he lets the couple live with

him on the barge, which once more passes underneath the bridges.

By concentrating on the milieu, and bringing into play the most basic human emotions, in an apparently simple story, Käutner stays clear of either sentimentality or the rhetoric of sacrifice. In this respect, it is a film which indicates rather clearly the continuity that could exist between the Thirties before Hitler and what could still or perhaps only be made in the very last days before the regime's collapse. Even though shot in Berlin during the early months of 1945, as Russian troops were almost at the Elbe and Allied bombers punishing the city every night, the film is not only of the most extraordinary technical perfection, but shows in atmosphere and mood no trace whatsoever of the time in which it was made: it represents so radical a repression of another reality as to make this itself the most telling historical and ideological fact about it.

The Fifties

The task of the Fifties in the cinema was evidently to come to a perspective on what preceded it, and in this sense the period started in 1945. The Allied Powers wanted to ensure that film production remained decentralized and on a small scale, in order not to be competitive, while American firms soon dominated film exhibition by controlling distribution. More than 60% of production facilities, laboratories and raw film stock manufacture was in the Soviet-occupied zone, where a nationalized film industry, the DEFA was licensed in 1946, which made the first post-war German film, Wolfgang Staudte's *THE MURDERERS ARE AMONGST US*.

In the Western zones film production re-started in 1947. The first films to come out of the ruins of the old Germany were aptly called "Trümmerfilme" (rubble films): attempts to trace the fatal logic that led to Hitler and the share of responsibility that must be borne by the ordinary, a-political German. Especially the films of Wolfgang Staudte (*ROTATION*, *DER UNTERTAN*) have a historical perspective that goes beyond the anecdotal and incidental. Other films, in the face of the overwhelming shame and guilt that the world focuses on Germany and its people, were anxious to find the good German caught up in events and in the smaller tragedies of human existence.

The first film Käutner made after the war, *IN JENEN TAGEN* is the story of a car, brand new in 1933 and on the junk yard in 1945, symbolically changing its owner with every significant date of the regime. The pathos of futility and regret, so poignant in the romance films, seems a curiously helpless gesture in the face of the enormity of the subject. His characters are persecuted by the SS, actively resistant, soldiers confronted with Russian partisans or silent anti-Nazis: one wonders how typical the car and its owners could have been, when the symbolism of its assembly-line existence entails so much pre-sifted evidence.

Whereas the purely entertainment-oriented share of post-war film production signalled a singular determination to avoid the present, preferring Hapsburg royalty (the hugely popular *SISSI* films) and Lederhosen melodrama (the ever-popular "Heimatfilm") to anything that might reflect the century's disturbing history, the 'problem films'

became more and more overtly apologetic of quietism, a-political inwardness, celebrating stoic heroism, self-sacrifice and devotion to a higher duty. This was perhaps only to be expected, since even by 1960, more than 40% of active filmmakers had been prominent directors of the Nazi cinema: Wolfgang Liebeneiner, Veit Harlan, Harald Braun, Josef von Baky, Gustav Ucicky became the mainstay of the cinema in the 1950s. Among these was also Kurt Hoffmann (1910-), a specialist in light comedy during the Forties after being an assistant to Reinhold Schünzel, the most gifted director of this genre, who had left in 1938 to work in Hollywood mainly as an actor. Hoffmann's films are generally wistful and melancholy, tending more towards sentimentality than satire. His greatest financial and critical success was WIR WUNDERKINDER, whose sardonic tone and oppositional stance towards the growing opportunism among the West German industrial establishment could seem unusual and bold only by comparison to the complacency which characterized most of the films which had the German economic miracle as their critical target. As with Käutner, Hoffmann, an apolitical director of the Forties, could hardly be expected to become political directors in the Fifties.

The Sixties

The cinema almost everywhere experienced during the Sixties its most momentous changes for half a century. Some were technological, but most of them social, and had to do with the arrival of television as the dominant mass medium. Film lost with the traditional family audience the majority of its spectators, and the challenge was to make films differently, with smaller teams, port-able equipment, out in the streets, rather than in the studio with constructed sets: filmmakers had to win new audiences if they were to halt the rapid disappearance of the cinema as a presence in people's minds and lives, and reverse the corresponding decline of its artistic and entertainment values. Yet one could equally say that any national cinema is only as good as its audiences want it or need it to be. By this criterion, during the Sixties, few Germans wanted their cinemas very much at all, for they closed at the rate of more than one a day. The decade began quite promisingly with the widely shared conviction that the commercial film industry had reached its absolute nadir, and that only very drastic measures could rescue it from its reputation of being Europe's financially most unsuccessful, stylistically most uninspired, and politically most conformist cinema. The remedies suggested were contradictory, because the interests of the film industry and those of a new generation of directors seemed incompatible. Miraculously, however, they led to the most remarkable renewal of filmmaking in Germany since the arrival of sound. The new generation who demanded to be heard did so in 1962 at the annual festival for short films. Their 'Oberhausen Manifesto' became the rallying point for an independent cinema that not only insisted on a complete break with the German cinema's past, but wanted a resolutely European outlook, following the lead that the French nouvelle vague of Godard, Truffaut, Chabrol, and the 'new' cinemas in Britain and Italy had given. Oberhausen led to an entirely different conception of filmmaking, based on the principle that the government should act as patron to the cinema, and provide film-production

