

INTRODUCTION

One of the most remarkable features of contemporary German film is the prominence of the historical genre. In 2003, eight of the fifteen highest-grossing German films on the home market were historical films. In international distribution, the situation is even clearer. With the exception of a few romantic comedies (e.g., *Bella Martha* [*Mostly Martha*, 2001]) and auteur-inflected problem films (the “Berlin School”; *Gegen die Wand* [*Head-On*, 2004]), the global presence of German cinema is associated almost exclusively with one genre. German historical films have dominated the Best Foreign Film category at the Academy Awards since the turn of the millennium. *Nirgendwo in Afrika* (*Nowhere in Africa*, 2001), *Das Leben der Anderen* (*The Lives of Others*, 2006), and Austrian co-production *Die Fälscher* (*The Counterfeiters*, 2007) won the Academy Award. In addition, *Der Untergang* (*Downfall*, 2004), *Sophie Scholl – die letzten Tage* (*Sophie Scholl – The Final Days*, 2005), *Der Baader Meinhof Komplex* (*The Baader Meinhof Complex*, 2008), and *Das weiße Band* (*The White Ribbon*, 2009) reached the five-film shortlist of nominees. In Germany, the genre’s prestige productions count among the most popular domestic features of the past decade. Abroad, German historical films have become nearly synonymous with German cinema.¹

In the last decade, German historical films have enjoyed attendance figures unknown in the heyday of the New German Cinema. Gone are the days when, at most, a few thousand cinephiles would watch Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet’s latest historical provocation, whose merits would later be debated on select German arts pages and dissected by academics in Britain and the United States. For all that has been written about the New German Cinema’s dramatic historiographical intervention in the 1970s, and for all the successes of Fassbinder, Herzog, Kluge, Schlöndorff, and Wenders at international film festivals and among cineastes, the question of their films’ effectiveness in reaching popular audiences remains, at best, uncertain. One commentator reckons that, of the approximately three hundred productions that might be counted as New German Cinema, only six recouped their production costs in commercial release in domestic theaters.²

It is useful to compare the 1970s screenings, which were often poorly attended, to the situation today. Productions such as *Der Untergang*,

Good Bye, Lenin! (2003), *Das Wunder von Bern* (2003), *Die Päpstin* (2009), or *Der Baader Meinhof Komplex* each attracted millions of Germans to theaters, not to mention DVD sales and rentals.³ Even the most accessible and celebrated incarnations of the New German Cinema rarely counted among the year's Top Fifty box-office list. Today, select German historical films successfully challenge the latest Hollywood blockbuster franchises. For instance, *Good Bye, Lenin!*'s opening-week box office surpassed even the contemporaneous *Harry Potter* and *Lord of the Rings* sequels; its third-place ranking in Germany for the year outpaced *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl* (2003) and *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003).⁴

The resonance of today's historical films goes well beyond fanzines and specialty cinephile publications such as *epd Film* and *film-dienst*. The government's Federal Agency for Civic Education writes pamphlets to use historical films as instruction in domestic schools: pupils learn about the unification by watching *Good Bye, Lenin!*; the biopic *Luther* (2003) accompanies lessons about the Protestant Reformation.⁵ Sometimes they function as political or media events. A Bundestag screening of *Good Bye, Lenin!* launched a fierce debate about the status of the Eastern past.⁶ Protagonists—and victims—of 1970s left-wing terrorism exchanged heated letters and lawsuits about their depiction in *Der Baader Meinhof Komplex* and directly confronted each other on television programs; the widow of victim Jürgen Ponto gave up her *Bundesverdienstkreuz* (Federal Cross of Merit) on account of the production's "unrealistic" recreation of her husband's murder, and went to court to alter the scene for the television broadcast.⁷ The contemporary German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder watched *Das Wunder von Bern* and admitted crying three times during the screening.⁸ In the past such reactions were the privilege of "imparts" such as *Holocaust* (1978) and *Schindler's List* (1993).⁹

Emerging Paradigms

How are we to understand the new wave of German historical films? As the subtitle of this book implies, I will be arguing that a complex engagement with film history—and various historiographical forms—characterize these new historical films. Before introducing that approach, however, it is vital to summarize briefly on which grounds these productions have been received hitherto. Postwall historical films have received largely negative middlebrow journalistic treatment and scorn from high-profile auteurs. Critics and scholars are contributing to a burgeoning body of work on the trend for period films in Germany, and approaching the historical film from a number of different perspectives. Four major paradigms have emerged.

One approach places identity politics squarely onto discourses of popular cinema, and in particular, transnational genres and production cycles. Instead of arguing for postwar German historical film as a genre, Jaimey Fisher proposes to see the new historical films as a production trend.¹⁰ Noting that scholars often fail to account for the very singularity of these productions—their popular success—he employs, following the work of Tino Balio in the context of Hollywood, the looser grouping of “production trend,” which, unlike a genre recognizes the “fashion” of certain subjects, themes, and semantics in patterns of commercial production.¹¹ In *German Film after Germany: Toward a Transnational Aesthetic*, Randall Halle situates the recent historical film as a “special form of narration that harbors many of the complexities attendant to the rather fraught nature of European transnationalism.”¹² Since the cohesion of communities relies on the articulation of a common past, individual national histories threaten “the project of European union.”¹³ Halle notes the recent proliferation of war movies and attends to how two such films—*Duell (Enemy at the Gates, 2001)* and *Der Untergang*—serve to create a common transnational identity by offering a critical history.

