

INTRODUCTION

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This second edition of *The German Cinema Book* contains for the first time a section on authorship. The inclusion of seven chapters and several case studies on key German auteurs in no sense signals a return to Romantic conceptions of the film author as an individual of singular genius; nor do the chapters in this section call for retrenchment to a *politique des auteurs* akin to that practiced in 1950s and early 1960s France and the United States, when the enthroning of the director as the “source of meaning and signification” (Rentschler, p. 198) formed part of a larger polemic against established film industry systems, their production hierarchies, and their preferences for standardized studio aesthetics and conventional narrative and genre modes.

The chapters below present instead a series of case studies on the film author as a figure who may well be identifiable in the film text by virtue of a recognizable authorial style or signature, but whose emergence is predicated on historically specific relationships amongst, for instance, competing production modes, national and international markets, trends in genre and film aesthetics, conflicting state ideologies, and national or supranational funding regimes. Like national cinema itself, the film author is understood in this volume as a highly mobile category produced at the intersection between national, transnational, and global circuits of cinematic production and circulation. At the same time, as Nicholas Baer points out in his contribution on F. W. Murnau, the film author is in some sense an emblem of historical crisis. Baer discusses the author as a figure enmeshed in the larger dilemma of the artist in mass-cultural modernity: a creative subject caught in a state of tension between Romantic conceptions of creative sovereignty and commercial demands that seem to compromise artistic autonomy in the name of profitability and market reach. The contributions in this section take a historical approach to this predicament of the film artist caught in the slipstream of shifting production modes and national and international film histories; they chart therefore a history of film authorship as a cultural value and a subject position whose changing significance in cinema culture highlights key moments of tension in the relationship between film as art and film as the quintessential medium of a modern mass culture.

When the notion of an *Autorenfilm* first surfaced in the German language in 1912 to 1913, it featured as the instrument of a larger cultural project to align film with literature and theatre, and thus to gain legitimacy for film as a respectable national art form. While theatre producers including the illustrious Max Reinhardt adapted their plays for the cinema, the early studios recruited established writers of the likes of Gerhart Hauptmann and Hugo von Hoffmannsthal, as well as a new generation of writers who articulated new themes and dramatic structures for the emergent film medium. Well-known theatre actors including Albert Bassermann and Paul Wegener helped films address middle-class audiences, while also building bridges between the literary and dramatic arts and mass audiences.¹ As Thomas Elsaesser has shown however, the boundary between the “self-consciously literary” films of such directors as Stellan Rye (*Der Student von Prag* [*The Student of Prague*], 1913) or Max Mack (*Der Andere* [*The Other*], 1913), and an emergent cinema of genres and stars, was not only porous, in the sense that films on both sides of the divide shared common personnel, themes, styles, and modes of audience address.² The mobility of the early *Autorenfilm* as an industrial as well as an aesthetic category was emblematic of a status that the film author was to maintain throughout subsequent decades as a cipher not simply for the artistic excellence of German film

but for successive moments of now fortuitous, now uneasy, but always ambivalent negotiation between popular cinema and film art.

In the interwar period, the rise of the likes of Murnau, alongside Ernst Lubitsch and Fritz Lang—the subjects of Sabine Hake’s and Nicholas Baer’s contributions—took place within a mode of production that differed markedly from Hollywood in its articulation of the relation between a director’s artistic vision and commercial demands. Film history has charted industry developments in early cinema that saw Hollywood moving, by the late 1910s, from a director-unit system in which the director controlled the film throughout the production process, to a central producer system in which the head of production oversaw the totality of studio output. The Ufa studios, by contrast, as German cinema’s equivalent of the Hollywood majors, maintained for their “artistic films” a director-unit model in which established directors enjoyed significant levels of authorial control over budgets, production schedules, casting, and the composition of creative teams. For Ufa producer Erich Pommer, the director-unit system, despite its risks, paid off as a means to establish Ufa titles as part of an “internationally recognised [German] art cinema.”³ The system thus on the one hand provided the framework for a filmmaking mode that enthroned the director as the controlling creative force—and this despite an ensemble production practice shaped significantly by such innovative talents as cinematographers Karl Freund or Günther Rittau, art directors Hermann Warm, Robert Herlth, or Erich Kettelhut, or international stars from Emil Jannings to Lya de Putti or Pola Negri. At the same time, the figure of the author served the end of product differentiation, establishing German cinema, until the mid-1920s at least, as a successful arthouse brand on international markets.