with the kind of funds already given to the other arts like theatre, opera, music. Cinema was to become part of the nation's "Kunst und Kultur". While the film industry wanted from the government tax concessions and interest-free credits, the new filmmakers demanded to be recognized as artists, as authors. They wanted to work under conditions of creative freedom that made them independent from commercial calculations and constraints. The result was the setting up of the "Kuratorium Junger Deutscher Film" for first-time filmmakers in 1964, and the "Film Subsidy Law" in 1967, which was meant to channel back into new German production a portion of the earnings of all films at the box-office. The "Kuratorium" proved an unqualified success artistically, financing a whole string of innovative films, and giving a start to what would turn out to be a prodigious number of highly talented filmmakers. The Film Subsidy Law, by contrast, was an artistic disaster, the levy money being mainly used to finance waves after waves of pornographic films and cheaply produced comedies. Yet neither measure succeeded in putting the cinema and film production back on a secure economic footing. It needed several revisions of the legislation behind both 'cultural' and 'economic' subsidy for there to be some improvement, and when it came, at the very end of the decade, it was largely thanks to television. The Sixties, then, showed two sharply contrasting faces: a commercial film industry which supplied an ever shrinking number of cinemas with the recycled genres of the Fifties, or catered for a very specialized clientele, and a growing group of independent filmmakers whose work -though at first little seen in regular cinemas- opened up new forms, new subjects, but also new uses for the cinema.

The most articulate and energetic director to take part in the Oberhausen revolt was Alexander Kluge (1932-). For a filmmaker, his background and skills are unorthodox. He is a trained lawyer, a part-time professor of sociology, author of short stories and documentary novels, essayist, polemicist, the founder-director of a film-school, and indefatigable political lobbyist for a progressive governmental film-policy. There has never been anyone like Kluge in the entire history of the German cinema, to produce proposals, organize initiatives, orchestrate public debates and activate fellow-filmmakers around an idea: thanks largely to his tactical gifts and dialectically trained intelligence, such diverse talents and personalities as Volker Schloendorff, Werner Herzog, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Edgar Reitz could recognize their own work as part of a common objective, and believe in the reality of a new German cinema before it ever existed either in the public's mind or as a body of films which bore the stamp of a country and an epoch.

Compared to the task of creating an organisational and intellectual support system for the independent cinema which could do battle with the film industry and win the day, Kluge's actual films might almost appear as mere by-products. He seems to regard them as diaries, or work-in-progress towards realizing what he calls "a cinema in the spectators' heads", and his films are, as a consequence, allusive, multi-layered experiences, mixing documentary and fiction, music and texts in a loosely conceived narrative around a central character, usually a woman. Yet despite the deliberately unfinished, open-ended nature of his work, it was Kluge who drew international attention

to the new German cinema with his first film, YESTERDAY GIRL (ABSCHIED VON GESTERN, literally: "Goodbye to Yesterday"), which won him second prize at the Venice Film Festival in 1966. Kluge's success vindicated Oberhausen, and the policy of the "Kuratorium" as pump-primer for funding low-cost feature films, but YESTERDAY GIRL also became the film most directly expressing the uneasy critical spirit of the generation who before 1968, tried to 'say goodbye to yesterday'. As social satire, YESTERDAY GIRL is almost a caricature of male chauvinism disguising itself as patronizing benevolence. All the men are grotesque figures of a perverted and perverse male self-assurance, while the heroine's amorality and hedonism becomes a form of defensive wit. Hunger for experience and a curiosity for life balances what might otherwise have been a Calvary of unrelieved victimization. It is a quality that belongs to the actress, Kluge's sister, who plays Anita, as if she rebelled not merely against a male-dominated society, but was also trying to escape the script's determination to make her into an exemplary figure. In this respect, YESTERDAY GIRL sets up a dialogue and an agenda that the films by women about women were to take up- those of Ula Stoeckl, Helke Sander, Helma Sanders-Brahms or Jutta Brückner for example- about the strategies of survival adopted by women, and their insistence on a version of history that dares to be both radically and vindictively subjective.

Kluge's original title is programmatic: "It provokes a contradiction because you never can say good-bye to yesterday. If you try to, you get as far as tomorrow, only to discover yesterday all over again". The contradiction turned out to be typically West German, and marked Kluge's generation as one for whom this was a personal issue: they had lost not only material possessions; memories and childhood experiences had to be said good-bye to, tainted as they were by an ideology that had managed, in Kluge's words, to "maintain the German family idyll right next to the concentration camp". Rather than face such truths, it must have seemed easier to eradicate the past completely and believe in the new start of 1945. In fact, Anita G is less a "Yesterday Girl" as she is tomorrow's woman; the men, for all their cool rationality, seem more haunted by what they decided to forget. But such was the curiously subterranean way of repressed historical awareness that it emerges only in the next generation. The sixties came to an end when hopes for a fundamental renewal of society awakened by 1968 began to give way to disillusionment, violence and nostalgia.