A second major viewpoint regards the recent proliferation of historical films in the context of a wider, multimedia “memory boom” and a particular national attitude toward the past: victimhood. Paul Cooke and Marc Silberman’s *Screening War: Perspectives on German Suffering*, which traces “the changing ways German film has addressed the legacy of its recent past” and in particular “the place of German wartime and postwar ‘suffering’ within this legacy,” is paradigmatic for this line of thinking.¹⁴ The editors place postwar historical films within the context of a number of other cultural phenomena. This larger “victimhood” discourse was precipitated by a number of media events and public interventions. W.G. Sebald’s 1997 lectures, later published as *Luftkrieg und Literatur (On the Natural History of Destruction)*, asked why there had been so few significant literary descriptions of the Allied bombings of Germany during World War II. Historians began to speak of the media interventions that followed as a shift in the public discourse about the war from the memorial of Nazis’ victims to a focus on the suffering of the German collective.¹⁵ These included Jörg Friedrich’s books on the Allied bombing raids on German cities, *Der Brand (The Fire)* and *Brandstätten (Sites of Fire)*, as well as the ever-continuing public debate about a memorial about the expulsion of Germans from Eastern Europe in the 1940s by the Bund der Vertriebenen (League of Expellees). On television, over five million watched Guido Knopp’s documentary mini-series on the historical event, *Die große Flucht (The Great Escape, 2001)*; more recently, *Die Flucht (March of Millions, 2007)* has told the story of the German refugees.¹⁶ Examining the intellectual and cultural discursive changes from perpetrator to victimhood over

the course of the postwar period, Cooke and Silberman look to a number of reasons for the new prominence of the victimhood discourse in the contemporary period. They include the contemporary historical distance to World War II; new media technologies and increased access to archival resources; millennial and 9/11 anxieties; as well as poststructuralist and postmodern intellectual theories.¹⁷

A third major approach, the “heritage film” critique, expands in many ways on the second; among scholars, it has served perhaps as the dominant paradigm in studies of postwall historical films. Scholars writing in this ideological-symptomatic vein, such as Lutz Koepnick and Kristin Kopp, use the examples of *Aimée & Jaguar* (1999), *Comedian Harmonists* (*The Harmonists*, 1997), and *Nirgendwo in Afrika* to speak of the postwall historical fictions as the “German Heritage Film.”¹⁸ Remarkable about these productions, in the words of Koepnick, “is that many of these films discover relevant heritage values in the sphere, not only of material objects, historical décor, and atmospheric textures, but in symbolic expressions and counter-factual models of social accord and multicultural consensus.”¹⁹ In this way, *Comedian Harmonists* relocates 1930s Jews from “oppressed outsiders” to “a particular ethnic group within a multicultural nation”; *Aimee & Jaguar* normalizes lesbianism.²⁰ German heritage cinema, Kristin Kopp writes in her study of *Nirgendwo in Afrika*, “looks back to the Nazi period, and locates spaces, however small or marginal, onto which instances of positive German practice can be projected and positive German identity imagined.”²¹ Johannes von Moltke, in his study of the *Heimatfilm*, agrees: “As a generic template for historical consciousness, Heimat appears ready-made for the German cinema’s postwall revisionist impulses. This is nowhere more obvious than in the ideological remix of Heimat and heritage that has characterized much recent filmmaking in Germany.”²² The “Heritage/Heimat film,” maintains von Moltke, provides conciliatory retroscenarios of the Nazi period in which contemporary German spectators behold comforting fantasies of identification with Jewish victims from the 1930s and 1940s. In sum, these scholars problematize the narratives’ triumphant images of German-Jewish love, desire, and cooperation as well as their renegotiation and realignment of identification so that contemporary German spectators are sutured into identification with persecuted 1930s and 1940s Jews.

The final major viewpoint, present in both journalistic and scholarly reckonings, bears down on one of the “heritage film” interlocutors’ objections and subjects the postwall German historical film to an ideological critique on the basis of the films’ naïve historicism. For example, German film critics, who have often called for more films dealing with the national past and contemporary reality, did not welcome the historical turn. In normative appraisals of the genre, commentators identified realism and an emphasis on “authenticity”

as the genre's organizing principle and point of critique. In the weekly *Die Zeit*, Katja Nicodemus invoked Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History" when she described new German historical films such as *Rosenstraße* (2003), *Good Bye, Lenin!*, *Herr Lehmann* (*Berlin Blues*, 2003), and *Das Wunder von Bern* as "whores in historicism's bordello."²³ For reviewer Cristina Nord, the history wave represented a "new naïveté" among filmmakers.²⁴ Mourning the New German Cinema's self-reflexive, political approach to the past, she ridiculed the "post-ideological, positivistic" attitude toward national history; the productions' measure of success is to "match the license plate number of the historical automobile."²⁵ Prominent contemporary arthouse directors and documentarists such as Christian Petzold, Romuald Karmakar, and Andres Veiel complained about the new exercises in retrospection as nauseating forms of "historical hyperstylization"; the films, working together with title pages of weekly glossies and talk shows on public TV, attempt to exhaust history.²⁶ To examine exemplary scholarly iterations of the "historicism critique," we might cite the critical reception of *Der Untergang*. Several studies address the moral and dramaturgical problems of representing Hitler and Bruno Ganz's performance,²⁷ and object to the film's naïve claims to "objective historicity" in line with the authenticity debate of Nicodemus and Nord.²⁸

Scholar Jennifer M. Kapczynski makes a similar argument in her broader characterization of the "historical turn" in German cinema.²⁹ Despite imagining a diverse group of historical periods in various narrative forms, the films share an aesthetic preoccupation: a desire for authentic representation. "Consumed with reduplicating the bygone moments that they represent," Kapczynski argues, "recent German historical films employ strategies targeted at conjuring past worlds with a maximum of accuracy" and often strive to revive the past by using historical styles.³⁰ Although Kapczynski acknowledges that this phenomenon is hardly new in German cinema and was a staple of New German visions of the past such as Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *Die Ehe der Maria Braun* (*The Marriage of Maria Braun*, 1979) or Helma Sanders-Brahms's *Deutschland, bleiche Mutter* (*Germany, Pale Mother*, 1980), she critiques today's productions for their lack of "stylistic practices that regularly remind audiences they are witnessing the unfolding of a highly mediated past—one to which they do not have direct access but rather must work to perceive."³¹

