

Agency in Contemporary German Cinema:
Tykwer, Akın and Petzold



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This thesis demonstrates that an interest in human agency is a significant trend in contemporary German cinema. It includes analyses of Tom Tykwer's *Heaven* (2002) and *The International* (2009), Fatih Akin's *Gegen die Wand* (2004) and *Auf der anderen Seite* (2007) and Christian Petzold's *Barbara* (2012) and *Phoenix* (2014), which illustrate that these three directors, who belong to different traditions in German cinema, have a focus on agency in common. A theoretical framework primarily made up of scholarship by Michel Foucault, Michel de Certeau, John Fiske and Laura Mulvey illuminates the portrayals of human control in the films. Tykwer, Akin and Petzold share a sense, also articulated in post-structuralist theory and theory which followed it, of the considerable limitations on human agency, which the three filmmakers work into their films for their characters to grapple with. I show that these filmmakers are investigating how individuals can be agents within this context.

The agency which is available to the characters in the films is personal rather than political, but the narratives are situated in political milieus, which complicates the idea of contemporary cinema simply turning towards the personal. Five of the films portray a mixture of scope for action and constraint, whereas *The International* paints a more pessimistic picture of agency, but illustrates the problems with such a negative portrayal, and problems that filmmakers must deal with when representing human control. This thesis addresses the question of how agency is portrayed in the filmic medium, illustrating how space and place, the gaze, the human body and characters' appearances more widely are used to convey the phenomenon visually.

Long Abstract

Fatih Akin's statement 'ich fühle mich letztlich Tom Tykwer, Christian Petzold, Oskar Roehler nahe — das sind Brüder im Geiste' raises the question of what it is that unites these seemingly disparate contemporary German directors, and also what wider trends in recent German cinema they are part of. There has been some recent discussion of what has characterised the current period of German film, since its renaissance in 1998 with Tykwer's *Lola rennt*, and to gain my own insight into what the focus in films in this period has been, and what these 'Brüder im Geiste' have in common, I have studied the work of Tykwer, Akin and Petzold. The films which I have analysed in depth in this thesis are Tykwer's *Heaven* (2002) and *The International* (2009), Akin's *Gegen die Wand* (2004) and *Auf der anderen Seite* (2007) and Petzold's *Barbara* (2012) and *Phoenix* (2014). In order to consider a wide range of traditions in German cinema, and to have the space to go into depth when looking at these three filmmakers' films, I have left an analysis of Roehler's work to another scholar. I also, however, use the films at the centre of my corpus to make links to a variety of other works, by Tykwer, Akin and Petzold, by other contemporary German directors, and also by directors working earlier, and/or outside Germany.

The discussion around what has characterised twenty-first century German film has largely focused on politics — to what extent contemporary German cinema is or is not political — but in this thesis I argue that it is an interest in human agency which Tykwer, Akin and Petzold have in common, and which is a significant trend in contemporary German cinema. Some critics have argued that there has been a shift from a focus on the political to a focus on the personal, in German film and elsewhere in contemporary culture, whereas others have argued that post-2000 German cinema

has been repoliticised. My focus on agency enables a more nuanced take on these issues.

With regard to Tykwer, Akin and Petzold, these three directors are not normally discussed together, as they represent three different traditions in recent German cinema. Tykwer has made the transition to English-language film, making genre cinema and adaptations of novels; Akin's cinema has often been seen through the lens of his, and some of his characters', Turkish-German identity; and Petzold is the best known director of the Berlin School, a movement of naturalistic, slow German films. An examination of the existing scholarship on the three directors does reveal shared themes, however, many of which are connected to human agency. The discussion of Tykwer, mainly focused on his breakout hit *Lola rennt*, covers his status as an urban, transnational filmmaker, and also covers the intermediality in his films. Although scholarship on Akin focuses more on identity, including gender and sexuality as well as ethnicity, than scholarship on Tykwer does, Akin is also seen as a transnational filmmaker and his portrayal of space, including urban space, is seen as central to his work. Identity and space/ place are also seen as playing an important role in Petzold's film, although much of the research on his work is devoted to his engagement with history and memory too. In this thesis I have tried to show not only that these three filmmakers share an interest in agency, but also that there are similarities between their models of human control, despite the different traditions the filmmakers belong to.

