# Introduction

> It is time for this type of film production to meet its reckoning.
> It is foolish, deceitful, and frequently cruel. It cannot
> be allowed to continue in this way.
> —Siegfried Kracauer, 'Der heutige Film und sein Publikum', 1928[1]

An early scene from Andreas Dresen's 2011 film *Halt auf freier Strecke/ Stopped on Track* begins with a series of scanned images of a brain that fill the entire frame. The pointer of a mouse moves over parts of the images, as if by itself, while a male voice describes where a tumour is visible and why it cannot be operated on. The source of the voice is then revealed to be a doctor, filmed in a medium close-up, sitting behind a desk, followed by a 'reaction' shot: a silent, visibly stunned man and woman in medium close-up, on the other side of the desk. As the doctor continues to speak, the camera remains fixed on the couple, registering the minutiae of their facial expressions. The woman's eyes fill with water until she blinks and a tear rolls down her cheek; the man clenches his jaw and furrows his brow. Rather than cutting back to the doctor using a conventional shot/reverse shot, we stay with the two figures and witness their shocked silence at this news, without being offered the momentary relief of a cut. The phone rings, the doctor answers and conducts an extended conversation about another patient's operation, and all the while the camera remains fixed on the couple's faces. The shot of the two figures lasts just over three minutes.

This scene from *Halt auf freier Strecke* exemplifies a number of aesthetic strategies which are intensely political in ways that are both surprising – in that they resonate with ideas from early film theory at the beginning of the twentieth century regarding how film should act upon the world – and characteristic of works of post-1989 German and Austrian cinema. It is this split position in which this book interested: on

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the one hand, the films I address in the following chapters can be read through the lens of a strand of twentieth-century German film theory that has its origins in Brecht's Epic Theatre and the neo-Marxist aesthetic theory of the German-Jewish intellectuals working at and with the Frankfurter Institut für Sozialforschung during the 1920s and 1930s. I make the case for the continuing pertinence of the writings of three film theorists, Walter Benjamin (1882–1940), Siegfried Kracauer (1889–1966) and Alexander Kluge (1932–), in gaining a new understanding of the ways in which contemporary German-language film is political. These three thinkers believed in the transformative potential of film as a medium, and were intensely interested in what cinema does – that is, what kind of experience of the world it could bring forth in a performative (political) gesture. On the other hand, this book presents an account of post-1989 German and Austrian cinema which is political in ways that move beyond the original neo-Marxist imperative of these three thinkers. Through the lens of Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge, it offers a new interpretation of the political aesthetics of some of the most important works of post-unification German and Austrian cinema, producing an impression of the contemporary filmic landscape which is both radical and optimistic.

So how do my observations about the above scene from *Halt auf freier Strecke* render its aesthetics 'political' in these terms? Firstly, the scene is somewhat unspectacular: there is no music, no loud and emphatic crying, no multiple perspectives intended to formally convey the characters' emotional unease. Yet the three-minute shot of the couple feels remarkable due to its contrast to other popular narrative fiction films of the new millennium (the average shot length in Hollywood films is around three to six seconds, for example).[2] The length of this long take serves to intensify the scene in a way that differs from the kind of intensification generated by what is often referred to as 'MTV-style editing'. While rapid cuts can intensify an action or a reaction by presenting viewers with multiple angles and extended slow motion sequences, intensification operates in *Halt auf freier Strecke* through demanding in viewers a prolonged confrontation with the image before them. The three-minute-long shot of the couple in the scene demands that viewers exercise a certain cognitive 'staying power' – that is, that they continue to focus on the faces of the two characters: their eye movements and blinking, the light and shadows on their faces, individual hairs, the way that they move their mouths. Unaccompanied by music, and uninterrupted by cuts, the three-minute-long shot breaks from formal convention. It rejects those markers that signify an emotionally charged

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moment, emptying out the frame of everything but a palpable sense of the couple's emotional reaction.

The intense response solicited by the three-minute take of the shocked couple can be read as seeking to induce a heightened level of attentiveness in viewers, a claim which is not new; a number of twentieth-century theories have politicised the viewing subject who is exposed to the long take/facial close-up in different ways, insisting on an ethical dimension to its reception.[3] The emergence of affect theory and the 'sensory turn' within film studies offer a wealth of reference points for theorising what this three-minute take in Dresen's film is trying to do. However, my contention is that a great deal of knowledge – about aesthetics, politics and the Berlin Republic – can be gained from viewing this moment in *Halt auf freier Strecke* through the lens of early-twentieth-century theory written by neo-Marxist German-Jewish thinkers. Writing in the early years of cinema as a mass medium, and in a climate of intense political tension, Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer were asking what kind of an experience watching films could bring forth with a sense of urgency: they insisted that film must sensitise and move viewers – not with a view to inciting political action, but rather in order to equip spectators with a keen and finely tuned sensory system (making them sensitive subjects). Sensitive subjects, they contended – in different ways, and using different rhetorical arguments – would no longer be alienated from themselves or those around them, and thus could be trusted to be critically aware, exercising the kind of judgement that would hamper the onset of fascism. Reading *Halt auf freier Strecke* through this particular neo-Marxist, philosophical strand of film theory forces us to ask whether Andreas Dresen, too, is seeking to produce an aesthetic experience in viewers with a comparable urgency or impetus. And if so, why? This question seems particularly pertinent given the numerous and multifaceted ways in which parallels can be drawn between theories by thinkers like Benjamin and Kracauer, and contemporary filmmaking practices. This theoretical framework demands that we interrogate the Berlin Republic that is screened in Dresen's film and the others in this book, and ask what kind of a viewing subjectivity is both assumed and produced in this body of films.

My second point concerning the film's political aesthetics relates to authenticity. The scene described from *Halt auf freier Strecke* features a non-professional actor and incursions of 'real life' into the fictional diegesis. The actor who plays the doctor in this scene is a lay actor, and in real life is Dr Uwe Träger, Chief Neurosurgeon at a Neurosurgery Clinic

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in Potsdam, who carries out real conversations of this nature three or four times a week. Reflecting on the filming process, Träger said:

> The conversation took place with the utmost attentiveness and concentration. I completely forgot that the camera was there; there was no extra lighting, nothing was different about the room.[4]

The doctor receives a call from his real-life operation coordinator whilst the cameras are rolling, with the effect that a slice of the real day-to-day operation of the clinic is inserted into the film's fictional diegesis. One reading of this aspect of the film would perhaps claim that Andreas Dresen displays here a commitment to rejecting the spectacular in favour of a more relatable mode of representation. However, I argue that Dresen's concern with the real has a number of other political dimensions that would not come to light without reference to the ideas I examine in this book. A century ago, Siegfried Kracauer was working as a film critic for the *Frankfurter Zeitung* when he issued the call to arms in the epigraph to this chapter. Deeply unhappy with what he called 'foolish, deceitful, and frequently cruel' film productions he was viewing on a daily basis, Kracauer called for a new kind of cinema, one which would treat its audience as intelligent and alert, a collaborator in the film-viewing process rather than a passive consumer of ideologically dangerous content.[5] Such an urgency can be found in the film-theoretical writings of Alexander Kluge, too. Writing in post-war West Germany, the political and social climate was such that artists, writers and filmmakers were being forced rethink the limitations of *l'art pour l'art* following the violent rupture in all modes of expression brought about by National Socialism. Questions of language – including film language and form – dominated the debate, evidenced perhaps most famously by Adorno's proclamation that 'to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric'.[6] Against this backdrop, Andreas Dresen's concern with truth and authenticity in the film may be read differently.

Alexander Kluge has argued that lay actors are positioned of a state of limbo, neither acting in accordance with the regulations concerning the depiction of 'real' on film, nor able to behave as they would in a real situation because of the technical limitations imposed on them (i.e. the need to stand in a certain way, face a certain direction, guide the conversation on a particular course).[7] The use of lay actors is for Kluge, then, a productive way of reminding viewers of the illusionary nature of film; the actors stand out as 'visitors' to the hermetically sealed reality that the film constructs, thereby drawing attention to this intradiegetic space as a fiction. As a result, the film demonstrates a concern

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with the ontological status of the image through small formal ruptures or jarring effects produced by the inclusion of 'real' elements. This book does not suggest that Dresen's formal decisions may be read as a direct response to the crisis of representation in post-war Germany and Europe. Rather, I wish to broaden the discussion around the film's political aesthetics, and ask: why would this film – and many of the other films I examine in this book – so fervently seek to draw attention to its own illusory nature? Which competing narratives are laying claim to a truth that these films are seeking to undermine?