These approaches all have their advantages in taking stock of certain sets and types of productions, but they are also not without some limitations, that, to my mind, need to be articulated before I introduce my own approach to the postwall German historical cinema. Although the heritage critics' individual ideological analyses of the work of Caroline Link, Max Färberböck, and Joseph Vilsmaier may be justified, I would question the tendency to apply a "heritage film" model to the

postwall German context. One major problem with the notion of the “German Heritage Film” is the status of the national history in question and how the term has been imported. These commentators have appropriated the term from British discussions about UK middle-brow historical productions (and co-productions) produced in the 1980s and 1990s, with Merchant-Ivory E.M. Forster adaptations singled out for particular critique.³² Ginette Vincendeau characterized heritage films as period costume dramas, literary adaptations, and historical films “shot with big budgets and production values by A-list directors and they use stars, polished lighting and camerawork, many changes of décor and extras, well-researched interior designs, and classical or classical-inspired music.”³³ To my mind there is an important difference between *Chariots of Fire* (1981) and *Comedian Harmonists*, or between *A Room with a View* (1985) and *Aimée & Jaguar*. The “German Heritage Films” that Koepnick and others describe are about war, poverty, suffering, exile, or the Holocaust, and they cast German as the *victims*—not victors—of a cruel history. Even the most cynical commentator would not want to imply World War II was a “highlight” of national history or make a facile analogy between British heritage theme parks and the memorials at Sachsenhausen or Dachau.³⁴ By coupling aesthetic and ideological claims about the entire landscape of German historical fictions, the term “heritage film” conflates many productions that are actually very different. In spite of the implication that recent German films entertain revisionist histories and prove thus aesthetically conservative (or vice versa), in this book we will encounter examples where prospects of history that many would regard as conservative or even reactionary come in very sophisticated forms. But beyond terminology, perhaps the most significant problem with the attempt to apply the heritage (but also “victimhood”) label to recent German cinema is that it only accounts for a subset of historical features looking back to the Nazi period and allows for only one way of seeing that past.³⁵

In response specifically to the critics of “historicism,” they too have made a valid point regarding a selection of films. Nevertheless, recent German historical films interpret “authenticity” in various ways. Besides the dramaturgical authenticity in *Der Untergang*, *Das Leben der Anderen*, and *Das Wunder von Bern* (and the labored paratextual discourses which accompanied their production and reception), a variety of other forms are at work. Although tropes of authenticity abide in *Sonnenallee*, it and other “Ostalgic” pictures constantly foreground their self-consciousness—if not in the Brechtian way of Fassbinder and Sanders-Brahms. How would the “authenticity” argument take account of *23* (1999) or *Die Unberührbare* (*No Place to Go*, 2000) which approach the past through historical styles but do not attempt to appropriate a “faithful” portrait of the past? Both *Baader* (2002) and *Der Baader Meinhof Komplex* use quotation as historical principle—to much

different ends. Although “authenticity” is at stake in contemporary historical productions worldwide, the contemporary German historical film is fascinating precisely for its varied approaches. In a way, the critique of “historicism” and “authenticity” simply reverses the traditional public debate over history on film: fidelity to the historical record.³⁶ For most professional historians and the general public, period films that depart from the record are “bad”; film critics tend to dislike historical productions that do not “stylize” their representation of the past. Although there are surely specific examples that deserve analysis along these lines (e.g., *Good Bye, Lenin!*, *Das Leben der Anderen*), we should remember that such critique cannot be extended to all recent German historical films, nor deny that, in practice, this is an ideological argument couched in a formal one. In crucial ways, the task of this book seeks to interrogate and complicate the “historicism” critique, by revealing the sophisticated and multifarious ways in which recent German historical films imagine the postwar past.

This very brief resumé of the recent work on this subject is meant not only to telegraph how postwall German historical cinema has been written about hitherto, but also to imagine the potentially productive different ways to deal with phenomenon. The films might be analyzed as indices of new paradigms of history and memory in unified Germany or as economic products that respond to international popular tastes for the dark German past. One might reassess the function of nostalgia and heritage by comparing Germany’s historical films with recent developments in other national cinemas, or entertain a symptomatic-ideological analysis of a new national subconscious in the age of Schröder and Merkel.

The scope of my study is more limited, however; my intervention is not to account for the whole phenomenon of postwall historical film. Rather, this book shows how recent German historical film deploys constellations of *film history* to recreate the past. By taking stock of the way that recent German historical films channel—compellingly and uniquely—past styles, cycles, genres, stars, and other filmic elements and forms, this book elucidates the postwall German film historical imaginary.

The Film Historical Imaginary: Intertextuality, Allusion, and Cinephilia in the Digital Age

In order to understand the postwall German film historical imaginary, it is necessary to contextualize my discussion within theoretical debates on intertextuality, allusion, pastiche, and cinephilia—the very concepts at stake in genealogies of cinematic production and consumption.

In their book on the transformation of cinephilia—an “act of memory” which “interpenetrates” with the past³⁷—in the age of new technologies,

social networks, and economic structures, Marijke de Valck and Malte Hagener observe that contemporary films themselves evince a visibly different representation of the past: "Arguably the most eye-catching characteristic of contemporary cinephilia is its cultural-aesthetic fusions of time and space, its radically different way of employing the historical signifier."³⁸ With a "media time" increasingly unhinged from "traditional historical time," they write, the new cinephilia "engages in popular reworkings" of the film-historical imaginary.³⁹

Of course, the attention toward reworkings of film history in film is not new; scholars have long examined notions of "intertextuality." The term was introduced into the academy by Julia Kristeva's reading of Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of dialogism, or "the necessary relation of any utterance to other utterances."⁴⁰ Bakhtin's analysis of linguistic and literary production suggests that "all texts are tissues of anonymous formulae, conscious and unconscious quotations, confluences and inversions of other texts."⁴¹ In Kristeva's structuralist study of the novel, she explores the way in which literature articulates "a complex, composite system, a montage of heterogeneous discourses within a single text";⁴² she defines the "three dimensions of textual space": the writing subject, the addressee, and exterior texts. "The word's status," Kristeva writes, "is thus defined *horizontally* (the word in the text belongs to both the writing subject and addressee) as well as *vertically* (the word in the text is oriented toward an anterior or synchronic corpus)."⁴³ In this sense, history and cultural history become "a mosaic of texts drawn upon by the writer or the reader to produce or interpret any particular word, sentence, or story."⁴⁴ Following Kristeva, other literary theorists modified or refined the terms of intertextuality, including Gérard Genette's formulation of intertextuality as the "effective co-presence of two texts," whether this constitutes allusion, quotation, plagiarism, or another more specific relation.⁴⁵

