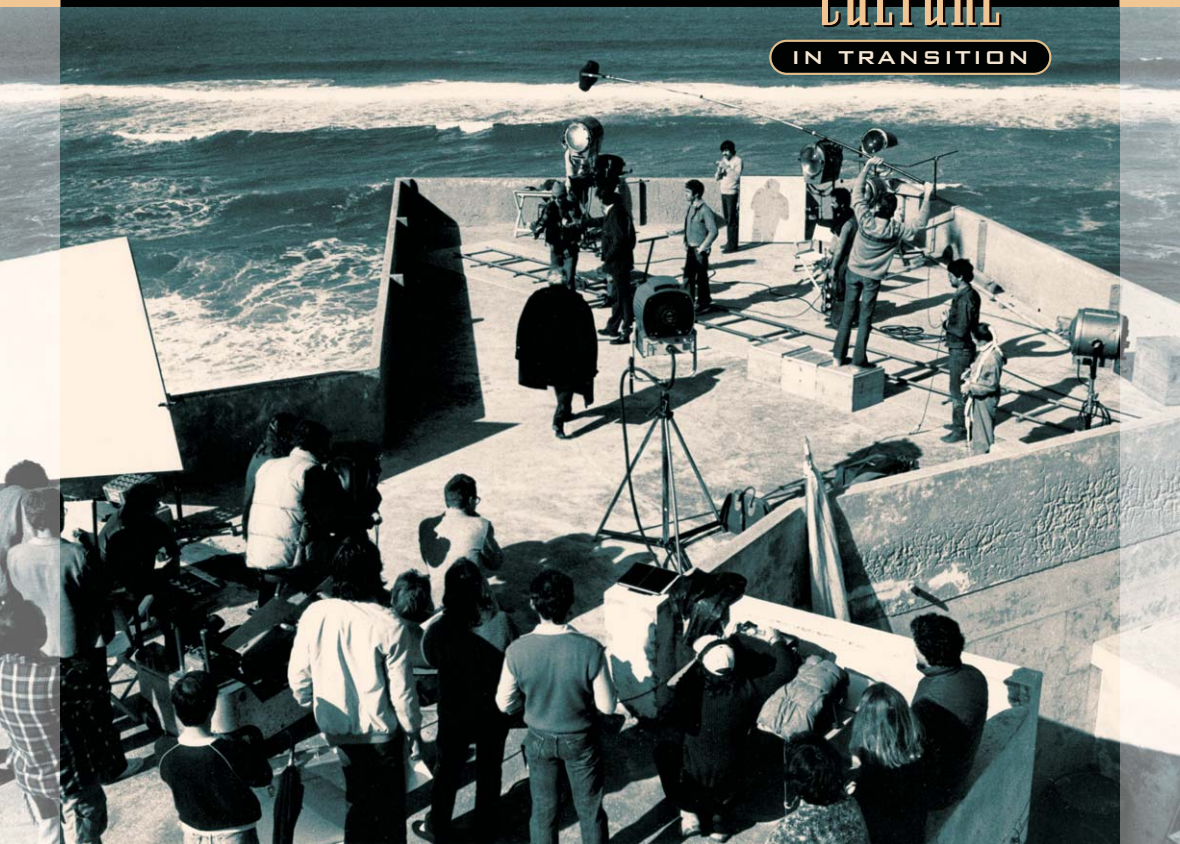


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GERMAN CINEMA IN THE AGE OF NEOLIBERALISM

HESTER BAER

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German Cinema
in the Age of Neoliberalism



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Hester Baer

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The publication of this book is made possible by a grant from the University of Maryland, College Park.

Cover illustration: Patrick Bauchau & Crew in *The State of Things* (Portugal, USA, Germany 1981/82) by Wim Wenders © Wim Wenders Stiftung 2015

Cover design: Kok Korpershoek

Lay-out: Crius Group, Hulshout

ISBN 978 94 6372 733 4

e-ISBN 978 90 4855 195 8

DOI 10.5117/9789463727334

NUR 670



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Acknowledgements

My work on this book over the past decade has often been a solitary pursuit, but it has also offered many opportunities for collaboration and solidarity, for which I am immensely grateful.

Writing collaboratively with several partners on other projects has contributed greatly to my thinking about this one. My interest in cinema and neoliberalism first developed in conversation with Ryan Long. Our work together on an article about Alfonso Cuarón's *Y tu mamá también* provided the initial spark for research on this book, and his insights and observations in countless subsequent discussions have helped me to sharpen my thinking and writing, as have his keen editing skills. Carrie Smith has been an important interlocutor for me over many years, and her recommendation that I read Lauren Berlant's *Cruel Optimism* was a catalyst for this project. Working on a collaborative article about digital feminisms with Carrie and Maria Stehle also boosted my thinking about this book (and my morale) at a crucial moment. Likewise, working with Angelica Fenner on several collaborative projects about feminism and German cinema has been decisive for my conception of this book, as has her intellectual camaraderie. Writing and teaching with Michele M. Mason has been a joyful experience, and learning about neoliberalism in Japan from her has opened up new ways of thinking about developments in Germany; her hospitality on countless writing dates made the end stages of this project both generative and fun. Last but not least, my most consistent collaborator on *Feminist German Studies* and other projects, Allie Merley Hill, has offered me encouragement and new perspectives on how to live a feminist life on a daily basis during the writing of this book. I thank each of them for their scholarly inspiration and friendship.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to Rick McCormick, who offered valuable feedback on an early draft of this project that helped me to develop a more complex account of the German cinema of neoliberalism. I am very lucky to have benefitted from his generous mentorship for many years. Barbara Menel also extended enthusiastic encouragement and support at several decisive moments. The generous and constructive manuscript reviews provided by both Barbara and Gerd Gemünden helped me to refine my arguments.

I began working on this book as a faculty member at the University of Oklahoma, where I was able to incubate it in a uniquely collegial and supportive environment, thanks especially to my colleagues in German Karin Schutjer, Joe Sullivan, Bob Lemon, and Jason Williamson.

Changing jobs midstream slowed down the writing process. I thank Jennifer Askey for helping me speed it up again and for many years of camaraderie. I am grateful to Mareike Herrmann for feedback on several early drafts, and for her friendship throughout the writing of this book.

At the University of Maryland, I am fortunate to be part of the School of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures, where I have benefited from the intellectual community of the faculty in Cinema and Media Studies in particular. I thank Liz Papazian for constructive feedback on an early draft of my introduction, which also positively affected the structure and argument of the rest of the book. My conversations with Mauro Resmini are always inspiring, and our work co-organizing a conference on cinema and neoliberalism offered new ways of thinking about the topic at a key stage of writing. Thanks also to my colleagues in German Josh Alvizu, Peter Beicken, Regina Ianozi, and especially Julie Koser, whose friendship and humour have sustained me through our seven years of working together. Students in several of my classes at the University of Maryland have contributed insightful readings of films and theoretical texts that have influenced my analyses in this book; I thank Rocio Ciganda, Raleigh Joyner, Melika Tabrizi, Wendy Timmons, and Abigail Trozenski.

I have benefitted immensely from the opportunity to discuss draft versions of sections of the book with audiences at several institutions. For invitations to speak and for generously hosting me, I thank Maria Stehle at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville; Francien Markx at George Mason University; Imke Brust at Haverford College; Rick McCormick and Seth Peabody at the University of Minnesota; Barbara Mennel at the University of Florida; Lutz Koepnick at Vanderbilt University; Corey Twitchell at Southern Utah University; Inga Pohlmann and Priscilla Layne at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Nicole Grewling at Washington College; Mary Helen Dupree and Friederike Eigler at Georgetown University; and Eva Hoffmann and Emily Jones at Whitman College. Thanks also to Kyle Frackman of the University of British Columbia for inviting me to present a keynote address at the Canadian Association of University Teachers of German Conference in Calgary in 2016, and to Angelica Fenner of the University of Toronto, Sabine Nessel of the Freie Universität, and the participants in the DAAD-sponsored Summer School "Gender, Affect, Neoliberalism: The Realist Turn in Contemporary German/European Cinemas" in Berlin in 2017.

My work on this book was supported by a DAAD Research Visit Grant that allowed me to spend four months completing initial research in Berlin in 2012, a visit that was also supported by a Vice President for Research Faculty Investment Program Grant from the University of Oklahoma. A Research and



Scholarship Award from the University of Maryland allowed me to complete drafts of several chapters; I also thank Fatemeh Keshavarz-Karamustafa for granting me a course release that gave me time to complete the initial draft of the full manuscript amidst many administrative duties.

I am especially grateful to the University of Maryland for supporting the open-access publication of this book, allowing it to enact the critique it offers by defying the privatization and marketization of academic research. My thanks go to Luka Arsenjuk of the Program in Cinema and Media Studies; Julie Koser of the Department of Germanic Studies; the School of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures; the College of Arts and Humanities; and the University Libraries for providing funding. Special thanks to Kelsey Corlett-Rivera, Head of Research Commons, for her advocacy and support of open-access humanities scholarship, and to Terry Owen, Digital Studies Librarian, for his assistance. Many thanks as well to Lauretta Clough, Janny Peng, Amy Xing Struck, and Charlotte Yuk Fan Tai in the School of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures for all their help in coordinating the subvention funding.