In this context, a second structuring opposition came to underpin conceptions of the film author: that of Hollywood and Europe as signifiers for production frameworks and aesthetic modes that appeared antithetical, but were in fact shaped by multiple forms of transatlantic traffic and cultural exchange. Sabine Hake’s contribution to this volume investigates Fritz Lang and Ernst Lubitsch as the émigré protagonists of an interwar film history that was grounded in an always dynamic relationship between rival but fundamentally interdependent cinema cultures and film industries. As Hake shows, Lubitsch and Lang each utilized changing notions of Germanness to mark their identity as filmmakers and sell their talents in and for Hollywood. As an immigrant director attracted to Hollywood by superior production conditions and US box-office success, Hake suggests, Lubitsch fabricated Hollywood films built on a productive play with US-German oppositions: so the European locations of his early costume dramas gave way to the cosmopolitan interiors of his signature US sophisticated comedies, while the American caricatures of his early German comedies became Europeanized types indicative of a larger “transatlantic traffic in national physiognomies and topographies” (p. 184).

Fritz Lang is understood similarly by Hake as a figure whose very “Germanness”—an attribute widely used to signal Lang’s brooding preoccupation with dark forces, his mastery of the monumental epic as well as the urban thriller, and a filmmaking vision that is more social-philosophical than quotidian—was a prerequisite for Hollywood success following Lang’s escape into exile in 1933. By the time Lang left Germany, the conditions shaping film production had also changed significantly from the director-led mode of the mid-1920s. The dual caesura of the coming of sound (the first German sound films were released by the Ufa competitor Tobis in 1929) and the world economic crisis in the wake of the Wall Street Crash, fundamentally reshaped the film-industrial landscape, shifting the ground of artistic innovation toward independent studios including the Deutsche Film-Gemeinschaft, the company launched under the artistic direction of seasoned director Carl Froelich; or Nero-Film, the company founded in 1925 by producer Heinrich Nebenzahl and director Richard Oswald, and destined to become, under the direction of Nebenzahl’s son Seymour, one of the most artistically significant production houses in late Weimar Germany. Froelich’s first title at the Deutsche Film-Gemeinschaft was Leontine Sagan’s *Mädchen in Uniform* (Girls in Uniform, 1931), the theater adaptation and soon-to-be lesbian classic that, for Siegfried Kracauer, demonstrated the continuing success of “alternative methods of film production to those of the dominant film industry.”⁴

At Nero-Film, the US-born Nebenzahl realized his ambitions as a producer of high-calibre artistic films in collaborations with G. W. Pabst (*Die Büchse der Pandora* [Pandora's Box], 1929; *Westfront 1918*, 1930; *Kameradschaft* [Comradeship], 1931) and Fritz Lang, who directed his two most celebrated early sound films under Nebenzahl at Nero: *M* (1931), and *Das Testament des Dr. Mabuse* (The Testament of Dr. Mabuse, 1932–1933). At Ufa by contrast, the company's 1927 takeover by the national-conservative media mogul Alfred Hugenberg (see Hans-Michael Bock and Michael Töteberg, Chapter 21) initiated a streamlining of production that oriented the company away from the filmmaking avant-garde, and toward the genre cycles—most centrally musical comedies and operetta films, many of them in multi-language versions (MLVs)—that were to revive Ufa's fortunes in the early sound era after 1930. The centralized production mode of the rejuvenated Ufa, as well as the ideological shift rightwards instituted by Hugenberg, also created the framework for a new model of film authorship tailored to the cultural-political program of German fascism. After 1933, Ufa became the primary testing ground for new production and exhibition modes envisaged by Reich Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels as the foundation for a new era of fascist film art. Goebbels's recognition of the power of film as a medium of mass persuasion found expression in a retrograde auteurism focused around the promotion of directors as modern figures of genius. Research on Nazi film authorship has previously focused on the cult of personality surrounding filmmakers who fulfilled Nazi criteria of ideological purity, while at the same time espousing a racially inflected aesthetics of the beautiful and the sublime.⁵ In 1926, Siegfried Kracauer had described concepts from bourgeois aesthetics including *Innerlichkeit* (interiority), *Tragik* (tragedy), and indeed *Persönlichkeit* (personality) itself—a term used in Nazi aesthetics in the Hegelian sense of a masculine person that unites in his being the values of individual and collectivity—as cultural values that have no purchase on the modern culture of surfaces to which film belongs.⁶ Under National Socialism, mass-cultural modernism's new depthlessness was countered with policies that reinstated the film author as the fount of racialized versions of a putative aesthetic truth. Following the racial and political purges that saw some 1,500 members of the German filmmaking community fleeing into exile (see Christian Cargnelli, Chapter 37), a state-managed mutation of the director-unit system returned to Ufa and other studios in the form of “artistic committees”: bodies responsible for preproduction vetting of scripts and treatments, and designed to use the combined power of Propaganda Ministry representatives and regime-friendly directors and actors both to shape the studio's output ideologically and to place it in the service of a new Nazi film art.