The small corpus of films I have selected enables me to carry out close readings of them in order to explore and compare both the filmmakers' models of agency and how they portray human control specifically in the filmic medium. The theoretical framework I adopted for this thesis is made up of philosophical and film

theoretical ideas about agency, and work by Michel Foucault, Michel de Certeau, John Fiske and Laura Mulvey is at the centre. In choosing this framework I was looking for approaches which would illuminate the portrayals of agency I discuss, and the films I analyse can also help us to understand this theory and can contribute to discussions about agency. I use reviews of the films in question, from German, British and American newspapers, magazines and websites, to help me to explore what difference the films' portrayals of agency make to the audience.

Tykwer, Akin and Petzold share a sense, also articulated in post-structuralist theory and theory which followed it, of the considerable limitations on human agency, which the three filmmakers work into their films for their characters to grapple with. I have found, however, that agency in the films in my corpus is generally characterised by a mixture of scope for action and constraint, and that this is a trend in contemporary German film more widely. *The International* has a slightly different role from the other films in my thesis: it illustrates that not all films have this model of agency, and also illustrates the potential problems with a very limited portrayal of human control. In the films in which there is some scope for action, however, the agency which is afforded to the characters is personal rather than political, although the films are situated in political contexts.

In this thesis I discuss the different ways that contemporary German cinema shows it is possible for individuals to be agents, and trends within the oeuvres of the three directors in my corpus in terms of their portrayal of agency. In *Heaven* and *The International* the characters are victims of corrupt, capitalist systems which limit their ability to act, but in the earlier film it is possible for characters to be agents on a personal level. In *Gegen die Wand* and *Auf der anderen Seite* characters must accept the need for them to engage with their backgrounds, and also the role of chance and

coincidence in human lives, in order to become agents. In Petzold's films we are shown how power relations can shift, by characters not accepting the roles that are handed to them, and a character's work often allows them scope for action.

There is much overlap between the techniques which the three filmmakers use to convey agency in film. The presentation of space and place is central to all of their models of human control, and this is indicative of a wider trend, but the different ways in which the directors use space reflect their different concerns. The gaze, the human body and characters' appearances more widely are highly significant in Petzold's approach to conveying agency, with the latter also important in *Heaven*.

A question related to agency which is often raised in scholarship on and reviews of the films in question is the extent to which the portrayals of agency in the films are universal, or whether the filmmakers are trying to make an argument about human control within a specific milieu. All three of the filmmakers at the centre of my thesis have been accused of universalising discourse in their films, indicating that this is an easy trap to fall into when attempting to make a comment about agency. I find, however, that the films generally manage to be both rooted in a specific situation and deal with issues which are universal enough for the directors to make a wider argument about agency. The exception here is again *The International*, which illustrates the pitfalls of attempting to include the entirety of contemporary society in a portrayal of human control. I also consider more broadly why the films in my corpus were made and are watched, which can provide a richer insight into agency. This raises the issue of whether a director is aiming to speak to or challenge the viewer's sense of agency, and whereas Tykwer seems to seek to reinforce his viewers' idea of how the world works, Akın and Petzold seek to challenge it, but crucially whilst creating models of agency which seem believable.

A topic frequently brought up in reviews, like the universality of the narratives, is ambiguity: I show that the films which include a degree of ambiguity are more likely to succeed in engaging the viewer and in presenting a portrayal of agency which is well-received. This also ties in with the agency of the spectator, as ambiguity allows more space for the viewer to construct their own reading of the filmic text. Yet a problem that this need for ambiguity poses is how filmmakers are to clearly communicate complicated relationships in film, and in the case of films which have agency at their centres the relationship between individual and supra-individual forces is often particularly important. The films in this thesis showcase different approaches to portraying supra-individual forces in film, with *The International* once again illustrating difficulties that filmmakers can face when representing agency.

The originality of my thesis lies both in the broad and the specific. My analysis of the interest in agency which is evident in the films in this thesis brings out a new trend in contemporary German cinema. I demonstrate that this agency is often characterised by scope for action and constraint and I illustrate how portrayals of human control in contemporary German film reflect recent theoretical work on the possibility of being an agent within limits. Through my focus on agency, I also bring out links between Tykwer, Akin and Petzold, filmmakers who are normally dealt with separately in scholarship. In terms of originality on a smaller scale, I am the first to provide an analysis of agency in *Phoenix* and my close readings of select scenes in the film contribute to the currently small amount of literature on it. I bring *The International* into the discussion of agency in Tykwer's oeuvre; bring out the connections in terms of the presentation of agency between this film and *Heaven*, identifying a trend in Tykwer's work; and situate this analysis within contemporary German cinema more widely, making an argument about its interest in limits on

agency in a globalised world. With regard to Akin's oeuvre, I analyse the role of chance and coincidence in his films for the first time, as well as contributing to the ongoing discussion of the significance of background in them. It is clear from my discussion of Akin's films that there is a range of limitations on agency in his work, and this discussion emphasises that Akin, and other German filmmakers who deal with characters from migration backgrounds, are not just interested in identity.