Scholars in the 1980s and 1990s imported literary discourses of intertextuality in order to understand various aspects of film culture—from oeuvres of particular auteurs to cycles in particular national cinemas⁴⁶—as open-ended discursive practices whose matrix of communicative utterances are reached "not only via recognizable influences but also through a subtle process of dissemination."⁴⁷ Although, theoretically, the "concept of intertextuality is not reducible to matters of influence or sources of a text in the old philological sense,"⁴⁸ in practice and in the course of challenges to structuralist and poststructuralist vocabularies, accounts of intertextuality often include more or less conscious allusionism and homage. Indeed, notions of intertextuality or its romantic conceptual predecessor, "influence," have been explored in film studies under the rubric of other more specific terms which have often been laden with pejorative associations that

suggest a sentimental or excessive preoccupation with the past (i.e., “nostalgia”) or a loss of aesthetic invention (i.e., “pastiche”).

One famous example is Fredric Jameson’s comments on the “nostalgia film” as a manifestation of the “postmodern” cultural logic of late capitalism.⁴⁹ Committing an “insensible colonization of the present,” films such as *Body Heat* (1981) contain—as “constitutive and essential” parts of their structure—an “awareness of the pre-existence of other versions, previous films of the novel as well as the novel itself”; intertextuality is a “deliberate, built-in feature of the aesthetic effect.”⁵⁰ Exemplars such as *American Graffiti* (1973) “restructure the whole issue of pastiche and project it onto a collective and social level, where the desperate attempt to appropriate a missing past is now refracted through the iron law of fashion change and the emergent ideology of the ‘generation.’”⁵¹ Incompatible with “genuine historicity,” these projects subject the past to “aesthetic colonization” and “set out to recapture ... the henceforth mesmerizing lost reality of the Eisenhower era.”⁵² Jameson deems this proliferation and visibility of film history in contemporary (Hollywood) cinema as an “elaborated symptom of the waning of our historicity, of our lived possibility of experiencing history in some active way.”⁵³

Another example is Noël Carroll’s landmark 1982 essay on the role of film history in 1970s and early 1980s film—much the same body of work that Jameson treats, albeit with much different conclusions. In “The Future of Allusion,” Noël Carroll claims that “allusion, specifically allusion to film history, has become a major expressive device, that is, a means that directors use to make comments on the fictional worlds of their films.”⁵⁴ In Carroll’s idiom, the term includes “quotations, the memorialization of past genres, *homages*, and the recreation of ‘classic’ scenes, shots, plot motifs, lines of dialogue, themes, gestures, and so forth from film history, especially as that history was crystallized and codified in the sixties and early seventies”; strategies include “imitation of film-historical referents; the insertion of classic clips into new films; the mention of illustrious and coyly non-illustrious films and filmmakers in dialogue; the arch play of titles on marquees,” and so forth.⁵⁵

Similar to Jameson, Carroll also notes the way that contemporary filmmaking prompts and sometimes requires knowledge of film history: “informed viewers are meant to recall past films (filmmakers, genres, shots, and so on)” as part of their consumption, but, crucially, “are not supposed to think of this as plagiarism” or derivative “but as part of the expressive design.”⁵⁶ Nevertheless, unlike Jameson, who sees the “nostalgia film” as a historical symptom, Carroll locates the new prominence of film history in film as a result of institutional, critical, and popular transformations in American film culture. The “boom for allusionism is a legacy of American auteurism,”⁵⁷ pertaining to the first generation of American film-school graduates and the enterprise of

Andrew Sarris and other auteurist critics who praised a “demonstrative expressiveness through markedly deliberate style”; indeed, according to Carroll, an auteurist/film-school “concern with style leads to the study of examples and thereby opens the possibility of both learning from the examples and quoting them outright.”⁵⁸ At the same time, “an unprecedented awareness of film history developed in a segment of the American film audience” during the 1960s and 1970s.⁵⁹ The result of these institutional transformations means that “explicit film-historical consciousness [has become] a hallmark of ambitious filmmaking and film going.”⁶⁰

Indeed, whereas Jameson sees allusionism as a symptomatic longing for a return to the conservative 1950s, Carroll sees the trend as the legacy of 1968. The baby-boom generation participated in a singular project: “the attempt to create a common cultural heritage.”⁶¹ For Carroll, allusionism is initially an expression of utopian urgency; the generation that rediscovered film rediscovered radical politics.

Jameson’s culturally pessimistic notions of “nostalgia” and pastiche, and Carroll’s (more ambivalent) “allusionism,” imply an ethical position toward a perceived historicism. Indeed, much writing from the 1980s and 1990s on film historical genealogy—much like discussions of film adaptations of literature—partake of moralistic discourses that judge films for their (lack of) authenticity, fidelity, or originality.⁶² Nevertheless, recent scholarship has tried to come to a more differentiated view of intertextuality and allusionism, locating the film historical imaginary within discourses of new media and the increased access to a more plural film history. Scholars have explored cinephilia—long derided as a type of fandom anathema to serious academic inquiry—as a productive form of nostalgia that innervated much of the film writing (by Bazin, Kracauer, and others) that makes up the canon of film theory.⁶³ At the same time, Elena Gorfinkel and others have pointed to a new “film historical imaginary” at work in the “retro” stylistic tendencies of contemporary filmmaking.⁶⁴ Examining the recent period films *Far From Heaven* (2002) and *Boogie Nights* (1997), Gorfinkel argues that Todd Haynes and Paul Thomas Anderson use “allusion to bridge the gap between past and present through the act of reworking and restaging film history.”⁶⁵ Citing literary scholar Thomas Green’s understanding of anachronism, Gorfinkel interprets “anachronism as a concept and mode of aesthetic recognition [that] becomes a direct means of dialoguing with popular cultural memories of the historical past.”⁶⁶ Thus, in these films, “reference to ‘outdated’ historical periods and objects invites spectators to engage affectively, though not necessarily uncritically, with history”;⁶⁷ “the intense artificiality of [*Far From Heaven*’s] *mise en scène* and the heightened constrictions on content in effect engine an earnestly emotional

response, from an audience that reorganizes the limits and myopias of the cultural past as seen through the fractured mirror of film history."⁶⁸