Eric Rentschler's contribution explores further the development of fascist aesthetics and Nazi film authorship under the Third Reich's new production regime. Rentschler's critique of the concept of fascist aesthetics articulated in Susan Sontag's influential 1975 essay “Fascinating Fascism” rests in the first instance on Sontag's limited vision of Nazi authorship. Sontag based her ideas primarily on readings of Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph des Willens* (Triumph of the Will, 1935) and *Olympia* (1938); but the atypical quality both of those films and of Riefenstahl's authorial persona make Sontag's essay unhelpful, Rentschler suggests, for any properly historical understanding of the Nazi auteur. Surveying the 168 directors who worked in Third Reich film (amongst whom, as he points out, Riefenstahl was a clear exception as the only woman), Rentschler contrasts official ideologies of the author-personality with an actual privileging in the Third Reich industry of what French New Wave critics would later deride as *metteurs-en-scène*: jobbing directors of whom, Rentschler suggests, the propaganda and popular genre filmmaker Wolfgang Liebeneiner was an important prototype. A prolific director of comedy and historical drama—but also, notoriously, of the euthanasia propaganda drama *Ich klage an* (I accuse, 1941)—Liebeneiner served in official state capacities as Director of the Artistic Faculty of the Filmakademie Babelsberg and later (1942–1945) as Ufa production chief. Liebeneiner's official functions stripped him of the artistic autonomy conventionally associated with the genius artist. But Rentschler also uses more complex cases—Helmut Käutner, Veit Harlan, Josef von Báky, Riefenstahl again—to question the very conception of the autonomous film auteur under National Socialism. As he notes, the “aesthetic resistance” often attributed for instance to Käutner's light-touch comedies or to his melancholic romantic melodrama *Romanze in Moll* (Romance in a Minor Key, 1943), is as much a demonstration

of the ideological elasticity of National Socialism as it is a signal of possible resistance by Käutner or other directors to Nazi ideologies of film art.

Michael Cowan's case study of Walter Ruttmann, a nonfiction film director who is remembered at one and the same time as a key figure in the Weimar modernist avant-garde, an advertising film pioneer, and a Third Reich documentarist of note, highlights a further difficulty with mapping auteur trajectories neatly onto ideological histories of German film. The film author as conventionally conceived is identifiable by an artistic signature that, while it may develop over time, is said to retain similar stylistic hallmarks throughout long filmmaking careers. The dramatic ruptures that characterize German political history have produced, however, especially marked examples of uneven "marks of authorship": incongruities that are at least as revealing of larger (film-)historical shifts, as they are of any supposed individual inconsistency or stylistic break. Both Liebeneiner and Käutner, for instance, despite aesthetic and, apparently, ideological differences before 1945, found similar niches in the stylistically unadventurous genre filmmaking of the West German industry after the war. In the postwar GDR, meanwhile, inconsistencies in the work of individual film authors reveal an ongoing tension between official aesthetics, and a creative control asserted despite official strictures by such prominent directors as Joris Ivens, Jürgen Böttcher, Gerhard Klein, or Helke Misselwitz (see Spotlight in Chapter 22).

