

VERGANGENHEITSBEWÄLTIGUNG: NEW GERMAN CINEMA

- outside Germany cinema has played a significant part in addressing the Holocaust (see the Philip French article for an overview), most recently and most spectacularly in Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1994) and Polanski's *The Pianist* (2002)
- in the Federal Republic, however, this was not the case until relatively late in the period:

I Antecedents – The *Trümmerfilm* (Rubble Film) 1945-49

“Licensed producers ... should be men who instinctively think or respond to ideas along the lines of Allied policy in Germany, i.e. freedom and dignity of the individual, civic courage, the general democratic principle of the right and responsibility of the individual to think and act for himself in terms of the common good, anti-militaristic, anti-Prussianism, the responsibility of the citizen for the policies and actions of his government ... etc.”

(Internal memo, Information Control Division in US zone, 24.11.1945)

Die Mörder sind unter uns (dir. Wolfgang Staudte, 1946)

Zwischen gestern und morgen (Harald Braun, 1947)

Ehe im Schatten (Kurt Maetzig, 1947)

Film ohne Titel (Rudolf Jugert, 1947)

In jenen Tagen (Helmut Krättnner, 1947)

The key features of these films were:

- the preoccupation with the ‘Schuldfrage’
- the effort to write a different kind of history of the German past from that available in the Third Reich cinema
- formal innovation
- the crisis of male narrativity: the representation of German women as best equipped to rewrite German history and/or provide the basis for new beginnings

II Catalysts

- Hitler: Eine Karriere* (Joachim Fest, 1977)
 - a documentary which sought to capture the fascination that Hitler aroused in the German people and which drew on the Nazis’ own images
- Holocaust* (1978), a four-part American television drama series lasting 8 hours
 - watched in America by 120 million and sold to 50 countries
 - screened in West Germany in January 1979 to an audience of 20 million
 - became a media event

III Classic Narrative Cinema

- Heimat* (Edgar Reitz, 1994), an eleven-part television series lasting 16 hours
- tells the story of the Schenck family over four generations (1919-1982) centred on the provincial life of the village of Kirchbichlbach
 - a direct response to the Holocaust, watched by 9 million Germans:
"The most serious act of appropriation there is, occurs when people are deprived of their history. With *Holocaust* the Americans have taken away our history."
 - methodologically an attempt to reinterpret/repossess German history by bringing to bear a perspective like the following:
"There are thousands of stories among our people worth filming which are based on the irritating minutiae of everyday experience. These stories individually would not appear to contribute to the assessment or explanation of history; but taken together they would actually fill this gap."

IV Feminist Cinema

- Deutschland, bleiche Mutter* (Helma Sanders-Brahms, 1979)
- the attempt to repossess history by writing 'herstory' from women's perspective
 - a fusion of filmic modes of representation (including realism, documentary, stylisation, allegory)
- Die bleierne Zeit* (Marlene Huettenbrenner, 1981)
- the attempt to relate the urban terrorism of the 1970s to the 'leaden times' of the 1950s (and the failure of that latter decade to come to terms with the Nazi past)
 - based on the relationship of Gudrun and Christiane Ensslin it is also a meditation on sisterhood (in both personal/familial and political sense)

V History in Allegoric Form

- Rainer Werner Fassbinder's trilogy: *Die Ehe der Maria Braun* (1979)
Lola (1981)
Die Sehnsucht der Veronika Voß (1982)
- these three separate films examine the post-war years 1945-55 as a period in which capitalism was 'restored' but the Nazi past repressed
 - in each film the protagonist is a woman who can be seen to represent an aspect of that restoration
 - basically realist in style, the films are also marked by significant departures from classic narrative cinema

FILMOGRAPHY

New German Cinema & History

- 1977 *Hitler - ein Film aus Deutschland* (Syberberg)
- 1978 *Deutschland im Herbst* (Brustellin et al)
- 1979 *Die Patriotin* (Kluge)
Die Ehe der Maria Braun (Fassbinder)
Deutschland, bleiche Mutter (Sanders-Brahms)
- 1980 *Hungerjahre* (Brückner)
Lili Marleen (Fassbinder)
- 1981 *Lola* (Fassbinder)
- 1984 *Heimat* (Reitz)
- 1990 *Das schreckliche Mädchen* (Verhoeven)
- 1997 *Comedian Harmonists* (Vilsmaier)
- 1999 *Aimee und Jaguar* (Färberbock)
- 2004 *Der Untergang* (Hirschbiegel)

SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

- 1971 Chancellor Willy Brandt (SPD) falls to his knees and genuflects at memorial to Warsaw ghetto, in public gesture of atonement for Nazi crimes
- 1977 Kidnap and murder of Daimler-Benz director, business leader and ex-Nazi Hanns-Martin Schleyer by *Rote Armee Fraktion*
Mysterious suicide of 3 prominent RAF members in Stammheim high-security prison (Baader, Ensslin Raspe)
Turning point in history of APO/terrorist anti-fascism
- 1978 TV screening of US series *Holocaust*: audience estimated @ 120 million
- 1985 President Reagan pays controversial visit to military cemetery at Bitburg, which contains graves of Waffen-SS
- 1986 *Historikerstreit* (see lecture, week 4)
- 1993 *Schindler's List* (Spielberg)
- 1996 *Goldhagen, Hitler's Willing Executioners* (see lecture, Week 4)

WRITERS, MEDIA AND SOCIETY
FILM AND/AS VERGANGENHEITSBEWÄLTIGUNG

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Thomas Elsaesser, 'Returning Home to History,' in Elsaesser, *New German Cinema. A History* (BFI 1989), Ch.8