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Introduction

Fatih Akin, the most prominent Turkish-German director, whose films are often analysed in relation to transnationalism and ethnicity, rejects links to other ethnic minority directors with his statement ‘ich fühle mich letztlich Tom Tykwer, Christian Petzold, Oskar Roehler nahe — das sind Brüder im Geiste’.¹ This, however, begs the question of what the spirit is which unites these four contemporary German directors. Although they all have enough creative control over their work to be considered auteurs, these filmmakers are stylistically very different from one another and the foci of their films are also diverse. Akin’s work frequently involves multicultural Germany and travel, primarily to Turkey; Tykwer’s films range from English-language thrillers to slower, more contemplative German-language romances; Petzold casts a critical eye over post-reunification Germany before making two films about the country’s twentieth-century past; and Roehler makes mainly energetic films about German youth and sexuality. Yet these directors share a common concern: the possibility of agency in contemporary Germany, and further afield.

In order to consider a wide range of traditions in German cinema, and to have sufficient space to discuss Akin’s, Tykwer’s and Petzold’s work, I leave a discussion of agency in Roehler’s work, and how it interacts with the portrayal of agency in the other directors’ films, to another scholar. Much has already been made of a link between Akin and Roehler, namely that both filmmakers’ films evoke Fassbinder’s work,² although Akin, with his breakthrough hit *Gegen die Wand* (2004), the first

¹ Fatih Akin, interviewed by artechock, ‘Ich bin wirklich davon ausgegangen: Ok, das könnte mein letzter Film sein...’, artechock, 11 March 2004 <http://www.artechock.de/film/text/interview/a/akin_2004.htm> [accessed 10 October 2016].

² See, for example, Jaimey Fisher and Brad Prager, ‘Introduction’, in *The Collapse of the Conventional. German Film and its Politics at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by Jaimey

German film to win the top prize at the Berlinale for eighteen years, has been more significant in the recent history of German film. The inclusion of Akin rather than Roehler also makes this thesis more focused on transnational German film, which is a significant part of the landscape.

This thesis will show that an interest in human agency is a trend in contemporary German cinema, both in Akin's, Tykwer's and Petzold's films and elsewhere. I use these directors to illustrate this tendency spanning different filmmaking traditions and styles. An exploration of this focus on agency provides a sense of the shared problems that cinema is used to engage with in a German setting, over and above individual filmmaking traditions, whilst recognising that each director has something new to offer. Looking at agency in these directors' films also enables us to see the different and overlapping ways that they conceptualise and portray how the world works. The portrayal of agency that can be found in their films is generally characterised by a mixture of scope for action and constraint, and my thesis will discuss the different ways contemporary German cinema shows it is possible to be an agent, and how the filmic medium can convey this, by analysing selected films from the oeuvres of Tykwer, Akin and Petzold in the context of philosophical and film theoretical ideas about agency.

The importance of the concept of agency in film studies, and the levels on which it comes into play, is reflected in Susan Hayward's *Cinema Studies: The Key Concepts*. Agency is named as one of the ideas central to an understanding of film, Hayward describes it as operating 'both within and outside the film' and she outlines the three levels on which it works, namely 'applied to a character'; 'at the level of the narrative', which raises questions about who the author of the film's narrative is; and

Fisher and Brad Prager (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010), pp. 1-38 (p. 23); Paul Cooke, *Contemporary German Cinema* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), p. 15.

at the level of the spectator, ‘in that she or he produces a meaning and a reading of the filmic text.’³ In my analysis, I will concentrate mainly on the first level that Hayward outlines but will also address the issue of focalisation (and therefore the second level) as well as, at the level of the spectator, the significance that the filmic texts’ representation of agency could have for the audience.