I am thrilled to publish *German Cinema in the Age of Neoliberalism* with Amsterdam University Press and the Film Culture in Transition Series. I thank Senior Commissioning Editor Maryse Elliott for her encouragement and support of the project, especially amidst the challenges posed for publishing by the global pandemic in 2020, when this book went to press. My thanks also go to Mike Sanders for his careful gatekeeping of the manuscript; to Daniela Pinnone for her assistance with accounting; and to Chantal Nicolaes for coordinating production.

Chapter 2 is partially based on my article “*Das Boot* and the German Cinema of Neoliberalism,” published in *German Quarterly* 85.1 (2012). I thank Wiley Blackwell for permission to reprint this material. Several sections of the book also draw on material previously published in “Affectless Economies: The Berlin School and Neoliberalism” in *Discourse* 35.1 (2013) and “The Berlin School and Women’s Cinema,” in *The Berlin School and Its Global Contexts*, edited by Marco Abel and Jaimey Fisher (Wayne State UP, 2018). I thank Wayne State University Press for permission to republish portions of both essays.

Finally, I thank my family, especially Della Baer and Ryan Long, for their care, sustenance, unwavering support, and enthusiastic and animated participation in home film screenings and discussions. They make ordinary life extraordinary, and they inspire me every day. I dedicate this book to my parents, Clint and Elizabeth Baer, with gratitude for their love and generosity.





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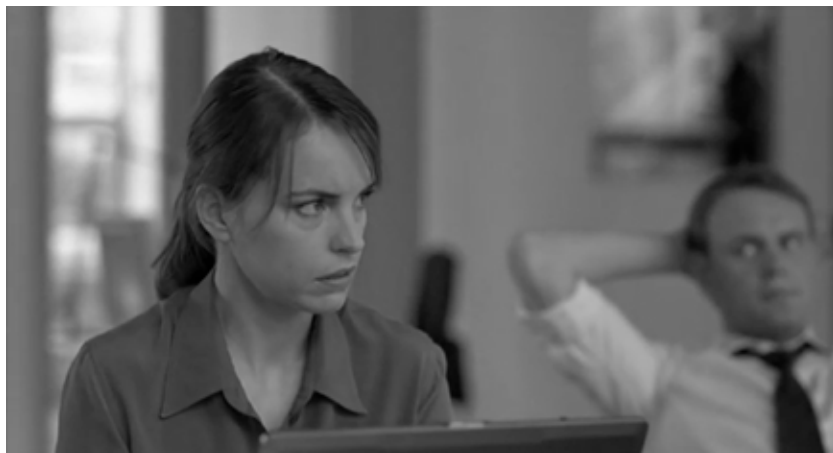
Introduction: Making Neoliberalism Visible

Abstract

Christian Petzold's *Yella* (2007) helps to establish the parameters for reconsidering German film in the context of neoliberalism. *Yella* develops formal interventions into audiovisual language to make the structures and affects of neoliberalism visible; it exposes neoliberalism as a highly gendered cultural formation; and its ability to create images of the present is contingent not only on representational practices, but also on its mode of production. Following a brief analysis of *Yella* as an emblematic film, this introduction provides a critical overview of approaches to neoliberalism and offers a short history of neoliberalism in Germany. It concludes by outlining the contributions of the book and its feminist approach for making neoliberalism visible.

Keywords: Neoliberalism, film history, film production, Germany, Christian Petzold, gender

In a scene from the 2007 film *Yella*, the private equity analyst Philipp (Devid Striesow) inaugurates the title character Yella (Nina Hoss) into the world of venture capital. Philipp has hired Yella to assist him in an important business negotiation. As they drive to the meeting, he asks her, 'Are you familiar with broker posing?' He explains that the broker pose—hands folded behind the head, elbows raised—is a gesture of dominance and intimidation performed 'by young lawyers in crappy Grisham movies'. 'I don't really like sitting there that way in meetings', Philipp explains to Yella, 'but it has an effect'. Like an acting coach preparing a student for an audition, Philipp teaches Yella a series of physical cues and improvisations, developing a scenario that will give them the upper hand in negotiation. Phillip tells Yella to maintain 'three lines of sight' during the negotiation: one at the opposing party, especially the business manager Dr. Fritz, whom Yella should disarm by holding his gaze as long as possible; one at the computer screen, where she should make



1. Imaging neoliberal capitalism in Christian Petzold's *Yella* (2007): Yella (Nina Hoss) performs business power while Phillip (David Striesow) strikes the broker pose.

a point of scrutinizing the firm's questionable balance sheets; and one at Phillip himself, especially if he strikes the broker pose, at which point she should whisper something in his ear. His instructions indicate how Yella should tailor her body to the demands of immaterial labour, schooling her in the language of self-fashioning and personal empowerment. As it happens, Yella's performance of business power exceeds all of Phillip's expectations, and the two prevail in securing a favourable business deal (see Illustration 1). In its depiction of broker posing, this scene envisages the performative language of venture capitalism; like the film as a whole, it works to make otherwise imperceptible aspects of the neoliberal present visible.

Yella is a woman from eastern Germany who dreams of making it in the west. In *Yella*, she literally enters into a dream in which she masters the game of finance capitalism, a dream that turns out to be a nightmare and one that is exposed by the narrative structure of the film as impossible, a fantasy that is (quite literally) dead in the water. In her dream, Yella leaves the eastern hamlet of Wittenberge for the western city of Hannover, where she pursues opportunities for white-collar employment in a series of nondescript business parks and hotels. Despite signs that a job she has been offered is not quite legitimate—and implications that something is seriously askew in the world at large—Yella stubbornly persists in believing that if she works hard enough, she will achieve security and prosperity.

In this way, Yella embodies the notion that self-optimization, personal responsibility, and an entrepreneurial attitude will lead to success, an injunction that is at the heart of what Lauren Berlant identifies as 'cruel optimism', a

characteristic affect of neoliberalism that occurs ‘when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing’.¹ While any optimistic relation may become cruel when the object you aim to attain actively impedes your well being, Berlant’s emphasis is on the crumbling of optimistic fantasies of the good life under the sign of neoliberalism: ‘The fantasies that are fraying include, particularly, upward mobility, job security, political and social equality, and lively, durable intimacy.’² Cruel optimism describes how the attachment to these fantasies does harm to those who subscribe to them.

Yella’s stubborn attachment to the dream of hard work in business demonstrates her investment in such crumbling fantasies of the good life, and *Yella* charts the tenacity of ‘aspirational normativity’, which Berlant describes as ‘the desire to feel normal, and to feel normalcy as the ground of a dependable life, a life that does not have to keep being reinvented’.³ Just as the performance of a job as Phillip’s assistant feels like participation in the economy, and thus engenders a sense of belonging for Yella, even proximity to the possibility of a ‘normal life’ animates her actions.

Yella is the only character in the film who exhibits mobility: she regularly crosses borders, not only between eastern and western Germany, but also between past, present, and future, between waking and sleeping, between intimacy and solitude, between life and death. However, this mobility does not lead upward; rather, mobility turns out to be both a dream and a nightmare for Yella, who seeks a resting place amidst the upheaval and precarity of the present. While she is always on the move, Yella is nonetheless trapped in a circuit defined by failed businesses and failed, abusive, and unscrupulous men. In Wittenberge, she leaves behind a father who is caught in the past and an abusive husband whose unsuccessful attempts to succeed in the new era of capitalism have led him down a path of violence. In Hannover, she apprentices herself first to a manager who hides the fact that he has been downsized, and later to Phillip, the venture capitalist whose success is predicated on an elaborate fraud.

Yella’s successive discoveries of these failures and frauds are depicted in the generic terms of the horror film (abrupt cuts, discomfiting music, creepy Steadicam shots), which expose the precarious body of the female protagonist to haunting and violence. The aesthetics of horror collide with the otherwise understated language of *Yella*, which—like other Berlin School films—unspools slowly, with long takes, a static camera, and an emphasis

1 Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 1.

2 Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 3.

3 Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 170.

on ambient sound. This disorganized formal language, which resignifies the vocabulary of both popular genre movies and European art cinema, is crucial to the film's exposure of the cultural logic of neoliberalism.

Yella is an emblematic film for the cinema of neoliberalism in three key ways that inform my arguments throughout this book. First, it develops formal interventions into audiovisual language in order to make visible the structures and affects of neoliberalism. Second, through its narrative focus and in formal terms, it exposes neoliberalism as a highly gendered cultural formation. Finally, its ability to create images of the present is strongly linked not only to the representational choices on display in *Yella* but also to its mode of production.

The director of *Yella*, Christian Petzold, has described his deliberate efforts to find a new language to 'image' neoliberalism in his films, one that is able to portray our affective investment in capitalist structures despite the harm they do to us. As Petzold puts it in the pressbook for *Yella*, he aims to show 'the face of modern capitalism': 'Modern capitalism, there has to be something sexy about it. Years ago, racketeers hid themselves away in a temple. Like thieves, they were ugly, devious, conniving. These days they are breezy, charming, healthy, Buddhist. But we still portray this world in old pictures, caricatures. We don't have a picture of it, no story. These new pictures and new stories, that was what it was about for me.'⁴ This search for new pictures and new stories to represent advanced capitalism—in order to break with cinematic clichés and address the spectator in new ways—underpins not only Petzold's project but also that of a range of other contemporary German filmmakers discussed here.⁵

The filmic project of imaging modern capitalism resonates with Fredric Jameson's well-known notion of cognitive mapping. As Jameson points out, the structural coordinates of life in global capitalism are 'no longer accessible to immediate lived experience and are often not even conceptualizable for most people'.⁶ Drawing an analogy between the individual's spatial mapping of the city and 'that mental map of the social and global totality we all carry around in our heads in variously garbled forms',⁷ Jameson argues for an

4 'Yella Pressbook.'