Indeed, Gorfinkel's notion of "film historical imaginary" encompasses not only academically trained directors' cinephiliac engagement with historical periods and film history, but also pertains to the simultaneous "broadening of cine-literate audiences through the spread and popularity of festivals, multiplexes, discussion forums on the internet, and DVDs," a type of film consumption that transcends the "small and elitist communities of the 1950s–1970s."⁶⁹ As Jenna Ng has further argued, the "movie-mad" generation of 1968 that Carroll diagnosed as a constituent part of the proliferation of allusionism in 1970s cinema has yielded to a "similar movie-mania" today, "albeit with two differences: (i) it operates primarily on unprecedented technological development; and (ii) it is marked by an extraordinary diversity of cross-cultural film experience."⁷⁰

In the conclusion to this book I will more closely examine these historical forces at work, in Germany and internationally, that make film historical referencing evident in the production and legible in the reception of film. Today—also in the German example—film connoisseurship is certainly not limited to Hollywood and select West European art cinemas, but a much wider range of international popular and art cinemas. To be sure, an active film historical imaginary was certainly a major constituent element of the 1970s' new waves; in his essay on allusionism, Carroll explicitly extends the phenomenon beyond American filmmaking to the example of the New German Cinema.⁷¹ Thomas Elsaesser has also elaborated on historicity in Fassbinder's period films in a similar manner: *Die Ehe der Maria Braun* "functions as a trigger of memories but at one remove: not so much recalling a reality, as setting up a chain of associations, stories remembered from one's parents, pictures seen in the family album, in short, the standard version of the 1950s as present in the culture at large of the 1970s."⁷² Even if the New German Cinema—cited as one of the art cinema movements most associated with reflexive and intertextual filmmaking⁷³—has been described as primarily in film historical dialogue with domestic traditions, Hollywood and American popular culture, and French cinema,⁷⁴ there is no doubt that German filmmaking today partakes of a globalized industry and international traditions. And even if it emits from the art cinema new waves,⁷⁵ the intertextual film historical imaginary has gone mainstream: popular German cinema indulges in this referencing extensively and often consciously; concomitantly, it has become a constituent element of the postwall historical cinema. Tracing the sources and implications of these borrowings will be a major task of this book.

The Cinema of Retro-flection: History Through, Over, and Against

In her study of memory within treatments of sexuality in postwar West Germany, Dagmar Herzog addresses the function of a “layering of memory” in retrospective assessments:

That is, with the ways each cohort of postwar West Germans evidently approached the past only through, over, and against the interpretations of their historical predecessors (with New Leftists contradicting the representations of the past offered them by many of their parents, and feminists offering yet a third description of Nazism’s purported sexual lessons)...For what is going on in these memory-texts is an attempt to reconstruct the fifties’ interpretations of the thirties and forties within the context of the seventies’ and eighties’ struggle with the meaning of the sixties.⁷⁶

Herzog elaborates how Holocaust memory has been instrumentalized as a “*lingua franca* of postwar West German political culture”: antinuclear activists warned that atomic war would entail a burning far worse than Auschwitz and Treblinka; leftists in the late 1970s described contemporary global economic injustice as a murderous conspiracy that made “the consequences of Hitler’s ‘final solution’ seem positively charming.”⁷⁷ Herzog characterizes this broader phenomenon, employed both by conservatives and leftists alike, as a specific feature of the national political culture.

My study builds on Herzog’s comments on the often complex twistings of memory, and applies them to film history. It examines how postwall German historical films incorporate, respond to, and rework film history, whether these references pertain to certain directors, stars, genres, traditions, or individual films from Germany or abroad. It investigates how film historiography might probe three other layers of memory: (1) the works’ historical interpretation of the period, event, and figures in question; (2) previous interpretations of this event, era, or figure; and (3) the contemporary moment in which the film itself was made and screened. How, for example, does *Das Wunder von Bern* look to the 1954 German soccer World Cup victory *through* a Nazi sports film and *against* the interpretation of this event in the classic New German Cinema historical film, *Die Ehe der Maria Braun*? How does Oskar Roehler assume the mantle of Fassbinder, both literally and figuratively, in the portrait of his mother in *Die Unberührbare*? How does *23* borrow on the conventions of the 1970s American paranoid thriller to represent 1980s West Germany and, at the same time, comment on the late 1990s “end of history”?

These films constitute what one might call a “cinema of retro-flection”: a highly ambivalent negotiation of German history and film history which looks back to the recent past through, over, and/or against film history and prior interpretations of national history, and

above all those of the New German Cinema. The term “retro-flection” emphasizes how processes of *retrospection* in the German history film wave are functions of *reflection* on film history. This is a group of films in search of a usable past.

The chapters that follow are arranged chronologically by period; proceeding to focus on one or two case studies, each surveys a major sector of the past and provides examples of the major ways of seeing in the postwar historical cinema.

Chapter 1 examines the most antagonistic position toward the traditions of the New German Cinema to be found in the postwar historical cinema: the revisionist impulse toward the war, Adenauerism, and the postwar in *Das Wunder von Bern*. Directed by Sönke Wortmann, an outspoken opponent of left-wing auteurist cinema, the film mythologizes the postwar rebirth of a nation at the same time that it celebrates the restoration of a family. Examining depictions of “emotional masculinity,” I demonstrate how the story mobilizes the soccer film in a way reminiscent of the Nazi production *Das große Spiel* (*The Big Game*, 1942). Considering the vital role of color and sound in the formation of memory and the coordinated marketing strategy, I show how the film’s sophisticated visual representations of the past work on two levels. It delivers the missing “prosthetic memory” of the 1954 West German World Cup victory and counters the critical memory of the event from the late 1970s, namely Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s *Die Ehe der Maria Braun*.