Locating my arguments in relation to and drawing on philosophical and film theoretical ideas about agency will add to Hayward’s description of agency in film as ‘often applied to a character in relation to desire. If that character has agency over desire it means that she or he [...] is able to act upon that desire and fulfil it.’⁴ This description reflects the definition of human agency which I adopt, that is the capacity for individuals to make free choices and act on them, but questions of how agency should be defined, as well as the extent to which we are agents, and why, have been at the centre of work in diverse fields at least since Classical Greek philosophers deliberated what was ‘up to us’ (*eph’ hēmin*).⁵ In this thesis, I consider how ideas about agency can be of use in the analysis of the films in question and how the films can help us understand the theory.

My analysis will be centred around two films directed by each of the three filmmakers: Tykwer’s *The International* (2009) and *Heaven* (2002); Akın’s *Gegen die Wand* (2004) and *Auf der anderen Seite* (2007); and Petzold’s *Barbara* (2012) and *Phoenix* (2014). I have chosen these six films as this selection, and references to other films, will allow me to identify some trends in the filmmakers’ work and contemporary German cinema more widely, and also to carry out close readings of scenes. I will go into detail about these trends in the next section. Qualitative

³ Susan Hayward, *Cinema Studies: The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 14-15.

⁴ Hayward, pp. 14-15.

⁵ My conception of agency does not take Classical ideas into account, but for recent research on this see Michael Frede, ‘The *eph’ hēmin* in ancient philosophy’, *Philosophia*, 37 (2007), 110-23.

reception research, looking at reviews of the films in question, will help me to explore what difference their portrayals of agency make to the audience, and I have chosen to use reviews due to their detailed engagement with the films and the focus on the reviewers' experience of the material. I use a mixture of reviews from German, British and American newspapers, magazines and websites to gauge the reaction to the films in the filmmakers' home country and in the countries which have produced the majority of the scholarship I engage with. I have consulted the same outlets when analysing the criticism of each film, although in my thesis I do not refer to every review in every publication.

Before the analysis of these films, however, this introduction will explain how my thesis fits into current discussions of contemporary film, including debates around the directors in question and a wider discussion of trends in contemporary cinema. I will also state what I aim to contribute to these debates. I then set out what discussion has already taken place around agency, and how my argument contributes to this. I finish with an overview of the chapters which make up my thesis.

Current discussions around Tykwer's, Akin's and Petzold's cinema

First of all it is necessary to acknowledge that a focus on German cinema may seem to be in conflict with a current trend in the discussion of contemporary film, namely the emphasis on cinema as a transnational medium, and on the importance of viewing film in this way. Andrew Higson argues that focusing on the transnational is 'a way of challenging the national bias in much film scholarship, which often assumes

that the national is a self-contained entity when the evidence is often to the contrary'.⁶ In the same spirit, I will be analysing films made by German filmmakers which interact with the wider world, whilst recognising that Germany has its own culture, film history and film industry, which interacts with and is influenced by other cultures, and the film history and industry of other states. My conception of what can count as German film promotes an imaginative and inclusive approach, in opposition to Higson's claim that the concept of national cinema 'limit[s] imagination'.⁷

This spirit can also be found in recent work on contemporary German cinema. In the last five years there have been two books which survey the landscape: Paul Cooke's English-language *Contemporary German Cinema*, published in 2012, and Pierre Gras's *Goodbye Fassbinder! Le Cinéma Allemand depuis la Réunification*, first published in French in 2011 and then updated and translated into German in 2014, appearing as *Goodbye Fassbinder! Der deutsche Kinofilm seit 1990*. The fact that these works have come out of the UK and France is testament to the relevance of German cinema beyond the borders of Germany, and Cooke in particular highlights that he explores films which 'owe their existence to some extent to a transnational mode of production, distribution and exhibition'.⁸

Both these works are organised in a fashion which reflects the categories which contemporary German films are often sorted into. Gras's chapters aim to identify 'den wichtigsten Strömungen des deutschen Kinos und arbeiten deren jeweilige Charakteristika und Qualitäten heraus'⁹ and Tykwer, Petzold and Akın are

⁶ Andrew Higson, quoted in Austin Fisher and Iain Robert Smith, 'Transnational Cinemas: A Critical Roundtable', *Frames Cinema Journal* <<http://framescinemajournal.com/article/transnational-cinemas-a-critical-roundtable/>> [accessed 31 August 2016] (p. 14).