The Seventies

Paradoxically, it was the films expressing this mood of disillusionment and melancholy self-reflexivity that brought the German cinema not only new spectators in Germany itself but an international audience, and with it a world reputation. By 1974 the New German Cinema was represented at every festival, and films like AGUIRRE WRATH OF GOD, ALICE IN THE CITIES, THE MERCHANT OF FOUR SEASONS, THE LOST HONOUR OF KATHARINE BLUM or LUDWIG-REQUIEM FOR A VIRGIN KING were discussed in learned journals and hailed in magazine cover stories. The militant and innovatory spirit of the directors seemed in stark contrast to the sombre mood of the films, as if -in the words of

Lotte Eisner, commenting on the collectively produced GERMANY IN AUTUMN- German filmmakers needed a good portion of despair, confusion and sorrow in order to find their true creative stride.

The different amendments of the Film Subsidy legislation had greatly strengthened the 'quality' orientation of German film production. At the same time, television had become -also by government decree- the major source of finance to complement the sums available in the form of federal cash prizes, project development money and funds from the "Kuratorium". New distribution initiatives like the "Filmverlag der Autoren" had begun to challenge American supremacy in this field, and in most urban centres new kinds of cinemas, the "Programmkinos", with daily changing schedules had attracted younger audiences. This was in no small measure also due to the increase the student population, itself a result of the unrest and dissatisfaction at the universities in the 1960s.

What made the German cinema suddenly of such interest was not only that it projected an image of Germany so vivid and imaginative as had not appeared on film since the Twenties. It was above all the representation of a certain subjectivity, which spectators the world over could recognize and identify with. For German films were not realistic in the accepted sense; in fact, the claustrophobic interiors of Rainer Werner Fassbinder, the exotic landscapes of Werner Herzog, the artificial paradises of Werner Schroeter and Hans Jürgen Syberberg seemed rather far removed from the everyday reality of West Germany. Even the cityscapes or desolate stretches of road in Wim Wenders represented more the margins of West German society than its powerful industrial centres, or life in the metropolis. Yet, whatever the locations, they appeared as interiorized spaces, the expression of a sensibility that wanted to compensate the loss of physical reality in everyday life by recreating it, suffused with emotion, in images.

The fact that women directors began to play an important part in national filmmaking, strongly underlined the need to give history and experience a subjective and autobiographical perspective. The motif of the journey, for instance, already powerfully represented in YESTERDAY GIRL, came to stand, not as it did in the American cinema for a move forward towards a goal and the exteriorization of an ambition, but rather, as a return to the past, a journey from the exterior into the interior and from the interior into the past. Yet in order to accomplish such journeys of self-discovery, the German cinema had to rediscover and come to terms not with the European cinema as Kluge and the Oberhausen generation had thought -but with the American cinema, and thus with the American influence on post-war German reality.

The most acute analysis of this complex relation between the United States and West Germany came no doubt from Wim Wenders (1945-) His films give a unique record of the relationship between the German cinema and the America that exists within it: "The Yankees have colonized our subconscious" one of the protagonists says in KINGS OF THE ROAD when he cannot get a pop song out of his head. But Wenders is also one of the filmmakers who has seized most directly that experience of alienation and melancholy narcissism which the disillusioned but detached generation of young males

turned against themselves, instead of against their fathers, or their country's cursed history.

KINGS OF THE ROAD represent the most extreme statement of the correspondence between an inner world of desolation, and an outer world of bare but evocative German landscapes. It is a masterpiece of what one might call German Neo-Romanticism, precisely because its images and moods are so quintessentially cinematic. With KINGS OF THE ROAD the German cinema had come of age, as it were, by finding its place again among international film culture.

Conclusion

No single film or even filmmaker can represent a decade, and the significant dates of the history of the German cinema do not always coincide with the round figures on the calendar. And yet there are divisions meaningful by themselves in the larger context of the continuities here suggested. Too often the German cinema is represented as divided by a simple 'before' and 'after' Nazism, with both parts implicitly or explicitly pointing to or referring back to this most traumatic period of German history this century. Such parallels as can be drawn have always suggested that the German cinema is in some special way the reflection of German society, and a reproduction of its history. But is this always the case? As an entertainment medium, the cinema deals with fantasies and anxieties more than with "the way things really are", and its topical relevance blends with an appeal to more permanent needs and feelings. It therefore has a history which is first and foremost also that of its audiences, and of their often very different sense of history. The German cinema, for good or ill, seems to be most authentic where it documents this movement of spectatorship in and out of time.