## The Political in German Film

There are a number of ways that the political has been theorised in relation to film aesthetics in the German context, and the definition of the political that I employ in this book – a neo-Marxist one that is filtered through Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge – differs primarily from others in that it takes in ideas relating to political cinema which span the twentieth century. In scholarship on political aesthetics – this book included – the political tends to refer to an oppositionality: aesthetic strategies that differ from established modes of representation in some clearly identifiable ways. A productive conceptualisation of this kind of 'political' is offered by Jacques Rancière, on whose work film scholars such as Blumenthal-Barby have drawn in order to define the political in relation to German-language cinema:

> At issue is the distinction between 'politics' (la politique), in the conventional sense of establishing and maintaining principles central to the preservation and reinforcement of political discourse, and its elusive other, namely 'the political' (le politique'), which designates a moment of disturbance or interference, posits an-other force that 'defies appropriation' and, as such, presents a latent threat to established political orders and their codified modes of representation.[8]

This statement is useful in that it offers a definition of what the political does. It posits an opposition between political discourse and its 'elusive' other, which constitutes 'an-other force', whereby the former operates within a framework of complicity and consensus, and the latter within one of disturbance, interference, interruption and threat. As Blumenthal-Barby notes, this definition of 'the political' can be effectively linked to aesthetic form through the performative. The way in which the political brings about an-other force is not descriptive

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(and thus dependent on counter-political narratives), but rather it is a performative act: it is brought into being through disturbance and interference.

This dichotomy between established order and interference has continued to shape understandings of the political in relation to German-language film. In Eric Rentschler's oft-cited account, for example, he charts the economic, political and cultural path of national cinema from the New German Cinema of the 1960s and 1970s to the so-called German 'cinema of consensus' that followed in the 1990s and continued to be the dominant mode of film(making), he claimed, from his standpoint when writing in 2000.[9] He pits a political *auteur* cinema that was formally innovative and 'challenged the nation's willingness to forget the past',[10] as embodied by Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Margarethe von Trotta, Werner Herzog, Alexander Kluge, Helke Sander, Wim Wenders and others, against a 'post-wall cinema of consensus' – a German star-driven, commercially oriented studio film culture that skirts 'thematics like right-wing radicalism, chronic unemployment, or the uneasy integration of the former GDR into the Federal Republic'.[11] In place of the political awareness of the New German Cinema, the German 'cinema of consensus' of the 1990s sought to 'engross and accommodate'.

What has remained from Rentschler's influential 'cinema of consensus' argument is a dominant understanding of the political in German film, whereby the political value of a film is inversely proportional to how 'consensual' it is deemed to be.[12] Further, thanks to Rentschler, the political is understood in a restrictive way: namely, political value is measured against the aesthetic choices, critical content and production structures of the New German Cinema. 'The issues that were important [for the New German Cinema] are important now as well, and like ghosts they have returned to Germany's screens', write Fisher and Prager.[13] Scholarly efforts to reinscribe the political into the narrative of German cinema over the past few decades thus often do so through creating links between the New German Cinema and the activities of filmmakers today.[14] This rests on an interpretation of the political that takes as its starting point the signing of the Oberhausen Manifesto in February 1962, a document released by a group of young filmmakers who were dissatisfied with the conditions of the German film industry in the late 1950s. Alexander Kluge was one of the leading signatories who denounced the filmmaking practices of his time ('The old film is dead'[15]). The primary objective of the group was change on every level, from the subject areas to be addressed in films ('film should embrace social documentation, political questions, educational concerns . . .[16])

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all the way to a complete restructuring of film production and funding that would allow for non-commercial, ideologically independent filmmaking practices. The legacy of the manifesto is far-reaching, and it includes the founding of the Kuratorium junger deutscher Film in 1965, which continues to support young talent today, and the opening of the Ulm Institute for Film Design in 1963, which closed in 1968. Its most celebrated legacy, however, is the oeuvre of the New German Cinema, which won international recognition for its forceful break from its predecessors.

The problem with this understanding of the political in reference to the New German Cinema and the Oberhausen Manifesto is that it is limited in scope: as shown in the examples above, the ways in which *Halt auf freier Strecke* – and indeed scenes from all of the films addressed in this book – constitute the political cannot be explained solely in terms of consensus and interference. Indeed, it is worth noting that Dresen's films scarcely appear in accounts of German political filmmaking. Rather, this book argues that a richer and more nuanced impression of Dresen's political aesthetics can only be gained by going further back than the Oberhausen Manifesto, for whilst the Oberhausen Manifesto represents a key marker on the trajectory of political film and political film theory, it is not the beginning. This book is interested in exploring a particular trajectory of such film-theoretical optimism, and asking how contemporary filmmakers respond to this. The optimism about the political potential of form to which I refer here is a left-wing political perspective closely linked to the critical theory that emerged from the Frankfurt School: the group of Marxist, German-Jewish intellectuals based at the Frankfurter Institut für Sozialforschung, founded in 1923.

The Institute included figures such as Theodor W. Adorno, Leo Lowenthal, Gershom Sholem, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Herbert Marcuse and Max Horkheimer, the latter of whom became Director and Editor of the Institute's influential journal, the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, in 1930. Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer, on whom this book focuses, moved within the intellectual orbit of the Frankfurt School, and were closely acquainted with its members, yet professionally independent, for the most part. The Institute went into exile in the United States in 1934, where its affiliates continued their assault on capitalist ideology by extending Marx's critique of capitalism into the cultural sphere.[17] The group was not uniform in thought, and this is especially evident in the texts its members produced on the subject of film. In *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, Adorno and Horkheimer eschew film as a site of political potential, as they consider it a form of entertain-

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ment firmly embedded in the culture industry. Their disillusionment in that text is an inevitable response to the rise of fascism and the resulting genocide of six million European Jews and many other groups deemed undesirable by the Nazi ideology. Yet a concurrent strand of film-theoretical optimism emerged from this group in the writings of Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer, both of whom champion film as the medium best suited to serve the neo-Marxist critical imperative of emancipation and enlightenment of the public – a public that was increasingly exposed to the still-new medium of cinema.

The framework through which I explore the political in German and Austrian film in this book builds upon this earlier moment of optimism and possibility. Rather than taking the Oberhausen Manifesto as a point of departure, my theoretical trajectory goes further back to Weimar- and Nazi-era film theory and its grappling with the urgent aesthetic and political concerns of its age. The book's corpus of film theory is comprised of programmatic texts on film written by Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin and Alexander Kluge. In what follows I show the points of intersection and divergence in their writing, points that emerge from their shared disenchantment with the domestic output of the German film industry in the eras in which they are writing, and I also take seriously the hope they placed in a different, as yet unrealised, politically engaged cinema.

The book's corpus of films takes in eight post-1989 works by German-speaking directors. Methodologically, it engages with different film-theoretical approaches: Marxist film theory; film history; cultural history, for example of particular film production companies; affect theory (insofar as Benjamin's writing on shock, for example, may be read as pre-empting the 'sensory turn' in film studies); and reception studies in my theorising of how the different films construct or conceptualise an assumed racialised, gendered viewer.

By reading post-unification films through the lens of these neo-Marxist theories, I aim to test whether the call to arms issued by Kracauer, Benjamin and Kluge at crucial moments in the twentieth century is now redundant. To what extent do the Frankfurt School philosophers' observations, concerning the alienated condition of the modern subject in an age of technological modernity and capitalism, retain their currency in an age of advanced capitalism and digital technology? How can these theories be productively 'updated' in order to take in those criticisms levelled against neo-Marxist/Brechtian filmmaking practices that assume both a problematically didactic position as well as an audience that is straight, white and male? Are there directors who may be

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seen as responding to the Frankfurt School's ideological call to arms? If so, what conclusions does this lead us to draw about the political aesthetics of contemporary German-language cinema?

## Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge

The pairing of Walter Benjamin with Siegfried Kracauer is not an unlikely one. Textual crossovers between the two figures have been the focus of existing scholarship, in broader terms as well as in relation to cinema.[18] Though Alexander Kluge was born half a century and one world war later than Benjamin and Kracauer, his friendship with Adorno set him on an intellectual and creative trajectory that makes it possible to identify a continuum in the three thinkers' philosophies. In different rhetorical styles and to varying degrees, Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge investigate the role of art in society, in particular the relationship between cultural producer, cultural object and audience. They each write from a position of dissatisfaction concerning the state of the film industry at their respective points of writing; Kracauer's statement in the above epigraph that contemporary productions are 'foolish' and 'deceitful' reflects the sentiments of Benjamin and Kluge, too. All three thinkers consider the way that this relationship changes over time as indicative of wider transformations in society. These are transformations not only in the role of art, but in the economics and politics of cultural production, the public sphere in its broadest sense, including its inclusionary and exclusionary practices. Moreover, and most significantly, all three theorists made claims about changes in human perception as a result of technological modernity, positing that the senses themselves have a history that must be analysed as a matter of urgent political import. Crucially, each identifies the moving image as the medium best suited to negotiate these changes. Yet they each theorised the changes and film's possible responses to them in different ways. My aim in this book is therefore not to create a smooth continuum of thought, but rather to show how these three thinkers can shed light on the political potential of the innovative aesthetics of some of the most important post-unification works of German-language cinema.