5 Petzold and his former teacher, filmmaker Harun Farocki, who, before his death in 2014, co-wrote most of Petzold's films, draw on a range of sources to construct multivalent representations of neoliberalism. For example, much of the business dialogue in *Yella* is taken verbatim from actual business negotiations recorded in Farocki's documentary about venture capitalism *Nicht ohne Risiko* (*Nothing Ventured*, 2004, included as an extra on the U.S. DVD release of *Yella*).

6 Jameson, 'Cognitive Mapping', 349.

7 Jameson, 'Cognitive Mapping', 351.



aesthetic of cognitive mapping, whereby the artwork's task is to mediate, via formal strategies, the paradox of the present: 'There comes into being, then, a situation in which we can say that if the individual experience is authentic, then it cannot be true; and that if a scientific or cognitive model of the same content is true, then it escapes individual experience.'⁸ As Jameson suggests, the search for a form to imaginatively represent the multinational networks, globalized spaces, and abstracted class relations of advanced capitalism is necessary for any resistant political project.

The situation described by Jameson, in which 'new and enormous global realities are inaccessible to any individual subject or consciousness', is perhaps exacerbated by the neoliberal turn.⁹ Though it is increasingly ubiquitous, neoliberalism is rarely named, so that its policies and effects often appear imperceptible, even naturalized. As David Harvey has written, 'Neoliberalism has, in short, become hegemonic as a mode of discourse. It has pervasive effects on ways of thought to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world.'¹⁰ The difficulty of comprehending the scale of transnational networks or the abstraction of the global financial system is compounded by the naturalization of neoliberal discourse, so that the contemporary world appears incomprehensible, even unfathomable. In this context, *Yella* and other recent German films—whether by design or through analysis—can help us to see and respond to aspects of contemporary life that often remain obscured from our view, thereby making neoliberalism visible.

Crucial to *Yella* and to the cinema of neoliberalism at large is an emphasis on the gendering of the neoliberal repertoire. One of the most significant aspects of neoliberalization since the 1970s has been the privatization of social reproduction, including caregiving provisions for youth, the elderly, and sick and disabled people as well as costs for education, health care, and social security. Now deemed a matter of personal responsibility rather than a state obligation, the burden of social reproduction has typically devolved onto women. Not least for this reason, as feminist critics have argued, in today's media culture 'women rather than men are constituted as ideal neoliberal subjects'.¹¹ Furthermore, Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff explain that, 'To a much greater extent than men, women are required to work on and transform the self, to regulate every aspect of their conduct,

8 Jameson, 'Cognitive Mapping', 349.

9 Jameson, 'Cognitive Mapping', 352.

10 Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 3.

11 Gill, *Gender and the Media*, 249.

and to present all their actions as freely chosen.¹² The asymmetrical interpellation of women as the primary subjects of neoliberalism is reflected by the thematic and formal-aesthetic preoccupations of recent German films. Across the spectrum of popular and art film, these movies often engage with the aesthetic forms and tropes of both the woman's film and feminist cinema in their attention to gendered aspects of everyday life and the intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, citizenship, religious affiliation, and national identity. In *Yella* and in many of the other movies I discuss, female characters become explicit sites for 'imaging' the present, a key trait of contemporary German cinema.

Also significant for the cinema of neoliberalism is how changing production models underpin representational choices in the era of media conglomeration, proliferating digital formats, and the increased marketization of culture. For instance, much attention has been paid to the way *Yella* and other Berlin School films constitute 'the next new wave', or a kind of reboot of art cinema for the 21st century, an approach that suggests their autonomous status as 'counter-cinema'.¹³ However, what this approach often overlooks is the transnational, postcinematic mode of production and reception reflected by Berlin School films. In an era when film production in Germany has been largely concentrated in the hands of a very few media conglomerates, Berlin School filmmakers like Petzold have created a successful independent production model. Relying like most German film productions on a combination of funding through international co-producers, regional film boards, private investment, distribution deals, and television financing, these low-budget films (costing on average approximately one to two million euros) have mostly played in cinemas only in limited release, where they have rarely drawn many viewers, not least due to low advertising budgets. However, on television they have done exceedingly well, often topping the charts for their time slots and drawing large market shares (8-15 percent, indicating well over a million and sometimes as many as several million viewers).¹⁴ Mostly shot on 35mm film, these films are not 'made for television' in terms of their formal style or content. Nevertheless, television exhibition and reception are crucial to the films' production model and expand their viewership, as does their international circulation via subtitled releases

12 Gill and Scharff, *New Femininities*, 7.

13 See for example Roy et al., *The Berlin School: Films from the Berliner Schule*, especially the contribution by Lim, 'Moving On: The Next New Wave' (88-96); and Abel, *The Counter-Cinema of the Berlin School*, which provides a more nuanced assessment of the Berlin School as counter-cinema.

14 Gupta, 'Berliner Schule: Nouvelle Vague Allemande.'



first at festivals and later through home video formats and digital platforms, especially streaming services. As a consideration of production and reception suggests, *Yella* and other Berlin School films are firmly embedded in the same neoliberal mediascape that they also place on display, attesting to the changed context in which films operate today.¹⁵

This context, of course, informs not only the global art cinema of the Berlin School, but also the broader cinematic landscape, which encompasses the surprising persistence of local genres, the rise of global blockbusters, and the ongoing domestic success of popular commercial cinema. Attending to all of these forms, this book examines the neoliberalization of cinema in Germany, seeking to understand how film, as a privileged site for considering the saturation of culture by economy that is a hallmark of neoliberalism, has participated in and resisted the neoliberal project. Both an aesthetic form and one that requires considerable financial investment and access to technology, feature filmmaking ‘can offer key insights into the nature and contradictions of the neoliberal project.’¹⁶ By focusing on aesthetic innovations, technological developments, ideological strategies, and transformations in spectator address and reception, I demonstrate how recent German films manufacture consent for, but also contest, neoliberal agendas, sometimes encompassing both impulses at the same time.

Neoliberalism, Cinema, and Germany

Neoliberalism designates the notion that the free market should serve as the guiding force of all human activity. Originating as a theory of political economy, neoliberalism has come to identify a range of historical developments, emergent government practices, and discursive repertoires operating in conjunction to enhance corporate profit and delegitimize the social.¹⁷

15 On the independent production model pursued by Berlin School and other contemporary German filmmakers, see also Baer, ‘The Berlin School and Women’s Cinema.’

16 Kapur and Wagner, *Neoliberalism and Global Cinema*, 1.

17 As numerous critics have argued, neoliberalism is a conceptually messy term, which is often invoked in historically nonspecific and reductive ways. The distinction between classical liberalism and neoliberalism is a slippery one, which is conceived of in different ways by various theorists; neoliberalism also developed differently in distinct geopolitical contexts, a fact that is often glossed over. Significant for this project is the difference between the American neoliberal trajectory and the German one, with its roots in ordoliberalism and the Freiburg School, a difference that is key for Michel Foucault’s influential exploration of neoliberalism, which I discuss in more detail below. Carolyn Hardin provides a useful distinction among three (often intersecting) deployments of neoliberalism in contemporary critical analysis: one drawing on

Some effects of neoliberalization include a collapse of distinctions between public and private, driven by new technologies; an emphasis on personal responsibility and individual self-fashioning; and the demise of collective social movements. Because neoliberalism favours corporations and seeks to boost profit at the expense of redistributive socioeconomic policies, neoliberalization has also resulted in the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few. By trumpeting the market above all else 'neoliberalism wages an incessant attack on democracy, public goods, and non-commodified values'.¹⁸ Neoliberalism also emphasizes individual freedom and private property, dissolving modes of collectivity and solidarity and inaugurating a transformation of the culture and politics of everyday life.¹⁹

Economists and politicians advocated the doctrine of neoliberalism throughout the second half of the 20th Century. Though its development has been uneven, taking shape differently in various national and local contexts, the year 1980 marks a watershed for the consolidation of neoliberalism in Western democracies and a trend toward economic liberalization worldwide.²⁰ Neoliberalism ultimately came to prevail around the turn of the millennium, when the New Economy of technologically-driven global capitalism replaced other forms of socioeconomic and political organization throughout much of the world. While the economic doctrine of neoliberalism suffered a blow in the aftermath of the financial crisis of 2008 and the global recession that followed, in the years since, rising inequality has gone hand in hand with an intensification of neoliberal discourse, prompting critics to speak of 'a redoubling of its intensity and reach'.²¹

Neoliberalism's financialization of all spheres of life has led to the erosion of traditional social formations, especially in the realms of family and

Foucault's ideas about the historical development of neoliberalism and its theory of human capital; one drawing on Marxist political economy that emphasizes neoliberalism as today's dominant capitalist ideology, opposing it to democracy; and one of 'epochalists' who invoke neoliberalism conceptually to describe recent economic developments. See Hardin, 'Finding the "Neo" in Neoliberalism.'

18 Giroux, 'The Terror of Neoliberalism', 2.

19 See Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality?: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy*.