Film critics have taken some recent historical films to task for their “gilded memory,” that is, their rosy treatment of terrible episodes in the national narrative. Chapter 2 inspects a group of films often subjected to such critique: those which look back to the political unrest of 1968 and the “leaden years” of left-wing terrorism through a “pop” vision of the past. This chapter probes the new wave of RAF films through their engagement with the terrorist films of the New German Cinema. Besides providing an inventory of the recent incarnations’ basic features, the chapter investigates closely the most radical film, *Baader*, a biopic of terrorist leader Andreas Baader, which received a critical excoriation from audiences, journalists, and academics alike. It depicts Baader dying not—as in reality—by suicide in 1977 after five years in maximum-security prison. Rather, it shows him perishing in a showdown with police in 1972, rendered in a scene worthy of Sergio Leone’s spaghetti westerns. *Baader*’s pop historiography allows a highly complex engagement with the RAF and its afterlife. Christopher Roth’s project eschews the New German Cinema’s more analytical approaches to the disastrous history of left-wing terrorism and instead concentrates on its less certain beginnings. *Baader* represents the Baader-Meinhof Group as a *bande à part*, driven and sustained by the cinephiliac dreams of *Pierrot*

le fou (1965), Jean-Pierre Melville's ironic gangster pictures, *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), and *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969)—in sum, the films that the real Baader and his band watched while on the run.

Chapter 3 investigates the beginnings of the postwall historical cinema and the ambivalent post-68er re-appropriation of the New German Cinema. Although in this book I speak broadly of a "postwall" historical cinema for the sake of simplicity, the critical volume of these films began in the late 1990s. In particular, Hans-Christian Schmid's *23*, released in early 1999, was praised by critics as unique. Suddenly, a German film was exploring the recent past, rather than eighteenth-century authors or World War II.⁷⁸ Paradoxically, *23* was so new because it partakes of past ways of seeing. In a close analysis of the film, which serves as an archetype of one strand of retrospection, I show how the story of an errant hacker from 1980s Hannover creates a subject position that criticizes the generation of 1968 at the same time that it draws on that generation's films, in particular Nixon-era paranoid thrillers and the New German "case studies," to enact that critique.

Chapters 4 and 5 focus on projects that employ material culture in order to interpret the last years of the GDR and unification. Chapter 4 examines the so-called *Ostalgie* (nostalgia for the Eastern past) wave that gave rise to multiple features, TV series, a musical, and countless commercial tie-ins. Studying *Good Bye, Lenin!* in the context of the broader "comic" retrospection of the Eastern past reveals how the film satisfied a broader cultural desire to relive the GDR in the safe space of materiality. Gaining insights into the voice-over and nostalgia, I show how the film merges national history with the fictional story of the Kerner family, from a Western viewpoint. Its multilayered temporalities offer an approach to history that is subject to human and media manipulation, only in the end to retreat from the implications of this self-reflexivity. This historical project echoes that of *Forrest Gump* (1994), another exercise in intranational harmony; it smoothes over the historical trauma of the unification and defines nation as a cabinet of mass cultural curiosities. Examining *Das Leben der Anderen* and the other fairy-tale treatments of the Eastern past unveils the paradox of *Ostalgie* and its obsession for historical fidelity.

Chapter 5 reveals the alternative genealogy of productions which engage the problems of unification in gritty, dark, or weird forms, focusing on Oskar Roehler's *Die Unberühmbare*. Based loosely on the events of Roehler's mother's life, the film tracks a West German novelist from the fall of the Berlin Wall to her suicide in early 1990. This chapter analyzes the film's constrictive *mise en scène*, its recourse to film noir, and its careful negotiation of architecture and space. Drawing on Edward Dimendberg's analysis of the centrifugal and centripetal American film noir,⁷⁹ I examine how Roehler's film renegotiates the classic noir's preoccupation with the natural and built environment. This portrait dramatizes millennial German spatial anxiety about Berlin,

which city planners and architecture critics deemed a city without a center.⁸⁰ Furthermore, I demonstrate how the film's many allusions to material objects and fashion, and the works of Billy Wilder, Sam Fuller, Franz Kafka, Orson Welles, and Rainer Werner Fassbinder complement the story of exile and displacement. Returning to the major features of the new regard of the past, Chapter 6 surveys the contributions that institutional and media developments have had on the development of the postwall historical cinema.

Notes

1. Besides the foreign box-office figures and the Oscar nominations, see, for example, the prominent place of the German historical films *Good Bye, Lenin!* (2003) and *Der Untergang* (*Downfall*, 2004) in articles on the renewed foreign interest in German cinema such as Lars-Olav Beier and Wieland Wagner, "Das deutsche Kinowunder," *Der Spiegel*, 11 July 2005, 82–83.
2. Olga Gruber, "Armer deutscher Film," *Transatlantik*, January 1981, 66. Quoted in Thomas Elsaesser, *New German Cinema: A History* (London: British Film Institute, 1989), 37.
3. See the market data of the Filmförderungsanstalt (German Federal Film Board) at <http://www.ffa.de>.
4. See the German Federal Film Board statistics (<http://www.ffa.de>) as well as Nicole Dolif, "Lenin lässt die Kinokassen klingeln," *Die Welt*, 18 February 2003.
5. See <http://www.bpb.de>.
6. See Volcker Eckert, "Good bye, Ahnungslosigkeit: Kino als Geschichtsstunde," *Tagesspiegel*, 6 March 2003; Constance Frey, "Die DDR ist längst Kult," *Tagesspiegel*, 5 June 2003; André Mielke, "Der Bundestag ist auch nur ein Mensch," *Die Welt*, 4 April 2003; Jan Thomsen, "Ein Kino-Besuch voller Missverständnisse," *Berliner Zeitung*, 3 April 2003; and "Betriebsausflug: Bundestag nimmt Abschied von Lenin," *Spiegel Online*, 3 April 2003, <http://www.spiegel.de/kultur/gesellschaft/0,1518,243206,00.html>.
7. "Nicht realistisch," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 2 December 2008: <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/prozess-um-baader-meinhof-komplex-nicht-realistisch-1.365677>.
8. See Fritz Göttler, "Hallo Helmut!," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 16 October 2003; Richard Bernstein, "Germany's Grief and Glory, Wrapped Up in a Soccer Ball," *New York Times*, 10 November 2003; and Hans-Joachim Leyenberg, "Im Sonderzug zurück nach Bern," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 16 October 2003.
9. For a succinct account of *Holocaust's* reception in West Germany, see Anton Kaes, *From Hitler to Heimat: The Return of History as Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 28–35, or Michael E. Geisler, "The Disposal of Memory: Fascism and the Holocaust," in *Framing the Past: The Historiography of German Cinema and Television*, eds. Bruce A. Murray and Christopher J. Wickham (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1992), 220–60.
10. Jaimey Fisher, "German Historical Film as Production Trend: European Heritage Cinema and Melodrama in *The Lives of Others*," in *The Collapse of the Conventional: German Film and Its Politics at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century*, eds. Jaimey Fisher and Brad Prager (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010), 186–215.
11. See the work of Tino Balio: for instance, *The American Film Industry* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976) or "Hollywood Production Trends in the Era of Globalisation," in *Genre and Contemporary Hollywood*, ed. Steve Neale (London: British Film Institute, 2002), 165–84.