⁷ Andrew Higson, 'Limiting Imagination of National Cinema', in *Cinema and Nation*, ed. by Mette Hjort and Scott MacKenzie (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 63-74.

⁸ Cooke, p. 13.

⁹ Pierre Gras, *Goodbye Fassbinder! Der deutsche Kinofilm seit 1990*, ed. and trans. by Marcus Seibert (Berlin: Alexander Verlag, 2014), p. 35.

dealt with in different sections, although Gras does define Akın as a ‘Filmemacher jenseits aller Gruppenzugehörigkeit’.¹⁰ Comments on Tykwer’s, Akın’s and Petzold’s films are distributed more evenly through the chapters of Cooke’s book but it is still clear that they represent three different traditions in recent German cinema. Petzold is the best known director of the Berlin School, a movement of naturalistic, slow German films; Tykwer has made the transition to English-language film, making genre cinema and adaptations of novels; and Akın’s cinema has often been seen through the lens of his, and some of his characters’, Turkish-German identity.¹¹ This conception of contemporary German film is also reflected in Gerd Gmünden’s 2016 assessment of the growth of German film and media studies since the mid-1970s. He refers to ‘the perennial allure of individual auteurs, most prominently Michael Haneke or Tom Tykwer’,¹² mentions work on cinemas of migration and diaspora,¹³ and argues that the Berlin School is ‘clearly the single most important German film studies topic to develop during the last decade’,¹⁴ yet the potential links between these three trends are not explored.

It is clear that the originality of this thesis is not the result of a discovery of little-known directors: the three filmmakers in question are perhaps the best known in Germany. Yet they are not normally discussed together, and a detailed consideration of the scholarship on the three directors does reveal shared themes. The discussion of Tykwer, mainly focused on his breakout hit *Lola rennt*, covers his status as an urban, transnational filmmaker, reflecting the recent emphasis on transnationality mentioned

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 156.

¹¹ See, for example, Valérie Carré, ‘L’indentité germano-turque à travers le cinéma allemand contemporain: L’Exemple de Fatih Akin’, *Recherches Germaniques*, 35 (2005), 155-71; Rob Burns, ‘On the Streets and on the Road: Identity in Transit in Turkish-German Travelogues on Screen’, *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film*, 7 (2009), 11-26.

¹² Gerd Gmünden, ‘Film and Media Studies’, *German Studies Review*, 39 (2016), 541-51 (p. 546).

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 547.

above, and also covers the intermediality in his films.¹⁵ Although scholarship on Akin focuses more on identity, including gender and sexuality as well as ethnicity, than scholarship on Tykwer does, Akin is also seen as a transnational filmmaker and his portrayal of space, including urban space, is seen as central to his work.¹⁶ Identity and space/ place are also seen as playing an important role in Petzold's film, although much of the research on his work is devoted to his engagement with history and memory too.¹⁷

There has also been some recent discussion of what characterises the current period of German film, and a large proportion of this discussion revolves around the extent to which contemporary German cinema is political. At one end of the scale of views is Randall Halle, who writes 'since the advent of film there have been attempts to understand and deploy film as a medium on behalf of class interest and radical politics [...] It now appears that the possibilities for such film politics have disappeared'.¹⁸ Halle connects this disappearance to 'the decay of the centralized state and the increasing significance of unfettered economic interest', asking 'what room is

¹⁵ See, for example, Karin Hamm-Ehsani, 'Screening Modern Berlin: Lola Runs to the Beat of a New Urban Symphony', *Seminar: A Journal of Germanic Studies*, 40 (2004), 50-65; Klemens Czyzydlo, 'Transnational auteurism: Tom Tykwer's and Krzysztof Kieślowski's *Heaven* (2002) between political engagement and Romantic anticapitalism', *Transnational Cinemas*, 2 (2011), 37-55; Ingeborg Hoesterey, 'Filmadaption und Intermedialität: Patrick Süskinds Roman *Das Parfum* in Tom Tykwers Regie', *Gegenwartsliteratur: A German Studies Yearbook*, 7 (2008), 30-44.

¹⁶ See, for example, Muriel Cormican, 'Masculinity and Transnational Paradigms', *Colloquia Germanica: Internationale Zeitschrift für Germanistik*, 46 (2013), 21-46; Joanne Leal and Klaus-Dieter Rossade, 'Negotiating Gender, Sexuality and Ethnicity in Fatih Akin's and Thomas Arslan's Urban Spaces', *German as a Foreign Language*, 3 (2008), 58-87.