20 In the U.S., 1980 saw not only the election of Ronald Reagan to office, following closely on the heels of Margaret Thatcher's election in the U.K. the year before, but also the ascension of Paul Volcker, a key architect of neoliberal monetary policy, to head of the Federal Reserve. The liberalization of the economy in China also began in the late 1970s, and experiments with neoliberalization proliferated in Latin America. See Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 1.

21 Peck, 'Explaining (with) Neoliberalism', 132.



employment.²² This erosion has resulted in both enhanced mobility and deepening insecurity, a paradox that exemplifies the neoliberal repertoire. Flexibilization of identity and work, together with an emphasis on self-fashioning and choice, offer novel opportunities for the individual-consumer, who is empowered to adopt new roles outside of conventional structures. At the same time, the loosening of conventions, the diminishing role of public and collective institutions, and the dismantling of redistributive social policies create a situation in which provisions for caregiving, networks of support, and mechanisms for sustaining life become matters of personal responsibility. Because these transformations of everyday life and the material world take place in the name of individual liberty, which goes hand in hand with the freedom of the market, they often seem to transpire invisibly, making them appear as common sense.

The consequences of neoliberalization for cinema have been particularly profound, underscoring 'how the transformation of the business of cinema was a central feature of the reorganization of neoliberal cultural production'.²³ Perhaps most evident are the rapid technological changes affecting film production, distribution, and exhibition since 1980, especially the impact of new media, but also the emergence of digital effects and computer-generated imagery, the proliferation of home video formats, and the rise of the multiplex. At the same time as new technologies were reshaping cinema, neoliberal agendas of deregulation, privatization, and marketization (especially as they affect broadcasting and media conglomerates) diminished the state's role as a primary sponsor and facilitator of film culture, leading to a further restructuring of film and media industries worldwide.

One result of this restructuring was to strengthen Hollywood's global hegemony over the world film market beginning in the 1980s; by the turn of the millennium, Hollywood owned from 40 to 90 percent of films shown worldwide each year.²⁴ As Toby Miller argues, 'Shifts toward a neo-liberal, multinational investment climate have reinforced global Hollywood's strategic power [...] through the privatization of media ownership, a unified Western European market, openings in the former Soviet Bloc, and the spread of satellite tv, the Web, and [home video], combined with the deregulation of national broadcasting in Europe and Latin America.'²⁵ These

22 On the erosion of traditional family and gender roles in neoliberalism, see Woltersdorff, 'Paradoxes of Precarious Sexualities'; and Bourdieu, 'Job Insecurity Is Everywhere Now.'

23 Kapur and Wagner, *Neoliberalism and Global Cinema*, 3-4.

24 See Miller, *Global Hollywood*, 3.

25 Miller, 4.

shifts hold particularly profound implications for smaller national cinemas worldwide, including German cinema.

Indeed, while the globalization of media networks that is a key facet of the neoliberal era has rightly led to a scholarly focus on the transnational connections that shape global cinema, national cinema remains a crucial category for mapping the neoliberal turn.²⁶ Not only does the nation continue to serve as a central figure for conceptualizing belonging and heritage in the present, with ramifications for film production and preservation as well as language and form, but funding regimes also continue to be connected to national discourses. Moreover, the nation has formed a recurrent focus of protectionism, not least in Europe, where national cinema has been on the front lines of debates about how to defend the contours of a meaningfully different indigenous culture against the homogenizing forces of global capitalism. These factors make a focus on national cinema necessary. In line with developments in the field, however, I view German cinema 'not as a determinate entity with fixed borders and a linear historical trajectory, but as a mobile formation that is perpetually made and remade in a network of relations across national, local, regional, transnational, and global spaces and entanglements', relations that help us to conceptualize the transformation of cinema in the neoliberal age.²⁷

One of today's strongest global economies, Germany has always been home to a vital film industry, despite the vicissitudes of its history since the birth of film. Producing domestically popular films alongside internationally successful art cinema throughout most of its history, Germany presents a particularly interesting case study for examining the impact on contemporary cinema of increased globalization, the restructuring of the world economy, geopolitical realignment, technological change, shifting conceptions of gender and national identity, and the homogenizing influence of Hollywood.

However, as I argue throughout this book, German cinema ultimately constitutes more than just a case study for understanding the transformation of film in the contemporary period—in many ways, it might be conceptualized as the cinema of neoliberalism par excellence. Indeed, German cinema provides a particularly stark example of cinematic neoliberalization and a key site for analysing the shifts it entailed not least because of the unique social, political, and economic context that underpinned filmmaking in divided Germany. Cinema in both East and West Germany was largely

26 See especially Halle, *German Film after Germany*.

27 Carter et al, 'Introduction', *The German Cinema Book*.



exempt from market mechanisms throughout the postwar period, when state sponsorship promoted a culture of cinema that took precedence over economic concerns (albeit with different ideological objectives and consequences in the Federal Republic and the German Democratic Republic). The abrupt reversal of this hierarchy that took place in the early 1980s in both Germanies, following the economic crisis of the 1970s and the concomitant erosion of autonomous spheres of cultural production, brings the emergent German cinema of neoliberalism into sharp focus.

Already in the 1970s, West Germany served as a key ground for Michel Foucault's theorization of neoliberal governmentality, whose roots lie in a critique of the historical variant of German neoliberalism known as ordoliberalism.²⁸ Foucault emphasizes the novelty of West Germany as a state whose legitimacy was grounded on the exercise of economic freedom, a corrective to the anti-liberalism of National Socialism. As subsequent commentators have noted, the market orientation of German reunification under the leadership of Chancellor Helmut Kohl sped processes of privatization and corporatization, placing Germany—and especially the territory of the former GDR—at the forefront of neoliberalization in Europe. Thus, the peculiar history of West Germany as a 'ground zero' of neoliberal ideas at mid-century was followed by the exceptional experience of East Germany as the vanguard of global neoliberalism at the turn of the new millennium, a historical conjuncture that is crucial to considering the transformations of cinema during this period.

Since reunification, Germany has assumed a central role in the economic and political life of Europe, another reason to consider its cinema as emblematic for the age of neoliberalism. Debates over the idea, meaning, and worth of cinema in Germany during the last four decades function as a seismograph of cultural neoliberalization. Notably, the domestic market share of German cinema has been on the rise during this period, but it has generally remained far below the worldwide average 35 percent market share for domestic productions, reflecting an internally divided cinema that has struggled to hold its ground, particularly against Hollywood. The case of Germany diverges sharply from that of France, for example, which 'defied Hollywood's new world order' and staved off the shrivelling of its domestic film industry in the age of neoliberalism with protectionist policy initiatives, international lobbying on behalf of cultural sovereignty, and a spirited defence of national cinema.²⁹

28 See Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*.

29 See Buchsbaum, *Exception Taken*.



In Germany, by contrast, government and industry commentators have defined the worth of a film largely by its capacity to make money, reshaping cultural policy to reflect this commercial imperative.³⁰ In this context, other functions of cinema—for example, as a site of cultural representation and aesthetic experimentation—remain relevant only insofar as they can be monetized and are measurable as components of a film's profit motive (though cultural representation and aesthetic form still remain central to the aspirations of filmmakers and to the reception context of audiences). As Christian Petzold somewhat polemically describes it, the policy-driven 'television- and subvention-economy' that stands in for a real film economy in Germany has led to a situation in which 'economic conditions are trying to annihilate films. There is still a call for cinema and for the passions that attach to it. But to make films that are against the status quo, and to do it in a such a way that they don't look like countercinema, is difficult.'³¹ Despite its unquestionable difficulty, this precarious balancing act that Petzold describes has driven German filmmakers to find a formal language to counter the status quo while still operating within the parameters of dominant media production in the era of global capitalism.

Finally, German cinema's status as the preeminent cinema of neoliberalism derives from Germany's unique social, political, and economic history in the 20th Century. The history of partition and unification, which is also the history of the failed mass utopias of capitalism and communism, paved the way for processes of accelerated neoliberalization in Germany, while also making those processes distinctly visible, not least to the camera eye.

A Short History of Neoliberalism in Germany

This section provides a brief overview of the intertwining of neoliberal ideas with German history over the past 100 years, a period characterized by social, political, and economic upheaval and the regular redrawing of borders. Because of the specificity of German history during this turbulent century, and the uneven development of neoliberalism in general, the following

30 For a helpful overview of these developments, see Cooke, *Contemporary German Cinema*, especially Chapter 1, 'Financing Cinema in Germany.'

31 Fröhlich, "Uns fehlt eine Filmwirtschaft", 31. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from the German are my own.



outline lays the groundwork for considering the stakes of neoliberalization for German cinema.

The programme of neoliberalism began as an attempt to revive the classical liberal idea of the self-regulating market during the worldwide economic crisis that took hold in the aftermath of the stock market crash of 1929.³² Advocates of neoliberal thought remained a minority throughout the 1930s and 1940s, but the doctrine gained traction during the second half of the 20th Century, when Western economists and politicians began to promote neoliberalism as a pathway out of postwar economic stagnation and toward a unified global market.³³ Around 1980, the adoption of neoliberal ideas accelerated with the implementation of policies and treaties that promoted privatization of state enterprise, deregulation of industry, liberalization of financial markets, and free trade throughout Asia, Europe, and the Americas. In subsequent decades, a series of social, economic, and political transformations took hold worldwide, including increased globalization, a fundamental restructuring of the world economy, geopolitical realignment, and technological change. During this period, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc greatly accelerated the global reach of neoliberalism.