*Sensitive Subjects* draws on texts by Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge spanning six decades. I take in their criticism of particular films, texts about film industries and how they operate in wider contexts, and programmatic essays and monographs on cinema. The primary sources by Kracauer to which I refer are taken from two crucial points in his career,

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pre- and post-Second World War. Born on 8 February 1889 in Frankfurt am Main to a middle-class German-Jewish family, Kracauer first studied architecture and gained a doctorate in engineering, a profession that he pursued throughout the war and then gave up in 1921 to join the *Frankfurter Zeitung* as a cultural correspondent; he acted as Culture Editor for the publication from 1924 to 1933, when he fled to France with his wife, Lili.[19] During this time he published almost two thousand articles for the paper, around a third of which were film reviews.[20] I cite a number of these texts written during the Weimar Republic, a period in which he forged and maintained friendships with Leo Löwenthal, Theodor W. Adorno (whom he mentored during the latter's late teens), Ernst Bloch and Walter Benjamin, whom he first met and began corresponding with in 1924.[21] Martin Jay characterises the group as 'unaffiliated and experimental leftists who . . . were fascinated by cultural questions more than economic ones'.[22] Kracauer was the least dogmatic in his politics and often had to defend his moderate, at times critical, stance towards the Marxist idealism embraced by Lukács, for example.[23] Jay cites correspondence between Kracauer and Ernst Bloch to show how Kracauer positions himself as a dissenting voice from within the 'staunchly bourgeois' *Frankfurter Zeitung*:

> [with regards to his] writing for the *FZ*, he remarked that his reputation as an 'enemy of the bourgeoisie' was known to all and that writing in a non-Marxist paper gave his words greater public impact. The accusation [by Bloch] that he had repudiated his militancy was also nonsense: 'I have advocated Marxism visibly enough and more than others and will continue to advocate it in a way that corresponds to my talents and energies'.[24]

Kracauer's focus on the cinema and other cultural phenomena in the tens of hundreds of texts he wrote for the *Frankfurter Zeitung* are part of his project of mapping, and so understanding, 'the experience of modernity as living on the brink of catastrophe'.[25] Concerning this era of Kracauer's thought, Hansen writes:

> Kracauer sees the historical process which culminates in modernity as an increased withdrawal of meaning from life, a dissociation of truth and existence; the world is disintegrating into a chaotic multiplicity of phenomena. This process is synonymous, in the economic and social realm, with capitalist rationalization and the concomitant alienation of human life, labor, and interpersonal relations.[26]

Kracauer's intellectual project entails rendering visible and analysing where the changes brought about by modernity are perceptible. For

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him, film offers a treasure trove of 'inconspicuous surface-level expressions' (*unscheinbaren Oberflächenäußerungen*), as he writes in the introduction to his essay, 'The Mass Ornament'.[27] A concern regarding 'the alienation of human life' is a key theoretical trope that Kracauer shares with Benjamin, and indeed with Kluge, despite the different eras in which they write.

Film becomes not only an indicator of the alienated subject, but also the medium of redemption in the second monograph published during Kracauer's exile in the United States, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, which appeared in 1960. In the following chapters, I draw extensively on that book, in particular in my discussions of realism in contemporary German-language cinema. Kracauer's first postwar monograph, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (1947) was the culmination of a project that was initially suggested to him by Max Horkheimer.[28] Here, Kracauer addresses the topic of fascism head-on. By searching for 'clues to hidden mental processes' in German silent film and Weimar expressionist cinema, Kracauer attempts to uncover a secret history – creating a linear, fascist trajectory – that foretells the fate of the German nation.[29] In *Theory of Film*, however, fascism plays a more spectral role. Kracauer continues his project of making sense of the present through film; the present, however, has been blown apart by the catastrophe to which Hansen refers above, and thus, although the Holocaust is mentioned only a few times, 'the elided historical object of the book is . . . the question of film after Auschwitz'.[30] Whereas cinema could be used to diagnose the psychological ills of a nation in *From Caligari to Hitler*, *Theory of Film* sees Kracauer somewhat surprisingly prescribe the cinema as their remedy. He ascribes to film the capacity to re-establish the connection between mankind and 'material reality' that has been lost:

> It is my contention that film, our contemporary, has a definite bearing on the era into which it is born; that it meets our inmost needs precisely by exposing – for the first time, as it were – outer reality and thus deepening, in Gabriel Marcel's words, our relation to 'this Earth which is our habitat'.[31]

The body of Kracauer's text consists of a treatise on cinematic realism, while the Epilogue delivers a critique of 'modern man's intellectual landscape', characterised by alienation, isolation and ideological disunity.[32] Whereas the experiences of the cinema-going masses in the mid-1950s are different to those of pre-war Germans, Kracauer believes that the films continue to be consumed in a state of distraction, and that

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the cinema remains a means of escapism. He argues that technological progress has created a disjuncture between the spectator-subject and 'physical reality'; the condition of modern man is such that his ability to experience is lacking. Finally, Kracauer gestures towards the potential of film to bridge this gap and to enable viewers to experience 'the world that is ours'.[33]

In the 'New German Critique' special edition on Siegfried Kracauer from 1991, a landmark publication in Anglo-American Kracauer scholarship,[34] Patrice Petro explains how scholars, notably Thomas Elsaesser, Gertrud Koch and Heide Schlüpmann, tend to imagine two distinct Kracauers, pre- and post-exile.[35] They cite 'Weimar Kracauer's growing interest in Marxism and contact with the Frankfurt School thinkers in their assessment of his *Ideologiekritik*. Based on his reviews for the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, the first Kracauer is characterised as an 'anticapitalist practitioner of a "material dialectics" (if not a dialectical materialism), the phenomenological observer of the local, the ephemeral, the everyday'.[36] Against the 'American' Kracauer, charges of conformity and conservatism are levelled, based on *From Caligari to Hitler* and *Theory of Film*. This second Kracauer is considered an 'anticommunist *émigré* intellectual, the sociological critic turned melancholy realist'.[37] Arguing against this narrative, Petro encourages the reading of Kracauer's diverse German and American texts as part of a 'common project', claiming that Kracauer's apparent political turnaround must be considered in light of the dramatic changes he experienced in his everyday life as a result of fleeing fascist Europe. Petro also draws attention to other factors that must be taken into account: changes in Kracauer's readership in the USA; a 'very different sense of place and belonging'; and the changing role of film in society and the establishment of film studies as a discipline.[38] Petro's article paved the way for methods of understanding and commenting on Kracauer's oeuvre that highlight points of continuity alongside rupture.

Miriam Hansen was a key figure in reframing Kracauer's oeuvre. Hansen traced the history of the writing of *Theory of Film* back to its conception in November 1940, when Kracauer was in exile in Marseille. By engaging with unpublished material made up of three large pads containing notes for a book on 'film aesthetics' inherited by the Deutsches Literaturarchiv, Hansen shows how preliminary sketches of the monograph reveal much in common with Kracauer's Marxist ideological-critical writings for the *Frankfurter Zeitung*.[39] She also claims that a stronger influence from Benjamin holds sway over the text, given that the two thinkers were in close contact during their time in Marseille.

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Like Petro, she calls for an approach to Kracauer's work that is in many ways *redemptive*; one which is more forgiving of his seeming utopianism and which emphasises a synthesis in the two thinkers' necessarily quite different perspectives. This project is taken up by Gerd Gemünden and Johannes von Moltke in their collection of Anglo-American scholarship on Kracauer, *Culture in the Anteroom: The Legacies of Siegfried Kracauer*, and the present book is intended to contribute to that film-historical trajectory. Whilst acknowledging the historical specificity of Kracauer's writings at different points of the twentieth century, I also make the case for reading contemporary film through the lens (singular) of Kracauer's multi-dimensional theory.