Heide Fehrenbach, *Cinema in Democratizing Germany. Reconstructing National Identity after Hitler* (University of North Carolina Press 1995) (esp. Chs. 2 & 3)

Anton Kaes, *From Hitler to Heimat: the return of history as film* (Harvard University Press 1989)

Robert C. and Carol J. Reimer, *Nazi-Retro Film. How German Narrative Cinema Remembers the Past* (Twayne 1992) (esp. Chs. 1 & 2)

Eric Rentschler, ed., *West German Filmmakers on Film. Visions and Voices* (Holmes & Meier 1988) (esp. Ch. VI, 'Collective Memory and National Identity')

conclude to discuss the morale-boosting Britain in 1945 by his media-mogul friend

Stanley Kramer movie *Judgment at Nuremberg* (1961) - a reworking of a 1959 television play now notorious for its sponsors, the American

damned from French television for a decade. Demanding complex arguments and unvarnished truths, Ophüls's movie indicated an alternative to Visconti's: these two streams



have since flowed alongside each other, and at times intermingled.

This particular period of interest in the Third Reich (called in Germany at that time the *Hitlerwelle*) produced such outstanding French films as Louis Malle's *Lacombe Lucien* (1974) and Joseph Losey's *Mr Klein* (1976) as well as documentaries such as Laurence Jarvis's *Who Shall Live and Who Shall Die?* (1981) about America's equivocal response to Jewish refugees before the Second World War. There were also voyeuristic, exploitative, near-pornographic movies, such as Liliana Cavani's *The Night Porter* (1974), in which a former SS guard (Dirk Bogarde) and his wartime victim (Charlotte Rampling) meet in 1957 Vienna to re-enact the sado-masochistic games they played in Dachau. One movie from the time, *The Day the Clown Cried*, has fortunately remained sealed in the vaults. Written and directed by Jerry Lewis (né Joseph Levitch), it stars Lewis himself as a German clown forced to be a Pied Piper in an extermination camp, leading Jewish children to the gas chambers.

The most widely shown movie of this period, the 1978 television mini-series *Holocaust*, raised the question about whether the American mass media (as opposed to European art-house movies) could properly handle the subject. This sincere, at times powerful, film tried to pack too much into its contrived saga of interlocking German families. Its im-

pect, however, was immense, both in America and in West Germany, where it introduced the term 'Holocaust' into popular usage and became a text for schoolroom study.

In 1983, when she published her valuable book *Indelible Shadows: Film and the Holocaust*, the American scholar Annette Insdorf was able to examine 125 feature films, television movies and full-length documentaries on the subject. In the revised edition six years later she had to consider a further 45 substantial pictures - more than the combined total of Westerns and musicals made in the Eighties.

The major films made since her first edition are Louis Malle's autobiographical *Au Revoir les Enfants* (1987), in which Malle recalls his friendship with a Jewish boy being hidden from the Gestapo by the priests in his Catholic boarding school in 1944, Marcel Ophüls's *Hotel Terminus: Klaus Barbie, His Life and Times* (1988) and, supremely, Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985). Lanzmann's nine-and-a-half hour documentary, among the greatest films ever made, relies entirely on interviews with Jewish survivors, Germans, guilty bystanders, observers and historians, and on visits to the camps as they are today.

It is this complex historical heritage that Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* enters, and I will review it next week. Spielberg, and his screenwriter Steven Zaillian, an Armenian gentle, have paid special attention to *Night*

and Fog and *Shoah*. Two decisions were crucial to its integrity: to shoot in black and white, and to eschew the use of existing documentary footage. In sticking to Thomas Keneally's non-fiction novel (published here in 1982 as *Schindler's Ark*) they tell a singular story that illuminates a corner of the experience without claiming to explain the historical catastrophe.

But why do it at all? Should actors play Holocaust victims, should Auschwitz be rebuilt in a studio? Turning down a request to write a television mini-series on the subject, the American playwright Paddy Chayefsky said, 'The word critics used on *Holocaust* was "trivialise", and, in a sense, that was an unfair criticism, even though accurate. Trivialisation is television.' The 1986 winner of the Nobel Peace prize and concentration camp survivor, Elie Wiesel, shares these doubts, but wrote an introduction to the second edition of Annette Insdorf's *Indelible Shadows*, praising her critical discriminations and stating:

Certain productions dazzle with their authenticity; others shock with their vulgarity. *Night and Fog* on the one side, *Holocaust* on the other. Up against Hollywood super-productions, can poetic memory hold its own? Me I prefer it. I prefer restraint to excess, the murmur of documentary to the script edited by tear-jerk specialists.

Stanley Kauffmann, doyen of American

'An eloquent meditation on Auschwitz': a scene from Alain Resnais's Night and Fog' (above) and from Steven Spielberg's Schindler's List' (left)

movie critics, has high praise for *Schindler's List* in his column in the magazine *New Republic*. He posed, and tentatively answered the question 'Is there a need for another film about the Holocaust? Especially after *Shoah*? Presumably, there are at least some people who have never seen a Holocaust film and may see this one because it's by Spielberg and will have mainstream promotion. Let's hope there are many such.'

The real answer to his question is that for a good many people *Shoah* is too demanding. One wonders how many Channel 4 viewers, to whom it was shown without intrusive commercials, lasted the movie's nine hour course. The Holocaust was a complex series of events that must never be forgotten. But the way it is remembered and understood is also important, in this respect, Spielberg's movie has a valuable role to play.

'Schindler's List' opens in London on Friday and goes on general release on 4 March