Though Germany was a key site for the initial development of neoliberal thought in the 1930s and 1940s, there is some disagreement among scholars about the impact and spread of neoliberalism in German-speaking Europe. To be sure, the reconstruction of the German economy after World War II and the collapse of National Socialism, as well as the subsequent partition of Germany, make it a special case within postwar Europe. The strength of (West) Germany's economy underpinned a commitment to social welfare that contradicts central tenets of neoliberalism, and trade unions have long remained stronger in Germany than elsewhere. This leads David Harvey, for example, to describe the Federal Republic as an exception, a country that maintained economic growth while resisting neoliberal reforms until the

32 For a historical overview of the development of neoliberal ideas, see Mirowski and Plehwe, eds., *The Road from Mont Pèlerin*. For a helpful discussion of the development of neoliberalism in the German context, see Butterwegge, Lösch, and Ptak, *Kritik des Neoliberalismus*. On neoliberalism in Germany, see also Urban, *ABC zum Neoliberalismus*.

33 Mirowski and Plehwe argue that neoliberalism must be understood as emerging from the concerted efforts of a 'neoliberal thought collective', an international group of intellectuals who first assembled in the Swiss village of Mont Pèlerin in 1947 to create an organized movement to spread neoliberal ideas. The Mont Pèlerin Society (which ultimately numbered around 1000 members) and related neoliberal think tanks exerted a huge influence on economic and political developments worldwide throughout the second half of the 20th century. See Mirowski and Plehwe, eds., *The Road from Mont Pèlerin*.



1990s.³⁴ While it is certainly true that the collapse of the GDR paved the way for increased neoliberalization since unification, it is crucial to recognize that the implementation of neoliberalism in Germany—and its effects on everyday life—began well before 1989.

Economist Ralf Ptak has argued that the postwar Federal Republic was in fact the ground zero of neoliberalism's ascent, which began in the 1950s.³⁵ Ptak describes how the Federal Republic's first Minister of Economics Ludwig Erhard, who championed the German variant of neoliberal thought known as ordoliberalism, guided the nascent FRG through economic and social reforms leading to the Economic Miracle, 'which German neoliberalism still counts among its own legendary policy successes'.³⁶ Ordoliberalism was developed by a group of theorists around Walter Eucken, who later rose to prominence as the leading economist of the Freiburg School. Ordoliberal ideas became influential not only in West Germany, but also in the Anglo-American context, where they achieved purchase through the influence of the Austro-British economist Friedrich von Hayek, who had studied at Freiburg and went on to play a crucial role in the worldwide dissemination of neoliberal doctrine.

While not fundamentally different from other streams of neoliberal thought, ordoliberalism is unique for its emphasis on the social dimension of the economy, as well as for its historical ties to German exceptionalism, including its endorsement of a strong state, of 'conservative patriarchal ideas of society', and of antimodernism.³⁷ First theorized in the 1930s, ordoliberalism developed as a response to the social and economic crisis of the interwar years in Germany, including the worldwide economic collapse of 1929, the failure of the Weimar Republic, and the spiritual and moral dilemmas brought about by the emergence of mass society.³⁸ Like other forms of liberal

34 Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 89-90. Harvey argues that neoliberalization began in Germany in the 1990s, due to the stresses on Germany's technological advantage brought about by unification as well as the declining role of banks and the rising role of stock exchanges in the world economy.

35 Ptak argues that '[t]he 1950s in West Germany must be viewed, without a doubt, as the first triumphal era of neoliberalism' (Butterwegge, Lösche, and Ptak, *Kritik des Neoliberalismus*, 81).

36 Butterwegge, Lösche, and Ptak, 82.

37 Ptak, 'Neoliberalism in Germany', 100.

38 The term ordoliberalism derives from the medieval notion of *Ordo*, a metaphysical conception of a hierarchically structured society that reflects the 'natural order' of things: 'The basic *Ordo* mind-set served not only as an ideological backdrop for a hierarchical social model, but also as a way of providing legitimacy for its supposedly irrevocable character' (Ptak, 'Neoliberalism in Germany', 104). Eucken's *Ordnungspolitik* (policy of order) aimed to fulfill the promise of this quasi-mystical natural order by emphasizing the hierarchical arrangement and interdependence

thought, ordoliberalism seeks to resolve the tension between individual freedoms and the common good in order to heighten personal liberties without sacrificing social order. Ordoliberalism thus responds to the liberal paradox (the fact that the individual freedom of some—the pursuit of personal liberty, private property, and material resources—poses a threat to the collective freedom and right to live of all) by granting the state a strong role in securing market capitalism and ensuring a competitive order.

While some ordoliberals collaborated with the Nazis and some were exiled, ordoliberal thinkers generally concurred that National Socialism resulted from anti-liberal interventions, which they sought to reverse.³⁹ Ordoliberals began planning for the postwar period already in the early 1940s, and during the period of occupation they emerged as a strong influence in the design of the emergent Federal Republic, ‘producing a constructive draft to combine society and economy in terms of a third way between capitalism (as a historically outdated order) and socialism (as a current threat), which finally materialized in the social market economy’.⁴⁰ The social market economy implemented by Erhard was something of a hybrid, adapted to the peculiar circumstances of reconstruction Germany.⁴¹ Nonetheless, it exemplified neoliberal principles, first and foremost among them an understanding of freedom as economic freedom and the market as a site of truth. Under the auspices of the social market economy, the emergent Federal Republic was grounded in market capitalism and gained legitimacy as a state on the principle of economic freedom.

Foucault argues that West Germany was ‘a radically economic state, taking the word “radically” in the strict sense, that is to say, its root is precisely

of the economic, social, and political orders, culminating in the motto ‘State planning of the forms [of order] – yes; state planning and guidance of the economic process – no.’ Qtd. by Ptak, ‘Freiburger Schule’, in Urban, *ABC zum Neoliberalismus*, 84.

39 Alongside Eucken, the economists Wilhelm Röpke and Walter Rüstow were both instrumental in the development of ordoliberal thought in the early 1930s. Röpke and Rüstow were both refugees from the Nazis, while Eucken remained in Germany during the Nazi period as a professor at the University of Freiburg. All three economists developed ordoliberal ideas throughout the 1930s and 1940s, helping to lay the groundwork for the postwar adoption of ordoliberal doctrine. For a discussion of ordoliberalism and Nazism, see Ptak, ‘Neoliberalism in Germany’, esp. 117–119.

40 Ptak, ‘Neoliberalism in Germany’, 120.

41 Ordoliberals such as Hayek objected to the use of the term ‘social’, with its connotations of social welfare, in the term ‘social market economy’. However, they ultimately understood the adoption of this term as a political necessity in the context of the emergent Federal Republic, since it helped to mediate the concerns of Social Democrats and trade unions, and helped to mitigate fears about authoritarian approaches to social integration in the aftermath of Nazism. See Ptak, ‘Neoliberalism in Germany’, 107.



economic'.⁴² As Wendy Brown has pointed out, Foucault was among the first thinkers to consider, in his 1978-1979 Collège de France lectures, how the 'reprogramming of liberal governmentality' begun in postwar Germany was starting to take hold elsewhere in Europe, where many countries combined neoliberal principles with welfare state policies from the 1960s onwards.⁴³ Foucault presciently emphasizes the importance of the German variant of neoliberalism for understanding the neoliberal project as a whole; for him, 'this idea of a legitimizing foundation of the state on the guaranteed exercise of an economic freedom'⁴⁴ is something historically novel and thereby crucial for his theorization of (neoliberal) governmentality.⁴⁵

Foucault understands neoliberalism as a normative order of governing reason, rather than as a stage of capitalism per se. As Brown explains, 'the norms and principles of neoliberal rationality do not dictate precise economic policy, but rather set out novel ways of conceiving and relating state, society, economy, and subject and also inaugurate a new "economization" of heretofore noneconomic spheres and endeavors'.⁴⁶ In the context of Germany, Foucault describes a circuit between economic institutions and the state, which 'produces a permanent consensus of all those who may appear as agents within these economic processes, as investors, workers, employers, and trade unions'.⁴⁷ As he suggests, participation in the economy and acceptance of the 'economic game of freedom' produces political consent; the economy's 'guarantee' of well-being produces the population's willing adherence to its regime. The responsabilization and active self-regulation of the individual that ensues is characteristic of neoliberal forms of governmentality, summarized by Foucault's invocation of *homo oeconomicus* as 'an entrepreneur of himself' rather than a partner of exchange.⁴⁸ Foucault's theory of neoliberal governmentality, with its roots in a critique of German ordoliberalism, provides an important basis for my analysis of neoliberalism and German cinema.

42 Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 86.

43 Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 50.

44 Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 83.

45 For Foucault, governmentality describes the distribution of power across the population through knowledge, the economy, and forms of social control; it is an 'ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculations, and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific, albeit very complex, power that has the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge, and apparatuses as its essential technical instrument'. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 108.

46 Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 50.

47 Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 84.

48 Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 226.



Given its ordoliberal foundations, the Federal Republic saw less a neo-liberal revolution per se in the 1980s than an intensification of neoliberal governmentality brought about by the worldwide economic failure of the 1970s, which put an end to the Economic Miracle of the postwar years, and by the subsequent globalization of neoliberal doctrine. During the early 1970s, the oil crisis had instigated a cultural shift in West Germany known as the *Tendenzwende* (tendential turn). This sea change in politics and society indicates a general turn away from the leftist *Zeitgeist* and toward a new conservatism, which was cemented by the return to power of the CDU in 1982 and the subsequent election victory of Helmut Kohl. The shift to the right was consolidated on an ideological level by the so-called *geistig-moralische Wende* (intellectual-moral turn), which describes the rise of neo-conservatism during the early Kohl era.