12. Randall Halle, *German Film after Germany: Toward a Transnational Aesthetic* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 89.
13. Halle, *German Film after Germany*, 89.
14. Paul Cooke and Marc Silberman, "Introduction: German Suffering?," in *Screening the War: Perspectives on German Suffering*, eds. Paul Cooke and Marc Silberman (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2010), 2.
15. See Helmut Schmitz, "The Birth of the Collective from the Spirit of Empathy: From the 'Historians' Dispute' to German Suffering," in *Germans as Victims: Remembering the Past in Contemporary Germany*, ed. Bill Niven (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 95.
16. See Tim Bergfelder, "Shadowlands: The Memory of the Ostgebiete in Contemporary German Film and Television," in *Screening the War: Perspectives on German Suffering*, eds. Paul Cooke and Marc Silberman (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2010), 123–44.
17. Cooke and Silberman, "Introduction: German Suffering?," 7–8.
18. See Lutz Koepnick, "Reframing the Past: Heritage Cinema and Holocaust in the 1990s," *New German Critique* 87 (2002): 47–82; Lutz Koepnick, "Amerika gibts überhaupt nicht: Notes on the German Heritage Film," in *German Pop Culture: How American Is It?*, ed. Agnes Müller (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 191–208; and Kristin Kopp, "Exterritorialized Heritage in Caroline Link's *Nigendwo in Afrika*," *New German Critique* 87 (2002): 106–32. See also Jennifer M. Kapczynski, "Newer German Cinema: From Nostalgia to Nowhere," *The Germanic Review* 82(1) (2007): 3–6.
19. Koepnick, "Reframing the Past," 58.
20. Koepnick, "Reframing the Past," 58.
21. Kopp, "Exterritorialized Heritage in Caroline Link's *Nigendwo in Afrika*," 106.
22. Johannes von Moltke, *No Place Like Home: Locations of Heimat in German Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 233.
23. See Katja Nicodemus, "Unsere kleine Traumfabrik," *Die Zeit*, 28 August 2003.
24. Cristina Nord, "Die neue Naivität," *taz*, 20 October 2008.
25. Cristina Nord, "Die neue Naivität," *taz*, 20 October 2008.
26. Dorothea Hauser and Andreas Schroth, "'Das Thema ist erledigt': Romuald Karmakar, Christian Petzold, und Andres Veiel zum Politischen im deutschen Film," *Ästhetik und Kommunikation* 117 (2002): 44–60; here 52 and 45.
27. Among the numerous articles on this subject, see Christine Haase, "Ready for his Close-Up? On the Success and Failure of Representing Hitler in *Der Untergang/The Downfall* (2004)," *Studies in European Cinema* 3(3) (2007): 189–99; Jürgen Pelzer, "'The Facts Behind the Guilt'? Background and Implicit Intentions in *Downfall*," *German Politics and Society* 25(1) (2007): 90–101.
28. Alexander Ruoff, "Die Renaissance des Historismus in der Populärkultur: Über den Kinofilm *Der Untergang*," in *Filmriss: Studien über Der Untergang*, ed. Willi Bischof (Münster: Unrast, 2005), 69–78.
29. Jennifer M. Kapczynski, "Imitation of Life: The Aesthetics of Agfacolor in Recent Historical Cinema," in *The Collapse of the Conventional: German Film and Its Politics at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century*, eds. Jaimey Fisher and Brad Prager (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010), 39–62.
30. Kapczynski, "Imitation of Life," 40–41.
31. Kapczynski, "Imitation of Life," 43.
32. Among the most frequently discussed titles were *The Remains of the Day* (1993), *A Passage to India* (1984), *A Room with a View* (1985), *Artemesia* (1997), *1492: Conquest of Paradise* (1992), *Rob Roy* (1995), and *The Madness of King George* (1994).
33. Ginette Vincendeau, "Introduction," in *Film/Literature/Heritage: A Sight and Sound Reader*, ed. Ginette Vincendeau (London: British Film Institute, 2001), xviii.
34. Attempts to use the English heritage label to describe contemporary German historical productions have overlooked some important differences between trends in the two national cinemas. For example: whereas many English heritage films that British scholars critiqued were largely literary adaptations and period costume

dramas removed from political events, Koepnick's German heritage films transpire around historical events (always World War II) and often include characterization of real political agents—e.g. Goebbels and others in *Comedian Harmonists*. In addition, during the Cold War and on both sides of the Wall there were in fact significant waves of German period costume dramas that aimed to appropriate the common national cultural heritage. In fact, German literary adaptations and period costume dramas comparable in subject matter and aesthetic to the Merchant-Ivory productions are still being made. The domestic cinema continues to produce its share of films that look back to the machinations of wealthy boarding-school pupils from the 1920s (*Was nützt die Liebe in Gedanken* [*Love In Thoughts*, 2004]), imagine the private lives of its most famous writers (e.g. Brentano in *Das Gelübde* [*The Vow*, 2008]), or adapt classic authors (*Buddenbrooks* [2008] is now the fourth German film based on Thomas Mann's novel). If the term "heritage film" is to make sense, it should be only used to describe those films, which promote Germany's self-described heritage as "the land of poets and thinkers." The trouble is that these films are not representative of the surge in postwar German historical productions, which above all turn to the postwar past; thus, scholars would be best advised to discard the label altogether.