As Barton Byg suggests in his study of a further important figure, Heiner Carow, the work of DEFA auteurs needs, just like that of their European and Hollywood counterparts, to be scrutinized for the "features conventionally ascribed to the cinema auteur, especially the ability to develop a distinctive style ... within the confines of a rigid studio system." A German film history that answered Byg's call for a revised understanding of DEFA authorship would also helpfully displace the pervasive narrative of the Young German Cinema (YGC) as the first signal of a return to a cinema of artistic ambition in postwar Germany. The manifesto by twenty-six young German filmmakers that launched the YGC at the Oberhausen short film festival in 1961 called for a new film aesthetics within an independent sector that was in turn nurtured by state financial support. There is no denying the significance of the manifesto, nor can its value be questioned in sparking moves in industry, state, and filmmaking practice toward an artistically ambitious, critically engaged, and properly post-fascist German cinema. But as contributions below on some of the key auteurs of the post-Oberhausen generation indicate—Brad Prager on Werner Herzog, Gerd Gemünden on Wim Wenders, Ulrike Sieglöhr on Ulrike Ottinger, Erica Carter on Helke Sander, Paul Cooke on Rainer Werner Fassbinder—the story of the Young and New German cineastes as a young generation of self-trained film artists whose filmmaking spoke of political rebellion as well as the Oedipal conflicts of the generation of 1968, needs revising in the light of these directors' own nuanced understanding of the constructed nature of the mythology of the New German film artist. Gemünden, for instance, presents Wenders as a filmmaker who self-reflexively explores the relation between the Hollywood-dominated culture industries and the film artist. For Prager similarly, Herzog's flagrant play, often in self-authored "paratextual material"—interviews, commentaries, blogs, manifestos—with the Romantic myth of the genius artist undermines his own status as authentic auteur and foregrounds instead an ironic authorial voice that comments on, and on occasion undermines, the position Herzog claims for himself as the "apostle" of an "ecstatic" poetic truth.

For Paul Cooke, Fassbinder similarly offers both to his contemporary audiences, and to latter-day generations, a language of film forged around a performative logic of self-construction and creative play. Witness for instance Fassbinder's ubiquity as actor and commentator in his films, his transnationally promiscuous cinephilia (Fassbinder was as enamored of 1950s popular German cinema as he was of the Hollywood western, the gangster film, or Sirkean melodrama), and his complex practice of recycling, remediation, and citation from multiple sources across the cinematic and cultural field. What this self-referential sensibility offers to later generations, argues Cooke, is a "film grammar" in which authorship is conceived not as the fount of authentic meaning but as a self-referential practice of citation and critical poesis. This "grammar" may be a resource not just for national but for transnational and global film practice which is illustrated by the influences Cooke traces from Fassbinder in

the work of globally renowned auteurs including Todd Haynes and François Ozon. That Fassbinder himself also perceived what Walter Benjamin would have called an operative—that is, politically interventionist—dimension in his filmmaking practice is further evident in the techniques of shock, distanciation, and repulsion through which he stirs his audience. Encapsulated in the remark reputedly made by Fassbinder during the filming of *Die Dritte Generation* (The Third Generation, 1979)—“I don’t throw bombs, I make films”⁷—Fassbinder’s filmmaking practice was conceived as a riposte to, but also as the signal of, a political proximity to the left-wing political movements of his time: here, the terrorist Red Army Faction whom Fassbinder parodies in this film.

This entangled relationship with contemporary political and social movements is characteristic of a 1970s and 1980s filmmaking generation whose practice was enmeshed in contemporary politics as well as dissident subcultures. In Part 5 of this volume, Randall Halle offers Rosa von Praunheim as a case study in a queer authorship mode that was both embedded within, and formative of LGBT politics in the postwar FRG. In this present section, Erica Carter’s spotlight on Helke Sander shows how Sander’s feminist reinvention of Brechtian film aesthetics went hand in hand with an activist politics around issues as diverse as collective childcare and quotas for women in German film. Ulrike Sieglöhr, by contrast, selects two filmmakers, Ulrike Ottinger and Angela Schanelec, whose experimental oeuvre sits at a tangent to feminist political discourse. Ottinger’s lesbian cult classic *Madame X* (1977–1978) was contentious in its day for its exposure of the sadomasochistic power play that haunted second-wave feminism; Schanelec’s austere realism, meanwhile, similarly eschews any explicit embrace of feminist politics but is read by Sieglöhr as feminist for an “aesthetics of withholding” that shares with feminist theory a questioning of the gendered, commodified, voyeuristic, and fetishistic cinematic look.