Promising a ‘historical new beginning’ for the Federal Republic, Kohl promoted a cultural renewal centred on the ‘leistungsbereiten Normalbürger’ (competitive average citizen).⁴⁹ Kohl’s notion of renewal emphasized affirmative cultural values and the ‘normality of bourgeois life’⁵⁰; the cultural turn he promised was predicated on the notion that the social-democratic/liberal coalition holding power since 1966 had promoted minorities and alternative lifestyles, which Kohl now sought to marginalize. At the same time, the new conservative government initiated sweeping changes in economic policy ‘away from more state, toward more market; away from collective burdens, toward more personal achievement [*Leistung*]; away from encrusted structures, toward more mobility, individual initiative, and increased competitiveness.’⁵¹ Taken together, the *Tendenzwende* and the *geistig-moralische Wende* signalled a profound turn in West Germany around 1980 comparable to (and inspired by) the Reagan and Thatcher revolutions in the U.S. and U.K.⁵²

While it is impossible to speak of neoliberalization per se in the GDR, the neoliberal turn taking place globally around 1980 likewise had a significant impact on the East German economy and society.⁵³ The oil

49 Görtemaker, *Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, 688.

50 Görtemaker, *Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, 688.

51 Qtd. in Ther, *Die neue Ordnung auf dem alten Kontinent*, 49.

52 For a useful discourse analysis of the rise of these two terms, see Hoeres, ‘Von der “Tendenzwende” zur “geistig-moralischen Wende.”’

53 For an extended discussion of the impact of the worldwide economic crisis of the 1970s and the transformation that ensued in the GDR see Maier, *Dissolution*. As Maier argues, ‘This was an epochal transformation that challenged all industrial societies. But the capitalist and socialist economies responded in different ways, and they paid a different price’ (81).

crisis and the subsequent rise in the cost of raw materials, together with the worldwide increase in interest rates during the 1970s, profoundly affected the GDR's economy, ultimately leading the country into a debt crisis.⁵⁴ In the 1980s, globalization continued to create external pressure on East Germany, which relied on the world market for access to goods from outside the Eastern Bloc, while the desire among citizens for an increased standard of living exerted pressure on the system from within.⁵⁵ In order to maintain its welfare provisions and continue to supply consumer goods, the GDR increasingly relied on 'credits' from West Germany, in the form of huge loans whose service fees quickly outstripped the GDR's limited export earnings.⁵⁶ At the same time, under the guidance of Soviet economic policy, East Germany borrowed from the West to shore up its large-scale ventures rather than enacting reform or investing in the production of exportable goods. This indebtedness to the West and failure to enact reforms in response to the changing world economy are two key factors in the eventual collapse of the socialist economies.

The unique relationship between the FRG and the GDR also contributed to the fall of the Wall and the demise of socialism by creating a 'mirror society' that brought the flaws of the latter into sharp relief, and by providing a back-door economy that fuelled the drive to consumerism. These same factors made the GDR ripe for neoliberalization after 1989, since the economization of everyday life under socialism could be rather seamlessly co-opted into the marketization of everyday life in neoliberalism. After unification, the 'new German states' formed a kind of tabula rasa for the development of a socioeconomic order characterized by geographic and social mobility, 'flexible' or insecure modes of employment, individualization and social fragmentation, heightened use of technology, and the centrality of consumption for social legitimation: "Thanks to the shock therapy of unification, eastern Germans not only had to adjust quickly but they did so to a late modern capitalist consumer society in its almost pure form of ruthless international economic competition, of shrinking social welfare protection, and of ubiquitous shopping malls, cellular phones, and auto dealerships."⁵⁷ As Laurence McFalls argues, due to uneven historical developments in the aftermath of unification, eastern Germans actually had to adapt to this

54 See Steiner, *The Plans That Failed*, 161-165.

55 See Kopstein, *The Politics of Economic Decline in East Germany*.

56 Maier, *Dissolution*, 60-61.

57 McFalls, 'Eastern Germany Transformed', 2.



new socioeconomic order before western Germans did, placing them in the vanguard of a new German identity, 'on their common path to a neoliberal global society'.⁵⁸

Indeed, the march down this common path sped up during the 1990s, when Germany witnessed a further intensification of economic processes of neoliberalization enabled by the opening of the GDR and the demands of reunification. As Harvey writes, 'The hasty reunification of Germany created stresses, and the technological advantage that the Germans had earlier commanded dissipated, making it necessary to challenge more deeply its social democratic tradition in order to survive.'⁵⁹ This period saw a redistribution of resources towards the rebuilding of infrastructure in the new German states. However, reunification also proceeded through deliberate privatization and corporatization of public assets, flexibilization of employment, and heightened commodification and financialization. The market orientation of the reunification process was signalled metaphorically by Helmut Kohl's infamous vision of the 'blühende Landschaften' (blossoming landscapes) that would emerge through the economic transformation of the ex-GDR states.

The election of Gerhard Schröder to the office of chancellor in 1998 paved the way not only for the formation of a centre-left coalition and a concomitant shift away from the conservative politics that had dominated during the sixteen-year reign of Helmut Kohl, but also for a new phase in the transformation of the sociopolitical landscape of reunified Germany. Influenced by Bill Clinton's new democrats and Tony Blair's new labour, Schröder's *Neue Mitte* articulated a third-way political agenda that sought to reconcile neoliberal capitalism with German social democratic tradition. In 1999, Schröder and Blair together released a policy paper, 'Der Weg nach vorne für Europas Sozialdemokraten' (English title: 'Europe: The Third Way'), which outlined a modernization plan for European social democracies in the age of globalization. The so-called 'Schröder-Blair-Papier', which emphasized reform of the social welfare system and flexibilization of the labour market (both hallmarks of neoliberalization) was a key step in the formulation of Schröder's signature policy, Agenda 2010, which was introduced in 2003. Designed to revitalize the German economy, Agenda 2010 introduced a series of stimulus measures, not least a wide-ranging dismantling of social-welfare provisions, intended to enhance competitiveness and combat the pressures of globalization.

58 McFalls, 'Eastern Germany Transformed', 3.

59 Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 90.

Under the auspices of Agenda 2010, Schröder ordered a series of reforms aimed at reducing unemployment and making the labour market more efficient and competitive. The so-called Hartz laws took effect in the period between 2003-2005; the most well-known of these laws, Hartz IV, which combined social welfare and long-term unemployment policies to reduce overall benefits, became the byword for neoliberal reform in the Berlin Republic.⁶⁰ As critics have noted, the outcome of this reform is a marked individualization and privatization of social risk, which subjects basic human rights to market forces, including the rights to education, health, work, and an adequate standard of living.⁶¹ In this way, the implementation of Agenda 2010 and the Hartz laws aligned the policy reforms in Germany with those of other capitalist democracies, bringing about an intensification of neoliberal governmentality in the Berlin Republic.

As this short history demonstrates, neoliberalism's local trajectory in the German context intersects with and responds to the rise of the neoliberal repertoire transnationally, while also developing in ways specific to the exceptional situation of National Socialist rule, reconstruction, partition, and reunification in the 20th century. This situation, in turn, shaped the unique course of German cinema, which played a significant role in the cultural legitimation of both the Federal Republic and the GDR prior to the 1980s, when the changing economy and disputes over the discursive status of cinema led to a transformation in the German film industry and in the aesthetic and political stakes of German film on both sides of the Wall. For it is not only via industrial transformations but precisely in its formal and aesthetic characteristics, its archiving of change, and its imaging of transformations in subjectivity and ordinary life that German cinema exemplifies and represents the neoliberal turn.

Theoretical frameworks and contributions

Throughout this book, my aim is to think through the social and cultural formations of neoliberalism as they have become manifest in cinema, a crucial site for considering these formations precisely because of its dual

60 Schröder tasked the *Kommission für moderne Dienstleistungen am Arbeitsmarkt* (Commission for Modern Services in the Labour Market) with the development of these reforms. Under the guidance of its head, the Volkswagen personnel director Peter Hartz, the commission recommended thirteen 'innovation modules', which were ultimately implemented in the laws Hartz I-IV.

61 Urban, *ABC zum Neoliberalismus*, 15.



nature as an industrial and aesthetic form. While I attend to the significant economic changes taking place from 1980-2010 as a key component of the paradigm shift I trace in German film, the account I offer does not take a deterministic view of neoliberalism, in which culture is determined by economy or conceived of as the superstructural reflection of changes to the economic base. Nor do I consider neoliberalism to be a unitary, teleological project. Rather, I understand neoliberalism as an assemblage that can help us to name, describe, and contest dominant repertoires of the present, repertoires that often impede our ability to survive let alone to flourish.