Walter Benjamin was well acquainted with Kracauer, as is clear from their correspondence as well as from the instances of their theoretical overlap and references to one another's work.[40] Three years younger than Kracauer, Benjamin was born on 15 July 1892 in Berlin to a well-off German-Jewish family.[41] After leaving his hometown to study philosophy in Freiburg, Bern and Munich, he returned to Berlin in 1920 with aspirations to work in academia, having completed his doctorate and with a number of unpublished essays to his name. He nevertheless failed to launch an academic career; the work he submitted for his application for a Habilitation at the Goethe University Frankfurt, a polemical study of Goethe entitled *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, had the effect of alienating Benjamin from influential members of the academy such as the intellectual group surrounding Stefan George, among whom he was striving to find his place. Those on whom Benjamin did make an impression, however, remained good friends and important allies, and facilitated his integration into – and financial support from – the *Frankfurter Institut für Sozialforschung*; these included Adorno, Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Gershom Scholem. His integration into the group, however, had its limitations. In her account of his life in the introduction to *Illuminations*, Hannah Arendt writes that 'Benjamin probably was the most peculiar Marxist ever produced by this movement, which God knows had its full share of oddities'.[42] Admittedly, Benjamin was interested in a more practical, at times even crude dialectical thinking than that of many of his colleagues, one that could be found in the work of poets and novelists rather than philosophers, and in the conversion of theory into practice.[43]

Bertolt Brecht was a role model for Benjamin in this respect. Benjamin identified strongly with the poet and playwright: 'my approval of Brecht's production represents one of the most important and most defensible points of my entire position. I have been able to paraphrase it

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quite often in literary terms at least approximately, if never comprehensively'.[44] They had a close friendship, and Stanley Mitchell claims that '[t]here are, for instance, strong indications that the ideas and implications of "epic theatre" were common to them both before they met'.[45] Given that Brecht's theatrical practice directly influenced Benjamin's writings on the role of the intellectual and the sociopolitical function of art, the forms that art may take, Benjamin's *Versuche über Brecht* is a key reference point for this book.

The focus on the materialist facet of dialectical materialism is an element of Benjamin's thought that links him to Kracauer: whilst both were Marxist in orientation, Marxism remains 'a heuristic-methodological stimulus'.[46] While Marxist doctrine offered a broad framework through which modernity could be theorised, both thinkers also place emphasis on its smaller-scale, material manifestations. Arendt writes about Benjamin:

> He was concerned with the correlation between a street scene, a speculation on the stock exchange, a poem, a thought, with the hidden line which holds them together and enables the historian or philologist to recognize that they must all be placed in the same period.[47]

For the most part, Benjamin's gaze was not on the moving image as Kracauer's was. Nevertheless, both offer a critique of the subject that is very clearly bound up with, as Hansen writes above, 'the experience of modernity as living on the brink of catastrophe'.[48] And, most importantly in the context of this book, both consider film a suitable medium through which to theorise that experience of modernity.

During the time when Kracauer was Cultural Editor of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, Benjamin also wrote for the paper on a freelance basis, though his contributions were primarily literary reviews. His diaries dating from his time in Moscow at the end of 1926 reveal him to be an admirer of certain Russian films,[49] and he wrote two essays on the Russian films he had seen for the *Literarische Welt* in 1927, to which I refer in Chapter 1.[50] He wrote short essays about Charlie Chaplin, of whom he was a great fan, as well as on Mickey Mouse,[51] yet film is more often an incidental topic in discussions about political modes of production, photography, kitsch and fantasy. Despite Benjamin's texts on film constituting only a fraction of his body of works, his lasting impression on film criticism is no less significant than Kracauer's, and this is largely due to his 1936 essay on technology and its effect on the artwork, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility' (hereaf-

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ter 'the Artwork essay'), which I refer to as a theoretical touchstone throughout this book.[52]

The Artwork essay has a complex history, but it suffices here to note that the third version of the essay, completed in 1939, is most commonly cited, perhaps due to its inclusion in *Illuminations*.[53] This English-language collection of Benjamin's essays, edited and introduced by Hannah Arendt and published in 1969, was pivotal in Anglo-American Benjamin scholarship; this is the version to which I will refer, unless otherwise stated.[54] The essay itself comprises fifteen short 'theses' into which two primary threads of argument are woven. Benjamin's first argument is that subjective experience has been transformed since the birth of mass culture in nineteenth-century Paris. He explains this transformation using the relationship between subject and artwork as an analogy: before the artwork was technologically reproducible, it was characterised by uniqueness, authority (a determinable author or creator), and ritual value (value ascribed according to history and tradition), which together gave the artwork its 'aura'. In an age of technological modernity, however, this kind of artwork is no longer befitting of the modern urban dweller, whose consciousness has necessarily adapted to cope with the 'shocks' that she encounters every day on account of industrialisation and urbanisation. The protective shield that she develops as a result of this has an alienating function, according to Benjamin, and results in a populace that is susceptible to manipulation to fascist ends. Further, in different ways to Kracauer, Benjamin also invests in *film* the capacity to undo the alienation and distraction of the viewing masses, which constitutes the second principal theoretical strand of the essay. Here, what Hansen refers to as the 'antinomic structure of Benjamin's thinking' is revealed:[55] the cinema is at once where the collective national psyche is (currently, negatively) shaped, as well as the site of its redemption. Benjamin imagines an as-yet-unrealised alternative function for a medium that has so far failed to achieve its potential.

The controversies surrounding the essay at the time of its initial publication in May 1936 in French in the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* under Horkheimer's editorship are well documented. Adorno's main objection, for example, is Benjamin's equation of aura with 'high art', or *l'art pour l'art*, citing Mallarmé and Schönberg as examples of autonomous art that is not auratic.[56] Adorno further calls into question Benjamin's embracing of film as counter-revolutionary, calling him 'romantic' in the faith he places in the film-going masses:

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> [The] idea that a reactionary individual can be transformed into a member of the avant-garde through an intimate acquantance with the films of Chaplin, strikes me as simple romanticization; for I cannot count Kracauer's favourite film director, even after *Modern Times*, as an avant-garde artist.[57]

Here, Adorno's stance towards Benjamin (and Kracauer) is clear. Yet, as Hansen points out, the rhetorical form of the artwork essay should not be underestimated: she suggests it be considered 'a set of militant theses defined by their tactical, interventionist value rather than their validity as an empirical account, a partisan manifesto rather than a presumably neutral scholarly treatise'.[58] This 'interventionist' definition guides the way in which I engage with the artwork essay. It represents a key moment of optimism concerning the filmic form within a specific set of historical and political parameters.

At this point it is worth noting that the optimism I identify in Benjamin and Kracauer must be qualified by acknowledgement of a secular Jewish Messianic tradition that directly and indirectly informs both thinkers' work. Anson Rabinbach characterises the post-1914 messianism to which Kracauer and Benjamin subscribed as follows:

> Modern Jewish Messianism . . . emphasizes a certain kind of intellectuality as politics, a spiritual radicalism which aims at nothing less than 'total transformation' of the individual and society. . . . Whether theoretical or actual, the politics of Jewish Messianism is in the final analysis apocalyptic – even when it assumes political guises.[59]

Rabinbach notes that the kind of Messianism present in the writings of Benjamin, Bloch and others is not 'pure' in form, but rather should be understood as a 'spirit or attitude'.[60] He describes it as an impulse that 'appears within different Jewish-secular frameworks'.[61] The scope of this book is not broad enough to take the respective Jewish-secular frameworks of Benjamin and Kracauer into account, nor is there space to interrogate the extent to which their writings on film represent this mode of apocalyptic thought in a political guise. Nevertheless, it is necessary to emphasise that the optimism to which I refer runs, at times, concurrent to allusions to a cataclysmic rupture that is imminent (for Benjamin) or that has already happened (for the later Kracauer).[62]

Texts by the theorist and filmmaker Alexander Kluge form the third theoretical strand of the specifically left-wing, neo-Marxist filmic optimism espoused by Kracauer and Benjamin. The absence of Messianic undertones, compounded by his practice as a filmmaker and television producer, makes Kluge's optimism easier to characterise. On the other

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hand, Kluge's body of experimental shorts and feature films, television productions and works of fiction, film- and social theory constitutes nothing short of a 'network' of 'symbiotic or mutually implicating arrangement of input and output',[63] in Elsaesser's terms, so that extrapolating the most relevant texts to underscore his particular strand of optimism demands some significant selectivity. The material I draw upon from Alexander Kluge thus constitutes only a small part of his vast creative output over the past six decades. Born in Halberstadt on 14 February 1932, (Ernst) Alexander Kluge studied music and modern history in Marburg and Freiburg before studying law and gaining his Doctor of Law degree in 1956. It was during his time working in a legal practice in Frankfurt that he came to know Adorno, who introduced him to Fritz Lang, for whom he worked as an intern on the set of *Das indische Grabmal* in 1958–59. The friendship between Kluge and Adorno was mutually influential. For Kluge as for other members of the German Left, Adorno's paradigm of the Culture Industry remained a key point of reference in the 1960s and 1970s.[64] However, Kluge eschews Adorno's (and Horkheimer's) absolute division between high and mass culture, a problem that Hansen articulates as follows:

> Adorno not only hypostasized the difference between critical subjectivity and the subject of mass manipulation; he also denied the empirical possibility that new forms – and other kinds – of experience, new modes of expression, self-reflection, and intersubjectivity might emerge from the same cultural technologies that were destroying the old.[65]

Kluge is thus more aligned with Benjamin here. For Kluge, new media offer precisely the opportunity to operate outside of dominant structures on various different levels: from the kinds of subjects represented, to the use of modernist formal devices and the creation of a 'counter-public sphere' of production. Kluge puts these strategies into practice – and reflects on them in his writing – across his entire network of output. As Hansen comments, Adorno eventually softened his stance towards cinema, a move she claims was influenced by Kluge.[66] Yet, as a self-proclaimed 'Benjamin devotee' ('Benjamin-Anhänger'),[67] Kluge's optimism regarding the possibilities of film is distinctly Benjaminian in character, a point that I underscore at different points throughout this book.

Since calling for a break with the old and the initiation of a new kind of filmmaking in the Oberhausen Manifesto, Kluge has written extensively on the subject of politics and film. Indeed, throughout his career, he has described himself primarily as a writer.[68] Kluge has continued

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to write critically about the film industry and the role of art in society whilst gaining critical attention as a director. It is notable that although Benjamin and the Frankfurt School are key reference points for Kluge, the extent to which he engages directly with early film-theoretical writing is limited. The main texts by Kluge on which I draw are those of a conditional nature: they prescribe the formal and content-based characteristics of film that could potentially render it politically valid if they were to be realised. For Kluge, there is no *Kultur* without *Politik*, and it is telling that a filmmaker like Harun Farocki would comment that: 'true, few people can say anything meaningful about film, but must Kluge always find the anthropological in everything and institutionalise it into a kind of cultural politics (*Kulturpolitik*)?(!)'[69]

One important point of reference for this book is *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere* (1972), which Kluge wrote together with the sociologist and assistant to Jürgen Habermas, Oskar Negt.[70] This dense philosophical work is at once a criticism of the dominance of a bourgeois public sphere that fails to be relevant to the working classes (and thus denies their participation in the creation of community and political decision-making), and a call for structural change at various levels in order to create an oppositional public sphere (*Gegenöffentlichkeit*). Negt and Kluge paint a picture of a public sphere that serves only the interests of capitalist production, comprising '[television], the press, the public sphere of interest groups and political parties, parliament, the military, public education, public chairs in the universities, the legal system, the churches, industry, and so on . . .'[71]. They analyse two forms of mass media in the book: the media cartel and television. I draw on this text in detail at various points in this book in order to show how, in line with Kracauer and Benjamin, Kluge is also concerned with legitimating the representation of the 'real' experiences of the West German viewing subject in mass media.[72]

With the exception of the interview I conducted with Alexander Kluge in May 2014, the texts I refer to were written during the time when Kluge was most active as a filmmaker (1970–90). I cite many of the short, programmatic essays that Kluge published in the book accompanying the film, *Die Patriotin/The Patriotic Woman*,[73] as well as those in *Ulmer Dramaturgien: Reibungsverluste*, a collection of texts Kluge wrote with film critic Klaus Eder. The latter reflects on the work of the Ulm Institute for Film Design, as well as offering 'excursions into a future – utopian? – film landscape'.[74] These elaborate on where other films are failing, in his opinion, to challenge spectators' imaginations, and thus contribute to the widespread dumbing-down of the (cinema-going)

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public. Further, they clarify the filmic methods that Kluge believes further the goal of films that produce critical spectators.

I also consider the article that Kluge wrote in response to a speech given by Interior Minister Friedrich Zimmermann in 1983, in which Kluge attacks contemporary culture politics for taking commercial (box-office) success as a measure of a film's merit.[75] Zimmermann played a key role in rechannelling state funding into commercial productions, a move which is often cited as a reason for the decline of New German Cinema from 1982 onwards.[76] Zimmermann most famously said: 'Taxpayers don't want to be provoked; they want to be entertained',[77] a sentiment to which Kluge strongly objects – the reasons for which he outlines comprehensively in the article I draw upon – and which stands in opposition to the function of film according to Kracauer and Benjamin, too.

Tara Forrest is one of a number of scholars who show how, for Kluge, television represents an apt medium for the reconciliation of the theory outlined in *Public Sphere and Experience* with practice.[78] My focus in this book remains, however, on film, since I am interested precisely in political optimism concerning *film* as a medium in an era of advanced capitalism, and it is for this reason that I focus on Kluge's texts on cinema.

## Contemporary German and Austrian Film

The films I read through the lens of Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge cut across genre. I consider filmmakers whose works are not usually compared in the same study, such as arthouse icon Michael Haneke and director of social tragic-comedies Andreas Dresen. The films are shot on 16mm, 32mm, HD and HDTV, making this study one that explores what constitutes 'contemporary' filmmaking practices in an age of digital reproducibility, in which filmmakers may also take the decision not to film on digital cameras. I also contribute to the growing body of scholarship on the Berlin School, asking what makes films by directors Elke Hauck, Angela Schanelec and Valeska Grisebach political in neo-Marxist terms. The term 'Berlin School' became common usage following a review of Thomas Arslan's *Der schöne Tag/A Fine Day* (2001) by film critic Rainer Gansera, to whom it is credited.[79] The label was imposed on directors rather than being one that was chosen, and is used to delimit a body of works from the beginning of the 2000s onwards that share stylistic commonalities. The Berlin School has been a driving force for critics and scholars arguing that German cinema is no longer consensual, and its films are the subject of five recent books.[80]

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There are some striking parallels between the reception of, and backlash against, the New German Cinema and the Berlin School in their respective times by figures like Dominik Graf and Bernd Eichinger, with echoing accusations of 'artistic indulgence'.[81] Scholars like Marco Abel, on the other hand, argue for the political significance and relevance of a body of works that has been accused of navel-gazing, precisely because of their close observations and painstaking analysis of the experience of their political era.[82] In my analyses of three films that are considered part of the Berlin School, the present book necessarily or implicitly offers a defence of the politics of their images.

The most obvious point of continuation between this book and the body of theory described above is my use of the language spoken by the films' protagonists to select the films I analyse. Like Rentschler and the other scholars to whom I refer, I am therefore also contributing to debates on national cinema at a time when the idea of one cinema affiliated with a particular region rests on unsound assumptions of coherence and unity on the level of the politics of the nation. Andrew Higson's claim in 1989 that the designation of films according to nationality was becoming 'increasingly problematic'[83] was reaffirmed twenty years later by Randall Halle, who writes that 'it has become increasingly impossible to invoke a transparent, self-evident relationship between the nation and state'.[84] Stephan Schindler and Lutz Koepnick write that:

> It is one of the historical ironies of the development of German film studies, in particular in the United States, that this renewed exploration of the national in the 1990s occurred precisely during a period in which we experienced an accelerated dissolution of the modern nation-state at the global level.[85]

Indeed, it is precisely this coincidence of two major geopolitical shifts – the global phenomena of globalisation and transnationalism, and the fall of the Iron Curtain and the unification of Germany – that makes German screen studies a stimulating area of study. In line with other scholars who thematise the difficulty of a purely national approach to film studies,[86] I heed Halle's warning against 'romantic nationalist essentialism',[87] proving that national cultures are not bound to produce a specific aesthetic by drawing on a range of different-sounding and -looking German-language films. Furthermore, though I consider German-speaking directors, my object of interest is not primarily their commentary on German-speaking societies, but rather the supranational themes of work, class, gender and violence in Western European neoliberal democracies.