Barbara Mennel’s account of Fatih Akin similarly locates his authorial politics not in any identification with social movements, but in the construction of transnational “affective community” that eventuates from an engagement with Akin’s films. For Mennel, Akin’s brilliance resides in his uses both of new strategies of textual address—including the deployment of music and multilingual dialogue as an “archive” of the migration experience and its multicultural effects—and non-theatrical (video, digital, and online) distribution modes to contest auteurist individualism and forge global audience communities defined by shared aesthetic sensibilities and modes of collective affect. Yet despite a film practice by Akin and others that displaces and pluralizes the figure of the sovereign auteur, the Autorenfilm is not by any means an exhausted force in recent German film. The rigorous aesthetics of the Berlin School filmmakers described below by Marco Abel are a cinematic intervention that seems at first glance a contemporary counterpart to a 1970s auteurist counter-cinema. Yet the “slowness” of the Berlin School transcends what were often the national preoccupations of the New German Film, deploying in the work of Angela Schanelec (see Sieglöhr), Christoph Hochhäusler, Ulrich Köhler, Christian Petzold, and others a formal language connected to the sensibilities of transnational slow cinema, a project “whose principal aim is to probe the rhythms and speeds, the memories and anticipations, that make life tick under conditions of unbound meditation and fast-tracked scenarios of change.”⁸

Abel argues, however, against any easy positioning of the Berlin School within a national/transnational binary, seeing in the movement instead a final deconstruction of the auteur as the core protagonist both of a sovereign national film history and of a transnational film art. Examining the School via its “strategies of enunciation,” Abel sees it as inhabiting the space of a minor cinema whose status resembles that of a Deleuzian “minor literature,” with the “minor” a “term that remains irreducible to the national/transnational binary ... because it sidesteps the very logic that constitutes this binary.” Locating the Berlin School as a loosely interconnected and historically bookended film movement of the Berlin Republic’s early years, Abel presents its directors as participants in a collective enunciation of a new conception of a “German people”: a people that, in the 1990s and early 2000s, does not yet exist, because it is in the process of becoming in the wake of unification, globalization, mass migration, and geopolitical alignment from 9/11 onwards. Like Mennel, Abel focuses attention on what Foucault might have called a film author function that has shifted dramatically since film’s earliest years, moving from that of

placeholder for artistic legitimacy within a developing national industry, to a creative force that calls into being social collectivities (which may or may not be that of German nation) through innovative strategies of production, distribution, exhibition, and textual address.⁹

This insight aligns with recent film studies approaches that explore ideas of authorship beyond national cinemas and at some distance from notions of a creative mind unbound and unbent by institutional or market demands. The following chapters and accompanying case studies offer an adjunct to this new scholarship, rethinking from a specifically German perspective understandings of authorship across cinema history from the 1910s to the twenty-first century's second decade.

NOTES

1. Anonymous, "The *Autorenfilm* and Its Assessment," in *The Promise of Cinema: German Film Theory, 1907–1933*, eds. Anton Kaes, Nicholas Baer, and Michael Cowan (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 182–183.
2. Thomas Elsaesser, "Early German Cinema: A Second Life?," in *A Second Life. German Cinema's First Decades*, ed. Elsaesser (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1996), 11.
3. Thomas Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema and After: Germany's Historical Imaginary* (London: Routledge, 2000), 115–116.
4. Siegfried Kracauer, "Revolte im Mädchenstift. Ein guter deutscher Film!" *Frankfurter Zeitung* 1, no. 12 (1931): 892–894.
5. Erica Carter, *Dietrich's Ghosts: The Sublime and the Beautiful in Third Reich Film* (London: British Film Institute, 2004).
6. Siegfried Kracauer, "Cult of Distraction," in "Weimar Film Theory," eds. David Bathrick, Thomas Elsaesser, and Miriam Hansen, special issue, *New German Critique*, no. 40 (Winter 1987): 94.
7. Wallace Steadman Watson, *Understanding Rainer Werner Fassbinder: Film as Private and Public Art* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 23.
8. Lutz Koepnick, "German Art Cinema Now," *German Studies Review* 36, no. 3 (2013): 656.
9. Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 124–127.