Conceptualizing neoliberalism as an assemblage (in the sense developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari for understanding the dynamic relations comprising social complexity) emphasizes its fluidity and openness, or what Harvey refers to as the way its different ‘activity spheres’ co-evolve distinctively.⁶² As Stuart Hall has described it, neoliberalism is a process with many variants; ‘It borrows, evolves, and diversifies’, translating liberal principles into different discursive formations with relevance to different historical moments: ‘It can do its dis-articulating and re-articulating work because these ideas have long been inscribed in social practices and institutions and sedimented into the “habitus” of everyday life, common sense, and popular consciousness.’⁶³ Hall emphasizes the fact that the term neoliberalism is itself unsatisfactory because it is conceptually vague, lumping together a diverse range of phenomena under one messy signifier, and because it is often used in a reductive and totalizing fashion, without due attention to historical specificity. However, as he goes on to argue, ‘naming neo-liberalism is *politically* necessary’, in order to enable resistance and critique.⁶⁴

My analysis identifies the messiness of neoliberalism as heuristically advantageous for understanding the complexity of contemporary cultural formations, including German films, whose political investments are hard to pin down, and which often resist categorization within conventional binaries (high/low, cinema/media, art/commerce, intellectual/popular, international/national, resistance/complicity, oppositional/hegemonic) that continue to inform our apprehension of contemporary culture. As a heuristic, neoliberalism helps to describe the suturing of contradictory tendencies that characterizes ideology in the present.

62 See Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*. Harvey also suggests viewing late-stage capitalism as an assemblage in *The Enigma of Capital*, 128.

63 Hall, ‘The Neo-Liberal Revolution’, 711.

64 Hall, ‘The Neo-Liberal Revolution’, 706.



However, in contradistinction to the new ideology critique, which calls for the revival of a critical trajectory in media and cultural studies that ‘exposes’ the way dominant culture constructs consent for projects of inequality and austerity,⁶⁵ I take a cue from recent queer and feminist thought that seeks to conceptualize theory in ways that supplement paradigms of exposure, paranoia, and the ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’.⁶⁶ Rather than simply ‘uncovering’ the ideological projects at stake in the films I analyse, I attend to the way they function as repositories for what is disappearing and to the places where they, in Elizabeth Freeman’s words, ‘collect and remobilize archaic or futuristic debris as signs that things have been and could be otherwise’.⁶⁷ For this reason, I have not chosen a strictly chronological approach to organize this book. Rather, each chapter examines a constellation of interwoven thematic and formal-aesthetic phenomena by considering a range of films from different historical and cultural moments ‘after the neoliberal turn’. As in *Yella*, nonsequential forms of time (for example haunting, reverie, afterlives) are endemic to the narrative construction and focus of recent German films as well as to understanding the relationships among West German, East German, and post-unification films. A nonchronological approach to non-normative forms of time is thus crucial to my reconsideration not only of German film but also of German film history since 1980.

Berlant’s *Cruel Optimism* has provided a particularly significant framework for my analysis. The formulation of cruel optimism helps to explain the psychosocial impact of the historical developments explored in this book, illuminating how neoliberalism contributes to the recasting of subjectivities, fantasies, and identities in the contemporary era. Cruel optimism also describes a relation at the heart of neoliberal cultural practices, which foster self-care and self-improvement, lionize wealth and celebrity, and promote the ‘necessary fiction’ that ordinary people may become rich and famous through extraordinary or unconventional paths.⁶⁸ At the same time, Berlant suggests how the rise of neoliberalism is not only recorded by cinema and other media forms that ‘archive what is being lost’, but is also accompanied by the emergence of new aesthetic forms that attend to the pervasive precariousness and crisis that characterize the present.⁶⁹ The multiple and often contradictory valences of

65 See Downey, Titley, and Toynbee, ‘Ideology Critique: The Challenge for Media Studies.’

66 See for example Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*.

67 Freeman, *Time Binds*, xvi.

68 See Hall, ‘The Neo-Liberal Revolution’, 723.

69 Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 7. For example, Berlant considers new genres such as the ‘situation tragedy’ and the ‘cinema of precarity’.



contemporary culture—recording, manufacturing consent for, and contesting neoliberalism—form the nexus of my analysis of recent German cinema.

In this regard, I contend that recent German films are emphatically political, albeit in ways that are markedly different from the politics of previous eras of film production. Neoliberalism characterizes itself via an illusion of political neutrality, and it co-opts resistance and difference, cannibalizes oppositional aesthetics, and depoliticizes movements for social change. Consequently, understanding cinema in the age of neoliberalism necessitates rethinking the relationship between aesthetics and politics today. While renewed attention to German cinema, especially in the context of the Berlin School, has often led to a doubling down on received critical categories like art cinema, I argue that such categories are no longer fully adequate for understanding this cinema's aesthetic or political affinities. To describe how German film productions navigate the neoliberal mediascape, traversing conventional categories and exhibiting seemingly opposed qualities simultaneously, I develop the trope of 'disorganization'.

Focusing on formal-aesthetic, generic, and thematic continuities across diverse modes of filmmaking, I examine the way German films since 1980 chart the subtle shifts effected by neoliberal restructuring, including transformations in the endeavour of filmmaking itself as well as in the production and marketing of films. Harvey has emphasized 'how much the world changed, depending on where one was, [...] between 1980 and 2010', due to neoliberalism's remapping of urban geographies and space relations as well as its 'wide-ranging state-sponsored changes to daily life'.⁷⁰ Arguing that these changes were particularly evident in the context of late 20th- and early 21st-century German history, I focus especially on how German films archive the reshaping of ordinary life, including the transformation of cities, especially Berlin; modifications in gender politics, family life, and provisions for caregiving; changes in labour and employment; as well as shifting conceptions of race, ethnicity, and nation, driven by globalization, transnationalism, and increased migration.

In addition to charting the neoliberal turn in German cinema, this book contributes to rethinking a number of commonplaces in German film studies, including a tendency toward conventional historical periodization that follows national political developments, a focus on directors at the expense of attention to the film industry, a narrowly defined conception of national cinema, and a recentring of the field away from theoretical approaches. Most histories of recent German film have foregrounded the

70 Harvey, *The Enigma of Capital*, 132; 197.



caesura of 1989 and the fall of the Berlin Wall, viewing the 1980s as a dead decade for both East and West German filmmaking and emphasizing the trope of reunification in postwall cinema.⁷¹ By contrast, I shift the focus to 1980—which Harvey has termed a ‘revolutionary turning-point in the world’s social and economic history’—as the key year of transition. Thus my analysis suggests, first of all, that the transformation of the world economy is in many ways more significant than German reunification for understanding recent German film history.⁷² Indeed, I demonstrate that the commercial renewal of German cinema that is usually attributed to the post-unification period was already firmly in place in the Federal Republic during the 1980s.

Second, by highlighting commercial, financial, and intermedial dimensions of German cinema, I move away from the influential paradigm of the *Autorenfilm* (auteur film), which continues to define scholarly approaches to New German Cinema, DEFA film, and post-unification German movies, especially after the emergence of the Berlin School. Third, by reading East German and West German films from the 1980s and 1990s side by side, and by considering the transnational production context of ‘German’ films, I also highlight the breakdown of conventional designations of national cinema in global capitalism. In so doing, I demonstrate how recent German cinema ‘is the localized expression of a globalized imagination’, but also how it increasingly aims to market national culture worldwide by inhabiting globally familiar aesthetic forms (especially genres) with markers of Germanness.⁷³ My examination of the interrelationship of contemporary German cinema with globalizing social and media structures and economic neoliberalization ultimately aims to expand our understanding of how film production and spectatorship operate within today’s changed world.

Finally, a feminist approach to the cinema of neoliberalism is crucial for developing a stronger account of the way the political agendas attached to German cinema dovetail with economic transformations. Approaching recent German films from a feminist perspective helps me to attend to the ways in which they reinforce and contest neoliberalism’s co-optation and depoliticization of feminism, antiracism and multiculturalism, LGBTQ movements, and class-based struggle. By emphasizing a feminist approach, I underscore not only the necessity of analysing neoliberalism as a gendered

71 See Rentschler, ‘From New German Cinema to the Post-Wall Cinema of Consensus’; Hake, *German National Cinema*; Clarke, *German Cinema since Unification*; O’Brien, *Post-Wall German Cinema and National History*; Hodgin, *Screening the East*; and Fuchs, Cosgrove, and Grote, eds., *German Memory Contests*.

72 Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 1.

73 Kapur and Wagner, *Neoliberalism and Global Cinema*, 6.



cultural formation, but also the renewed significance of feminist theory for cinema and media studies in the 21st century.

The Chapters

This book draws on diverse theoretical frameworks in order to develop a methodology that seeks to do justice to the complexity of neoliberalism and to apprehend the myriad ways in which it intersects with German cinema, while also attending to a broad range of thematic concerns germane to neoliberal culture. In her influential critique of the cultural politics of neoliberalism, *The Twilight of Equality?*, Lisa Duggan proposes that

Developing analyses of neoliberalism must ask how the many local alliances, cultural projects, nationalist agendas, and economic policies work together, unevenly and often unpredictably, rife with conflict and contradiction, to redistribute the world's resources upward—money, security, healthcare, and mobility; knowledge and access to communication technologies; leisure, recreation, and pleasure; freedom—to procreate or not, to be sexually expressive or not, to work or not; political power; participatory access to democratic public life, and more...in short, resources of all kinds.⁷⁴

Taking a cue from Duggan's analytical framework, I examine the conjunctions of local, national, and transnational, cultural, economic, and aesthetic projects at stake in the German cinema of neoliberalism.