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The objective of this book – to identify traces of a German-Jewish, Frankfurt School political project in contemporary German-language films – thus raises questions about the 'Germanness' of the continuum I investigate. My approach is more holistic than other studies on German cinema: I include works by filmmakers who trained and set their films in the GDR, West Germany and in Austria. I also study one French-language film by the German-born, Austrian-residing 'pan-European' director,[88] Michael Haneke. Furthermore, I consider the works of three directors who are associated with the New Austrian Film: documentarist Michael Glawogger, Michael Haneke and Ulrich Seidl. This latter, eclectic movement was not born out of any particular manifesto; it is instead characterised by the filmmakers' continued challenging of official discourses on history and national image.[89] Dassanowsky and Speck write: 'the attacks of New Austrian Film are not aimed at a specific Austrian petit-bourgeois milieu, but at the general mode of existence that carries this ideological apparatus and that lingers on not only in Austria'.[90] *Sensitive Subjects* is therefore also interested in the scope and limitations of theories by Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge – theories that are directly and indirectly informed by the thinkers' experiences of German fascism – in transnational contexts. The inclusion of Austrian case studies in this book prompts an evaluation of phenomena that may be considered to be Western European more broadly. Indeed, the fourth Austrian director included in this book, Gerhard Friedl, sets out to explicitly interrogate the narrative of global late capitalism and its pervasive reach.

At the beginning of each chapter, I elaborate on a theoretical strand that is common to Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge with close reference to their works of film theory. I then use these works as a basis for asking specific questions relating to the political in different post-unification German-language films. Chapter 1 is primarily concerned with subject matter, in other words with plot, characterisation and with the films' engagement with their respective contexts. I ask whether the imperative of representing the German working-class on-screen expressed by each of the three thinkers remains, whilst questioning whether such categorisations apply in the Berlin Republic and contemporary Austria. Can we speak of a twenty-first-century worker film (*Arbeiterfilm*)? The large-scale outsourcing of manual labour and the transformation of Germany into an economic power based on technological innovation rather than production leads us to ask: who is the German-speaking worker? Is she as revolutionarily minded as the heroes of *Battleship Potemkin* lauded by Walter Benjamin?[91] Michael Glawogger

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and Elke Hauck offer two divergent answers to these questions. Glawogger's documentary from 2004, *Workingman's Death: 5 Bilder zur Arbeit im 21. Jahrhundert*, offers images of black and brown workers around the world, and defines (white) German workers in relation to these, whereas Elke Hauck paints a portrait of local workers in former East Germany in her film *Karger* from 2007.

Thanks to the success of films like Maren Ade's *Toni Erdmann* (2016) and Valeska Grisebach's *Western* (2017), which consider global flows of labour and capital in divergent contexts, the question of how post-1989 German and Austrian fiction film is responding to changing conditions of work is receiving greater attention. Gözde Naiboğlu's *Post-Unification Turkish German Cinema: Work, Globalisation and Politics beyond Representation* is a formative work in this context; her discussion of the precarity of post-Wall living and working conditions centres on films that deal with labour migration from Turkey to Germany. It is also worth noting that the past two decades have seen German and Austrian documentarists take on different kinds of work in some formally interesting ways, and Michael Glawogger – identified by Dassanowsky and Speck as part of the Austrian 'new-wave documentary'[92] – numbers amongst these. Theoretical approaches to these range from Deleuzian, post-representational readings (Naiboğlu) to those which draw on theories of surveillance capital and complicity for analysing what Annie Ring calls 'workplace documentaries', for example.[93] *Sensitive Subjects* contributes to this conversation, arguing all the while for a framework that takes in the specifically German context of the German worker film. The thematic focus on *Karger* in this chapter also represents an attempt to restore an emphasis on the political content of Berlin School films, a school to which *Karger* is considered to belong,[94] rather than focusing on the politics of their form.

In Chapter 2, I turn my attention to Kracauer's *Theory of Film* and show how his vision of filmic realism diverges quite substantially from the realist practices advocated by Benjamin and Kluge, both of whom were heavily influenced by Brecht's ideas on this topic. Each of the three theorists grapples with common concerns, however, namely: what is the most truthful way of capturing reality through the lens of a film camera? How is it possible to represent a world that is deeply disappointing in a way that does not merely affirm the prevailing conditions? I look at three films that, in different ways, reflect the complexities of this crucial relationship between the camera and the realities it pretends to record. Kracauer offers the framework for my reading of *Marseille* (2004) by dffb graduate Angela Schanelec, who, together with

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Thomas Arslan and Christian Petzold, is considered a first-generation Berlin School director. My approach to *Marseille* via Kracauer contributes to – and looks to deepen – discussions of the observational filming style of the Berlin School.

The more radical kinds of realism put forward by Benjamin and Kluge inform my analyses of Andreas Dresen's *Halt auf freier Strecke* (2011) and of the documentary *Hat Wolff von Amerongen Konkursdelikte begangen?* (2004) by the lesser-known Austrian filmmaker Gerhard Friedl.[95] I show how Kluge and Negt's conception of a counter-public sphere renders *Halt auf freier Strecke* political through the director's commitment to telling real stories. My reading of *Hat Wolff von Amerongen Konkursdelikte begangen?* through the theories of Benjamin and Kluge seeks to draw more attention to Friedl's challenging work. This chapter thus offers a new constellation of German-language films analysed together under the umbrella of the 'real', and I draw attention to some unexpected points of continuation between these films.

Chapters 3 and 4 both address an idea that Benjamin and Kracauer's almost 100-year-old theory sees addressed in remarkable ways in the films in this book: namely, a profound concern with a perceived shallowness of experience, a desensitised state of numbness, which characterises the cinemagoing subject. These two chapters reflect both on this assessment of (white) Western European subjectivity, as well as the ways that the theory and the films themselves suggest that the medium of film, contrary to Adorno's assertion in his letter to Benjamin, has transformative potential. Chapter 3 shows how Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge demand that a film engage viewers intellectually by rejecting storylines and formal devices that allow it to be 'consumed'. The idea of fragmentation is central to this chapter because it underpins the theory common to the three thinkers, and offers conceptual framework for my reading of two films by Michael Haneke: *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls* (1994) and *Code Inconnu: Récit incomplet de divers voyages* (2000). I illuminate here the ways in which Haneke seeks to engage viewers in a dialogue using techniques advocated by Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge. I also address Rancière's critique of the active/passive dichotomy set up by Brechtian theatre and filmic responses in *The Emancipated Spectator*, thereby testing my theoretical approach against more recent reception theory that challenges the use of Marxist theory for its 'overly' didactic position.[96]

Other scholars have read Haneke's oeuvre in the terms of the Frankfurt School, and my analysis via the fragment is not in itself a new approach.[97] The fragmented condition of the neoliberal subject – whether

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this be a result of a disjuncture between mediated images and real life in a digital age, or tensions between the local and global at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first – is a theme that features prominently in Haneke criticism.[98] For example, Temenuga Trifonova reads Haneke against a similar background to that deployed in this study and acknowledges the relevance of both Benjamin and Kracauer in her criticism; however, our approaches differ quite significantly. Whilst I subscribe to her statement that 'Haneke views film as an alternative public sphere with a demythologising and democratising potential which he – following Nietzsche, Kracauer, Benjamin and Adorno – locates in the fragment',[99] our conception of what constitutes democratising potential is different, a point that I demonstrate in Chapter 3 by drawing also on Alexander Kluge's notion of the autonomous spectator. My approach most clearly approximates that of Tara Forrest, given that she also analyses Haneke's use of fragmentation via Kluge, Adorno and Benjamin, and also looks at *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls*.[100] However, where Forrest's argument hinges on Adorno and negative utopianism, mine seeks to demonstrate the striking intersections between Kluge's theory and Haneke's praxis.

Chapter 4 also takes as its starting point the critique of the alienated subject articulated by Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge, and it draws in particular on Benjamin's notion of the filmic 'shock effect' (*Schockwirkung*)[101] as a means of creating a more alert – and ultimately critical – spectator. 'Alert' in this chapter has a different meaning than simply intellectually engaged: here I am more concerned with how directors may be seen as tapping into the political potential of the *sensorial* experience of the moving image. I refer extensively to the epilogue of Benjamin's Artwork essay, specifically to the connection that he draws between (sensory) alienation and violence. In this final chapter, the urgency of the optimism expressed by Benjamin, Kracauer and Kluge becomes clear, as I show how it is bound up by the direct and indirect experience of fascism. As I show, the (re)sensitisation of the viewing subject is a political imperative for these three thinkers, for the alienated, numb subject is open to manipulation to violent ends. In this way, Chapter 4 confronts a central question that arises from the interweaving of early Marxist film theory with recent German-language film in this book: in the images and sounds of Germany's and Austria's neoliberal democracies, how pertinent are concerns regarding the link between an alienated populace and violence on a mass scale? To what extent do contemporary directors exhibit what I term a 'politics of sensitivity',

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where 'sensitive' is understood in Benjaminian terms as experience that is characterised by a critical, sensory absorption?