¹⁷ See, for example, Matthew D. Miller, 'Facts of Migration, Demands on Identity: Christian Petzold's *Yella* and Jerichow in Comparison', *German Quarterly*, 85 (2012), 55-76; Anke S. Biendarra, 'Ghostly Business: Place, Space, and Gender in Christian Petzold's *Yella*', *Seminar: A Journal of Germanic Studies*, 47 (2011), 465-78; Eric Scheufler, 'The Ghosts of Autumn Past: History, Memory and Identity in Christian Petzold's *Die innere Sicherheit*', *Seminar: A Journal of Germanic Studies*, 47.1 (2011), 103-20.

¹⁸ Randall Halle, *German Film after Germany: Towards a Transnational Aesthetic* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), p. 190.

there for radical political film in a world media under the control of names like Columbia, Bertelsmann, Turner, Murdoch, and so on?’¹⁹

This argument fits with claims which have been made about trends in contemporary film and contemporary culture more widely, and one such perceived trend is a shift from a focus on the political to a focus on the personal, as is reflected in the prevalence of personal rather than political agency in the films in this thesis, which I will go on to explore. In his article on *Heaven*, Czyzydlo makes reference to the personal agency in the film and situates this in relation to a wider trend, stating that ‘*Heaven*’s turn towards the personal is indicative of a broader change in cinematic discourse’ and ‘this change is [partly] a result of the waning of the paradigm of political modernism’.²⁰ ‘Political modernism’ here refers to a tendency in film theory and practice in the 1970s, described by D. N. Rodowick as ‘the expression of a desire to combine semiotic and ideological analysis with the development of an avant-garde aesthetic practice dedicated to the production of radical social effects’.²¹

The primary way in which I make use of political modernism in my thesis is my inclusion of Laura Mulvey’s 1975 essay ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ in my theoretical framework. Mulvey, who was the first person to popularise the concept of the male gaze with this essay, is one film theorist and filmmaker whose work has been described as political modernism and my use of this essay, as part of my theoretical framework and in particular in my analysis of Petzold’s films, will illustrate how contemporary cinema can engage with and criticise this paradigm. My analysis of the films in question more widely, and their engagement with the political, or something beyond the personal, will also complicate the idea of contemporary

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Czyzydlo, p. 47.

²¹ D. N. Rodowick, *The Crisis of Political Modernism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 1-2.

cinema simply turning towards the personal, despite the prevalence of personal rather than political agency in the films.

Counterarguments to Halle's and Czyzydlo's pessimistic claims can also be found in Hake's *German National Cinema* (2008) and Fisher and Prager's *The Collapse of the Conventional: German Film and its Politics at the Turn of the Twenty-first Century* (2010), although there have, of course, been developments in German film in the period that has elapsed since these texts were written. Hake makes reference to the 'cinema of dissent',²² arguing that 'the self-celebratory images of the New Berlin Republic that initially prompted film scholars to describe early post-unification cinema as a "cinema of consensus" in the early 2000s has given way to more critical narratives and complex images'.²³ A look at viewing figures for German films in Germany reveals that this is not the case across the board: four out of five of the single most successful films in each of the years 2012 to 2016, namely *Türkisch für Anfänger* (2012), *Fack ju Göhte* (2013), *Fack ju Göhte 2* (2015) and *Willkommen bei den Hartmanns* (2016), were comedies which do not reflect the critical narratives and complex images to which Hake refers.²⁴ I do, however, concur with Fisher and Prager that all films have a politics,²⁵ and Hake does find critical narratives and complex images in films which appear in this thesis: she argues that 'the experiments with the creative possibilities of a transnational cinema founded on cross-cultural-exchanges and creative border crossings'²⁶ have played a significant role in the shift in German cinema. She also mentions Turkish-German films in particular, which in her eyes have 'contributed to the repoliticisation of cinema around issues of identity

²² Sabine Hake, *German National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 216.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Filmförderungsanstalt, 'Jahreshitliste (National) 2012', 'Jahreshitliste (National) 2013', 'Jahreshitliste (National) 2014', 'Jahreshitliste (National) 2015' and 'Jahreshitliste (National) 2016' <<http://www.ffa.de/filmhitlisten.html>> [accessed 13 July 2017].

²⁵ Fisher and Prager, p. 12.