Each of my six chapters deliberately pairs films across geopolitical and/or temporal divides in order to establish sometimes unexpected forms of relationality and to bring into focus how the context of neoliberalism opens up new perspectives on German film history, production, and aesthetics. Rather than offering an exhaustive account of the German film landscape from 1980-2010, I have chosen to zoom in on selected emblematic films that best exemplify particular traits of cinematic neoliberalism. Close reading and detailed formal analysis are integral to my approach to these films, which I also situate within the overlapping (film historical, socioeconomic, formal-aesthetic) frames of their production and reception. Careful textual analysis is essential because it allows me to unpack how films respond to, enact, and/or make visible neoliberal imperatives in variable and often

74 Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality?*, 70-71.



contradictory ways. Just as important, close reading allows me to demonstrate how each film is contingent upon, but not wholly determined by, the neoliberal repertoire.

Chapter 1, 'German Cinema and the Neoliberal Turn: The End of the National-Cultural Film Project', brings together two exemplary films about the transitional status of cinema around 1980, Wim Wenders's *Der Stand der Dinge* (*The State of Things*, FRG, 1982), and Iris Gusner's *Alle meine Mädchen* (*All My Girls*, GDR, 1980). Situating these films in relation to Gilles Deleuze's influential *Cinema* books, which were written in the early 1980s in response to the crisis of cinema that both films also narrate, I analyse *Der Stand der Dinge* and *Alle meine Mädchen* as exemplifications of Deleuze's crystal-image, a figure that helps explicate the way these films make visible the cinematic confrontation between time and money. I argue that both films discursively anticipate signal events of the neoliberal turn in the Federal Republic and the GDR, demonstrating the impending triumph of market principles over the national-cultural film project represented by the New German Cinema in the West and DEFA in the East. At the same time, my feminist-queer reading of the way both films disrupt normative timelines facilitates attention to the alternative imaginaries opened up by both *Der Stand der Dinge* and *Alle meine Mädchen*.

Itself forming a kind of crystal-image with Chapter 1, Chapter 2 extends my consideration of the relevance of Deleuze's account of cinema to neoliberal films. Whereas Chapter 1 addresses films about films that narrativize the end of postwar art cinema and the project of socialist realism, respectively, Chapter 2, 'Producing German Cinema for the World: Global Blockbusters from Location Germany', focuses on German films about German film history, which instantiate the neoliberal co-optation of Germany's film tradition. This chapter focuses on three films created for international audiences that neutralize the critical, political and aesthetic forces figured by Deleuze's notion of the crystal-image, forces whose critical power also characterized a certain legacy of German cinema beginning in the Weimar era: Wolfgang Petersen's *Das Boot* (FRG, 1981); Tom Tykwer's *Lola rennt* (*Run Lola Run*, 1998); and Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's *Das Leben der Anderen* (*The Lives of Others*, 2006). Building on influential critical approaches to recent German film, including Eric Rentschler's notion of 'cinema of consensus'; Randall Halle's attention to transnational ensembles; and Lutz Koepnick's theorization of the German heritage film, I examine the particular strategies employed by German blockbusters to address global audiences while affirming the victory of global capitalist imperatives over local film traditions, including especially Brechtian defamiliarization. My



feminist analysis of these three films emphasizes how their affirmative vision is based on an ambiguous and often misogynist gender politics. Ultimately, my examination of global blockbusters from location Germany demonstrates how the predominance of commercial imperatives underpins the emergence of particular formal, aesthetic, and generic traits in the German cinema of neoliberalism, which aims to subsume and diffuse the heterogeneity and variety of Germany's legacy of counter-hegemonic filmmaking.

Chapters 1 and 2 together consider the emergence of new constellations of German cinema after the neoliberal turn in connection with attention to Deleuze's *Cinema*. Similarly, Chapters 3 and 4 are united by a focus on films that chart the transformation of ordinary life across the period of neoliberal intensification in East and West Germany respectively. Both chapters investigate pairs of films whose deliberate intertextual relation helps to index the neoliberal transition while also signalling a shift away from the *Alltagsfilm* (film about everyday life) in order to portray the endemic precarity of the 'crisis ordinary'. These chapters thus continue to describe the transition away from the traditions of socialist realism and postwar art cinema and toward new aesthetic and generic forms that characterize the German cinema of neoliberalism. Chapters 3 and 4 attend to the affective dimensions of the neoliberal turn, drawing on a common feminist/queer theoretical framework, especially the work of Lauren Berlant and Sara Ahmed, to analyse how these four films make neoliberalism visible in narratives about affect aliens and feminist killjoys which refuse a future-oriented model of political consciousness. As I argue, all four films employ women characters as seismographs of political and cultural re-orientation, breaking with conventional forms of representation to signal disaffection with prevailing circumstances. This disaffection becomes retrospectively legible in the earlier films through the pointed critique of neoliberalism developed by their later intertexts.

Chapter 3, 'From Everyday Life to the Crisis Ordinary: Films of Ordinary Life and the Resonance of DEFA', examines Konrad Wolf's *Solo Sunny* (GDR, 1980) and Andreas Dresen's *Sommer vorm Balkon* (*Summer in Berlin*, 2005) in order to bring into focus the enduring influence of DEFA on contemporary German cinema. Both films were written by renowned screenwriter Wolfgang Kohlhaase, and both films trace their inspiration to the same historical figures and Berlin neighbourhoods, a connection that facilitates attention to the continuities and ruptures in the two films' depiction of the historical present. Chapter 4, 'Future Feminism: Political Filmmaking and the Resonance of the West German Feminist Film Movement', analyses

Ulrike Ottinger's *Bildnis einer Trinkerin* (*Ticket of No Return*, FRG, 1979) and Tatjana Turanskyj's *Eine flexible Frau* (*The Drifter*, 2010), examining the imprint of West German feminist filmmaking on contemporary cinema, despite the significant undermining and obscuring of its legacy via processes of privatization and media conglomeration. Focusing on women protagonists in Berlin who exhibit gender, sexual, and class mobility and refuse to accede to regimes of normativity, both films investigate how responsabilization, flexibilization, and professionalization emerge as 'solutions' to problems of agency and sovereignty in neoliberal capitalism.

While Chapters 3 and 4 focus on the specific trajectories of German art cinema, Chapter 5, 'The Failing Family: Changing Constellations of Gender, Intimacy, and Genre', examines a boundary-crossing archive of popular and countercinematic West, East, and post-unification German films: Doris Dörrie's *Männer* (*Men*, FRG, 1985); Sönke Wortmann's *Der bewegte Mann* (*Maybe...Maybe Not*, 1994); Heiner Carow's *Coming Out* (GDR, 1989); and Valeska Grisebach's *Sehnsucht* (*Longing*, 2006). These films all constitute cinematic landmarks in both film historical and political terms. A sleeper hit, the neoliberal fairy tale *Männer* laid the groundwork for the subsequent success of the German relationship comedy, paving the way for *Der bewegte Mann*, the top domestic box office draw of the 1990s. I argue that both of these popular films intervene into the comedy genre in ways that enable their imaging of precarious genders and sexualities. I read them in connection with two films that differ from the relationship comedy in terms of form, but that also archive neoliberal transformations of gender, sexuality, and intimacy through interrogations of genre: *Coming Out*, the first East German feature film about homosexuality, and *Sehnsucht*, a crucial contribution to the emergent Berlin School of filmmaking. Chapter 5 shifts the terms of my analysis from a focus on the depiction of women to a consideration of men and masculinity in the postfeminist era. I examine specifically how genre forms an important ground on which these films subject the heteropatriarchal family to scrutiny, often exploring homosocial bonds and queer intimacies in the process. In addition to making visible changing modes of affect and intimacy, this chapter sheds new light on the much vaunted 'return to genre' in the German cinema of neoliberalism.

Chapter 6, 'Refiguring National Cinema in Films about Labour, Money, and Debt', brings into focus the theme of precarity, a red thread throughout this book, by analysing four films about labour, money, and debt that train a lens on precarious, racialized bodies made disposable in and by global neoliberalism: Thomas Arslan's *Dealer* (1998); Angelina Maccarone's



Fremde Haut (*Unveiled*, 2005); Fatih Akin's *Auf der anderen Seite* (*The Edge of Heaven*, 2007); and Christian Petzold's *Jerichow* (2008). Labour, money, and debt have long posed difficult subjects for cinematic representation, a problem exacerbated by the era of immaterial labour and financialization. In considering how these films find a form for the depiction of labour, money, and debt, I develop the figure of indebtedness as a central trope that binds together their narrative and aesthetic language. All four films contribute to the reconfiguration of German national cinema by centring migrant characters, reflecting on their perspectives and experiences, and making visible their subaltern status, while also configuring the terms of their representation via an explicit engagement with German film history. On the diegetic level, they form deliberate intertextual relationships with specific films (especially the oeuvre of Rainer Werner Fassbinder), genres (including the Berlin film and the *Heimatfilm*), and traditions (particularly the New German Cinema), often disorganizing the tropes and forms associated with these. However, unlike the global blockbusters discussed in Chapter 2, which co-opt and neutralize the legacy of German cinema while affirming neoliberal agendas, the films discussed here seek to resignify this legacy for resistant aesthetic and political projects. This chapter therefore also probes the extradiegetic frames that have shaped the critical reception of these films, including global art cinema (all four films), transnational queer cinema (*Fremde Haut* and *Auf der anderen Seite*), the Berlin School (*Dealer* and *Jerichow*), and the cinema of migration (all four films). In dialogue with these critical frames, this chapter culminates in a broader consideration of the category of (German) national cinema after neoliberalism, paving the way for a brief conclusion that summarizes the key contributions of the book for understanding the changed context of German cinema after the neoliberal turn.

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