I turn to two formally very different films in my grappling with these questions: the documentary-style fiction film *Hundstage* (2001) by Ulrich Seidl, and the feature film *Sehnsucht* (2006) by Valeska Grisebach. By searching for different kinds of 'shocks' in the two films, I draw broader conclusions about the spectatorial experience in twenty-first-century German-speaking countries. Whilst Benjamin's Artwork essay is a popular point of reference in a range of different disciplines, it is largely employed as a polemical device or a way of opening discussions on art and fascism, specifically the manipulation of the former by the latter. The programmatic parts of the essay, especially those relating to shock and distraction, have been the focus of a number of articles on Benjamin,[102] but significantly fewer in screen studies. I argue that the idea of shock, adapted and detached slightly from Benjamin's original articulation of the term, continues to offer a productive way of theorising the relationship between film, violence and experience.

Thus there are a number of theories that I apply in novel ways to these films. The reading of contemporary German-language films against the tradition of the *Arbeiterfilm*; an in-depth analysis of the Berlin School film *Marseille* through Kracauer's oft-dismissed *Theory of Film*, considerations of the commercial viability of the 'radical' realisms of Benjamin and Kluge; the pairing of Haneke and Kluge; and bringing Benjamin's shock theory into dialogue with these particular film-texts all constitute approaches so far untested anywhere in the study of German-language film. Furthermore, throughout the book I reflect on the relevance of my diachronic approach: what are the perils of consolidating and updating theories that diverge significantly in parts, and which are from very different historical contexts? How useful is speculative materialism in an age of advanced capitalism? Bergfelder, Carter and Göktürk argue that:

> the legitimation crisis experienced in western Marxism following capitalism's neo-liberal regeneration in the early 1980s, and the collapse of state socialism as an apparently viable alternative after 1989, provoked in German film history a new awareness of classical Marxism's unreliability as a founding paradigm.[103]

While mindful of this, in the chapters that follow I look to show that there remain some surprising insights relating to both the philosophy of aesthetics as well as contemporary filmmaking practices to be gained from reading contemporary films through a Marxist lens. For as Hansen says of Kracauer and Benjamin, and one may also say of Kluge,

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these thinkers are 'more interested in what cinema *does*, the kind of sensory-perceptual, mimetic experience it enabled, than in what cinema *is*'.[104] I look in the following pages to illustrate the salience of this optimism – which has a long and rich history – about the potential of cinema to *do* things to its audiences, and by extension to the societies in which they are located.

## Notes

1. Kracauer, 'Der heutige Film und sein Publikum', 151. Translations of all sources with French and German titles are my own unless otherwise stated.
2. Bordwell, *The Way Hollywood Tells It*, 123.
3. For Béla Balázs, the duration of a close-up could extrapolate viewers from the linear temporality of a film's diegesis, a radical move and one which we might now read as a queering of time/space. See 'The Close-up' in Balázs, *Béla Balázs: Early Film Theory*, 38–45. The invitation to touch or connect with the palpable surface of the film (here, the characters' skin) might be read through Laura Marks as engendering a bodily experience that has the capacity to transcend language/cultural barriers, through what she terms 'haptic visuality' in Marks, *The Skin of the Film*. Indeed, a number of scholars have theorised 'moving' images, that is, they have asked what it means for films to touch us, and linked embodied responses to cinema to political (re)actions. See, for example, Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts*.
4. Booklet accompanying DVD of *Halt auf freier Strecke*, dir. by Andreas Dresen (Pandora edition, 2011).
5. Kracauer, 'Der heutige Film und sein Publikum [Film 1928]'.
6. Adorno, 'Cultural Criticism and Society', 34.
7. Author interview with Alexander Kluge, May 2014.
8. Blumenthal-Barby, 'Topologies of Film and Politics', 25.
9. Rentschler, 'From New German Cinema to the Post-Wall Cinema of Consensus'.
10. Ibid., 271.
11. Ibid., 262.
12. For example, the term 'consensual' features in discussions pertaining to the (a)political nature of the heritage film in Rentschler, 'The Lives of Others', 242; Hake, *German National Cinema*, 215; and Cook et al., 'Introduction', in *Berlin School Glossary*, 16–17.
13. Fisher and Prager, 'Introduction', in *The Collapse of the Conventional*, 4. Paul Cooke and Chris Homewood make the same argument in Cooke and Homewood, 'Introduction', 3–4.
14. X-Filme Creative Pool, which has produced films by Tom Tykwer and Wolfgang Becker, has been compared to the Filmverlag der Autoren of the 1970s, whereby the latter features as a benchmark for the successful negotiation of commercial and art-house filmmaking. See Clarke, 'Introduction', 4 and Fisher and Prager, *The Collapse of the Conventional*, 12.
15. Blüthner et al., 'Oberhausen Manifesto', 2.
16. Kluge, 'What Do the "Oberhauseners" Want?', 10.
17. For a comprehensive account of the Frankfurt School group, see Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*.

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18. The most extensive study on Benjamin, Kracauer and cinema is Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*. On Benjamin, Kracauer, film and urban modernity see also Gilloch, 'Urban Optics'. On photography-related intersections see Giles, 'Making Visible, Making Strange'. For an examination of commonalities in the thinkers' respective approaches to media and politics, together with Alexander Kluge, see Forrest, *The Politics of Imagination*. Notably, this is the only other monograph that looks at the three thinkers together.
19. For comprehensive biographical information see Jay, 'The Extraterritorial Life of Siegfried Kracauer'.
20. A complete list of Kracauer's writings can be found in Levin, *Siegfried Kracauer*. The posthumous publication of Kracauer's complete works in edited volumes includes the three-volume collection of his film-related essays and reviews: Siegfried Kracauer, *Kleine Schriften zum Film, Band 6.1* (1921–27), *Band 6.2* (1928–31), and *Band 6.3* (1932–61), edited by Inka Mülder-Bach (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004).
21. The first record of written correspondence between the two is a letter from Benjamin to Kracauer dated 1 March 1924, and the last is also a letter from Benjamin, on 14 May 1940, four and a half months before his death. See Benjamin, *Briefe an Siegfried Kracauer*.
22. Jay, 'The Extraterritorial Life of Siegfried Kracauer', 61.
23. Ibid., 63–64.
24. Ibid., 64. Jay cites a letter from Kracauer to Bloch dated May 29 1932.
25. Hansen, 'Introduction', xi.
26. Hansen, 'Decentric Perspectives', 50.
27. Kracauer, 'The Mass Ornament', 75.
28. Quaresima, 'Introduction to the 2004 Edition', xix.
29. Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, 7.
30. Hansen, in 'Introduction', xiv, summarises the now-familiar argument that the Holocaust is the epistemological vanishing point of *Theory of Film* put forward by Gertrud Koch and Heide Schlüpmann.
31. Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, li. Kracauer quotes Marcel, 'Possibilités et limites de l'art cinématographique'.
32. Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 287.
33. Ibid., 296–304.
34. In the year of the centenary of Kracauer's birth, 1989, the Akademie der Diözese Rottenburg-Stuttgart and Fachstelle für Medienarbeit joint-hosted a conference called the Internationale interdisziplinäres Kracauer-Symposions, which ran from 2–4 March in Weingarten, and was organised by Michael Kessler. In the introduction to the resulting conference publication, *Siegfried Kracauer: Neue Interpretationen* (Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 1990), editors Michael Kessler and Thomas Y. Levin note that up until 1989, there were only two major accessible publications on the works of Kracauer: an issue of *Text und Kritik*, edited by Heinz Ludwig Arnold, (Issue 68, 1980), and Inka Mülder's *Siegfried Kracauer – Grenzgänger zwischen Theorie und Literatur: Seine frühen Schriften 1913–1933* (1985). The *New German Critique* special issue on Siegfried Kracauer, Issue 54 (1991), in which Petro's article appears, was the first English-language collection of criticism.
35. Petro, 'Kracauer's Epistemological Shift', 131–32.
36. Ibid., 131.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid., 135.
39. Hansen, '"With Skin and Hair"'.