35. An important exception is Jaimey Fisher's smart essay on *Das Leben der Anderen*. See Fisher, "German Historical Film as Production Trend"; Adam Muller also attempts to expand the term to *Good Bye, Lenin!* in his "Notes toward a Theory of Nostalgia: Childhood and the Evocation of the Past in Two European 'Heritage' Films," *New Literary History* 37(4) (2006): 739–60.
36. Robert Burgoyne, *The Hollywood Historical Film* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), 1.
37. Marijke de Valck and Malte Hagener, "Down with Cinephilia? Long Live Cinephilia? And Other Videosyncratic Pleasures," in *Cinephilia: Movies, Love and Memory*, eds. Marijke de Valck and Malte Hagener (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005), 14; see also Paul Willeman, "Through a Glass Darkly: Cinephilia Reconsidered," in *Looks and Frictions: Essays in Cultural Studies and Film Theory* (London: British Film Institute, 1994), 227.
38. De Valck and Hagener, "Down with Cinephilia," 15.
39. De Valck and Hagener, "Down with Cinephilia," 15.
40. Robert Stam, Robert Burgoyne, and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, *New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics* (London: Routledge, 1992), 203.
41. Stam et al., *New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics*, 204.
42. Stam et al., *New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics*, 204.
43. Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 66.
44. Katherine J. Goodnow, *Kristeva in Focus: From Theory to Film Analysis* (New York: Berghahn, 2010), 13.
45. Stam et al., *New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics*, 207. See Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestes: La Littérature au Second Degré* (Paris: Seuil, 1982).
46. See, for example, James Goodwin, *Akira Kurasowa and Intertextual Cinema* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994); or Jefferson T. Kline, *Screening the Text: Intertextuality in New Wave French Cinema* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).
47. Stam et al., *New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics*, 204.
48. Robert Stam, *Film Theory: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000), 202
49. Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review* 1(146) (1984): 53–92.
50. Jameson, "Postmodernism," 67.
51. Jameson, "Postmodernism," 66.
52. Jameson, "Postmodernism," 67.
53. Jameson, "Postmodernism," 68.

54. Noël Carroll, "The Future of Allusion: Hollywood in the Seventies (and Beyond)," *October* 20 (1982): 51–81; here 52.
55. Carroll, "The Future of Allusion," 52.
56. Carroll, "The Future of Allusion," 52.
57. Carroll, "The Future of Allusion," 54.
58. Carroll, "The Future of Allusion," 79.
59. Carroll, "The Future of Allusion," 54.
60. Carroll, "The Future of Allusion," 56.
61. Carroll, "The Future of Allusion," 79.
62. Stam, *Film Theory*, 209.
63. See Christian Keathley, *Cinephilia and History, or The Wind in the Trees* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).
64. Elena Gorfinkel, "The Future of Anachronism: Todd Haynes and the Magnificent Andersons," in *Cinephilia: Movies, Love and Memory*, eds. Marijke de Valck and Malte Hagener (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005), 153–67.
65. Gorfinkel, "The Future of Anachronism," 155.
66. Gorfinkel, "The Future of Anachronism," 156.
67. Gorfinkel, "The Future of Anachronism," 153.
68. Gorfinkel, "The Future of Anachronism," 160.
69. De Valck and Hagener, "Down with Cinephilia?," 21.
70. Jenna Ng, "Love in the Time of Transcultural Fusion: Cinephila, Homage and *Kill Bill*," in *Cinephilia: Movies, Love and Memory*, eds. Marijke de Valck and Malte Hagener (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005), 69.
71. Carroll, "The Future of Allusion," 72.
72. Thomas Elsaesser, *Fassbinder's Germany: History, Identity, Subject* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1996), 105.
73. See Robert Stam, *Reflexivity in Film and Literature: From Don Quixote to Jean-Luc Godard* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 106.
74. See Gerd Gemünden, *Framed Visions: Popular Culture, Americanization, and the Contemporary German and Austrian Imagination* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998).
75. "Aperture"—a term that encompasses "open-endedness, overspill, intertextuality— allusion, quotation and parody"—was one of the "cardinal virtues" of the counter-cinema according to Peter Wollen's famous list in his "Godard and Counter Cinema: *Vent d'Est*," in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, 6th rev. ed., eds. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 529.
76. See Dagmar Herzog, "'Pleasure, Sex, and Politics Belong Together': Post-Holocaust Memory and the Sexual Revolution in West Germany," *Critical Inquiry* 24(2) (1998): 393–444; here 398–99. See also Dagmar Herzog, *Sex After Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), especially 3–9.
77. Herzog, "'Pleasure, Sex, and Politics Belong Together,'" 440.
78. See Christiane Peitz, "Karl und wie er die Welt sah," *Die Zeit*, 14 January 1999; and Michael Sennhauser, "Hacken in der Eiszeit," *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 29 January 1999. See also Katja Nicodemus, "Film der neunziger Jahre. Neues Sein und altes Bewußtsein," in *Geschichte des deutschen Films*, eds. Wolfgang Jacobsen, Anton Kaes, and Hans Helmut Prinzler, 2nd rev. ed. (Weimar: Metzler, 2004), 328; and Merten Worthmann, "Ich bin schuld an Tschernobyl," *Berliner Zeitung*, 14 January 1999.
79. Edward Dimendberg, *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).
80. See, for example, Dorothee Kohler and Boris Grésillon, "Berlin aus französischer Sicht," *Architektur in Berlin: Jahrbuch 1999*, ed. Architektenkammer Berlin (Hamburg: Junius, 1999), 10.