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40. See previous endnotes in this chapter for scholarship on points of intersection between the two thinkers. Though it is mainly the letters and postcards from Benjamin to Kracauer which have survived and made it to print, contact was maintained and the relationship valued by both sides; the formal address 'Lieber Herr Kracauer' turns to 'Lieber Kracauer' and eventually 'Cher Ami' in the final letter that Benjamin writes to Kracauer from Paris in 1940 (in French). Kracauer and Benjamin were both in Marseille from mid-August to shortly before Benjamin's death.
41. For detailed bibliographical information, refer to Eiland and Jennings, *Walter Benjamin: A Critical Life*. This is the most substantial critical work to date that takes Benjamin's entire oeuvre into account, and it does so chronologically. See also Leslie, *Walter Benjamin*.
42. Arendt, 'Introduction. Walter Benjamin: 1892–1940', 11.
43. Arendt (ibid., 15) cites Brecht's concept of 'crude thinking' (*das plumpe Denken*) and refers to Benjamin's praise of 'crude thoughts' with regards to Brecht's *Dreigroschenroman*, citing Benjamin, 'Brechts Dreigroschenroman', 446.
44. Benjamin, Letter to Kitty Marx-Steinschneider, 20 October 1933, 430.
45. Mitchell, 'Introduction', viii.
46. Arendt, 'Introduction. Walter Benjamin: 1892-1940', 11.
47. Ibid.
48. Hansen, 'Introduction', xi.
49. Benjamin praises Kuleshov's technical expertise after he sees *By The Law* (1926) during his time in Moscow, but highlights the shortcomings of the story, which he regards as descending into the absurd. See Benjamin, *Moscow Diary*, 28.
50. Walter Benjamin, 'On the Present Situation of Russian Film' (1927), and 'Reply to Oscar A. H. Schmitz' (1927) are both printed in translation in in Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, 323–27 and 328–32 respectively.
51. Walter Benjamin, 'Chaplin in Retrospect' (1929) and 'Micky Mouse' (1931) can both be found in *Selected Writings 2*, 222–24 and 545–46 respectively. For an insightful analysis of Benjamin's theory of film in relation to Disney, see Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, 163–82.
52. Benjamin, 'L'œuvre d'art à l'époque de sa reproduction mécanisée', and in *GS* 1, 709–39.
53. In Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 219–53. A re-worked, improved translation by Harry Zohn and Edmund Jephcott is published under the new title of 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Third Version' in Benjamin, *Selected Writings* 4, 251–83.
54. See the respective editorial notes in *Gesammelte Schriften* for information relating to the different versions: see *GS* 1, 982–1063 for the editors' comments on the first German handwritten version, the third version (referred to as the 'second version' here), and the French version; see *GS* 7, 661–90 for the editors' comments on the second version which Benjamin originally submitted to Horkheimer for publication, and see *GS* 7, 681–82 for a clear overview of the structural differences between the four different versions. The original version that was submitted to Horkheimer is published in *GS* 7, 350–84. For a brief history of its reception, see Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, 38 and 307, footnote 28. See also Eiland and Jennings, 'Chronology 1935-1938', 426–29.
55. Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, 81.
56. Theodor W. Adorno, 'Letter to Benjamin dated 18 March 1936', in *Adorno and Benjamin, The Complete Correspondence, 1928–1940*, 128–129. See also Richard Wolin's sec-

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tion on 'The Adorno-Benjamin Dispute', specifically relating to the Artwork essay, in his monograph *Walter Benjamin: An Aesthetic of Redemption*, 183–197.

57. Theodor W. Adorno to Walter Benjamin, 130.
58. Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, 77.
59. Rabinbach, 'Between Enlightenment and Apocalypse', 82.
60. Ibid., 83.
61. Ibid.
62. Alongside Rabinbach see also Wolin, *Walter Benjamin*, 48–63. Hansen sketches Kracauer's complex Messianism in Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, 21–24.
63. Elsaesser, 'The Stubborn Persistence of Alexander Kluge', 24.
64. On Adorno's modernist influence on Kluge, see Lutze, *Alexander Kluge*, 17–23.
65. Hansen, 'Foreword', xviii.
66. Ibid., p. xx. Hansen cites Adorno, 'Transparencies on Film'.
67. Author interview with Alexander Kluge, May 2014.
68. Wach, 'Hieronymus im Mediengehäuse der Geschichte', 22. Wach quotes Alexander Kluge's Böll prize speech from 1993: 'I am and will remain an author, first and foremost' (translation my own). For biographical information see Stollmann, *Alexander Kluge*.
69. Farocki, 'Arm in Arm', 190.
70. Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung: Zur Organisationsanalyse von bürgerlicher und proletarischer Öffentlichkeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972). Published in English as *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*, with a foreword by Miriam Hansen, trans. by Peter Labanyi, Jamie Owen Daniel, and Assenka Oksiloff (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).
71. Negt and Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience*, xlviii.
72. Miriam Hansen elaborates on crossovers between Kracauer, Benjamin and Kluge concerning the concept of 'Erfahrung' in 'Foreword', xvii.
73. Kluge, *Die Patriotin*. Some of these have been published in translation in Rentschler (ed.), *West German Filmmakers on Film*, and in Kluge, 'On Film and the Public Sphere'.
74. Eder and Kluge, *Ulmer Dramaturgien*, back cover.
75. Kluge, 'Pact with a Dead Man'.
76. See Rentschler, 'From New German Cinema', 265–66.
77. Friedrich Zimmermann at the awards ceremony for the German Film Prize on 25 June 1983, quoted in Rentschler, 'Eigensinn und Vielfalt', 13.
78. Forrest, 'Raw Materials for the Imagination'. See also Schulte and Siebers, *Kluges Fernsehen* and Uecker, *Anti-Fernsehen?* As founder and managing director of dctp (development company for television program mbH), Kluge has also produced over 1500 hours of television broadcast material since 1988.
79. Gansera, 'Glücks-Pickpocket'. Gansera was not however the first to coin the term. See Cook et al., 'Introduction', 3.
80. English-language publications include Landry, *Movement and Performance in Berlin School Cinema*; Abel and Fisher, *The Berlin School and its Global Contexts*; Cook et al., *Berlin School Glossary*; Roy and Leweke, *The Berlin School*, and Abel, *The Counter-Cinema of the Berlin School*.
81. See Rentschler, 'From New German Cinema', 264 for Rentschler's overview of the charges of 'artistic indulgence' levelled at the New German Cineastes, for example. Compare this with criticism of the *Berliner Schule* by Dominik Graf, who accuses the filmmakers of using 'die feste Form, das visuelle Konzept' as a veil for their unwillingness to engage with narrative. See Graf, 'Unerlebte Filme', 64.

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82. Abel, 'Intensifying Life'. Abel quotes Ekkerhard Knörer.
83. Higson, 'The Concept of National Cinema', 38.
84. Halle, *German Film after Germany*, 24.
85. Schindler and Koepnick, 'Introduction', 4.
86. See e.g. Fisher and Prager, *The Collapse of the Conventional*, 13–16; Uecker, *Performing the Modern German*, 12; and Halle, *German Film after Germany*, 1–29.
87. Halle, *German Film after Germany*, 28.
88. Dassanowsky and Speck, 'Introduction', 10.
89. Ibid., 8.
90. Ibid., 2.
91. Benjamin, 'Reply to Oscar A. H. Schmitz', 330.
92. Dassanowsky and Speck, 'Introduction', 14.
93. Ring, 'System Error'.
94. Abel, 'Intensifying Life'.
95. Existing scholarship on Friedl is limited in scope and consisted primarily of short reviews and festival descriptions until recently. The first book to address his work is a German-language 'workbook' from 2019 which comprises interviews, production notes, images, texts by Friedl and an introductory essay by editor Volker Pantenburg; this volume will hopefully result in further scholarship on Friedl's films. See Pantenburg, *Gerhard Friedl: Ein Arbeitsbuch*.
96. Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*.
97. For example, Roy Grundmann employs Adorno's only essay on film in a formal analysis of *71 Fragmente* and *Code Inconnu* in 'Between Adorno and Lyotard'. He draws on Adorno, 'Filmtransparente'. See also Harald Meindl's use of the sublime as conceived by Adorno and Lyotard in analysing Haneke's depiction of violence in Meindl, '"Ästhetik-Gewalt-Erhabenes"'. Temenuga Trifonova looks at *Der Siebente Kontinent, 71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls,* and *Code Inconnu* (which she, too, pairs thematically with *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls*) in 'Michael Haneke and the Politics of Film Form'.
98. See Domizio, 'Digital Cinema and the "Schizophrenic" Image', and Speck, 'Thinking the Event'. See also Frey, 'The Message and the Medium' and 'Supermodernity, Sick Eros and the Video Narcissus'.
99. Trifonova, 'Michael Haneke and the Politics of Film Form', 67.
100. Forrest, 'A Negative Utopia'.
101. Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility', 267, and corresponding footnote 42.
102. See for example Eiland, 'Reception in Distraction'; Buck-Morss, 'Aesthetics and Anaesthetics'; and Andrew Benjamin, 'Boredom and Distraction'.
103. Bergfelder et al., 'Introduction', 5.
104. Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, xvii.

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