²⁶ Hake, p. 216.

and their relationship to practices of exclusion and discrimination'.²⁷ Looking at agency reveals a more differentiated picture in the case of Fatih Akin's films, however: despite the political context which Hake explores, Akin focuses on personal narratives and personal agency.

Fisher and Prager agree that there has been a shift in German cinema in the new millennium, arguing that 'German cinema at the turn of the century can be best approached as a politically charged polyvocal arena'.²⁸ They go as far as to draw parallels between New German Cinema and contemporary German filmmaking, claiming that in both periods 'many directors [...] harbored formal and/or stylistic ambitions',²⁹ films displayed a 'critical and demystifying engagement with the past, especially with Nazism and World War II',³⁰ and 'this engagement with the past had distinctly Leftist political valences'.³¹ Again, there are exceptions to these tendencies, and as part of my investigation into the extent to which agency in contemporary German cinema is political, I look at a range of films. My analysis reveals that although the arena, as Fisher and Prager put it, is politically charged, the characters in the films in my corpus are not able to effect change on a political level. It is a focus on agency which allows this distinction to become clear, and I argue it is an interest in agency rather than politics which is a trend in contemporary German film.

If we return to the themes which are commonly discussed in relation to Tykwer's, Akin's and Petzold's films, human agency is also clearly linked to many of these subjects. Vital to a conception of gender, ethnicity and sexuality is how these parts of one's identity affect what one can or cannot do; the ability, or need, Tykwer and Akin's characters have to travel is an important part of their agency, particularly

²⁷ Ibid., p. 219.

²⁸ Fisher and Prager, p. 32.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 5.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 6.

³¹ Ibid.

in the case of the latter director; and the three filmmakers' use and presentation of space is one of the most common ways in which they convey human control in a visual medium, as my thesis will show. In terms of more explicit engagement with filmic agency in existing research, the extent to which characters have control is discussed in the scholarship on Tykwer, and most frequently in scholarship on *Lola rennt* in particular. This film is described by Tykwer as 'über die Möglichkeiten der Welt, des Lebens und des Kinos'³² and although scholars have taken a more nuanced view of *Lola rennt*, desire and free will, as well as the lack thereof, are central to much of the work on the film.³³ *Heaven* is also included in scholarship on dislocation, entrapment and escape in Tykwer's oeuvre.³⁴ Agency in *The International* has been discussed in the context of the genre to which it belongs, i.e. that of the paranoia or conspiracy thriller,³⁵ but the film has not yet been analysed in the context of Tykwer's other films, as one which addresses the same issue as his earlier work, and its portrayal of agency has not been analysed in the context of contemporary German cinema more widely. I have chosen to discuss *The International* and *Heaven* so that my thesis can shift the focus on Tykwer's work and argue that the optimism evident in *Lola rennt* gave way to another trend, representative of a wider tendency in post-millennial cinema: in *Heaven* and *The International* the characters operate within a corrupt, capitalist system which limits their agency.

³² Tom Tykwer, *Lola rennt* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 2008), p. 117.

³³ See, for example, Ingeborg Majer O'Sickey, 'Whatever Lola Wants, Lola Gets (Or Does She?): Time and Desire in Tom Tykwer's *Run Lola Run*', *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, 19.2 (2002), 123-31; Guido Rings, 'Zwischen "Schicksal", freiem Willen und instinktivem Verhalten: Hybriditätsaspekte und Ansatzpunkte zu deren Vermittlung in Tom Tykwers *Lola Rennt*', *German as a Foreign Language*, 1 (2002), 1-28.

³⁴ See Lutz Koepnick, "'Free Fallin'": Tom Tykwer and the Aesthetics of Deceleration and Dislocation', *Germanic Review*, 82 (2007), 7-24; Heidi Schlipphacke, 'Melodrama's Other: Entrapment and Escape in the Films of Tom Tykwer', *Camera Obscura: A Journal of Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies*, 21.2 (2006), 108-43.

³⁵ See Temenuga Trifonova, 'Agency in the Cinematic Conspiracy Thriller', *SubStance*, 41 (2012), 109-26 (pp. 110-11).

A pattern of filmmakers discussing how much agency their characters have is also clear in Akin's comment, on *Gegen die Wand*, that “‘Life is What You Make It’, der Song von Talk Talk, ist die Moral von der Geschicht’ und läuft deshalb über dem Abspann am Ende’.³⁶ This reflects one extreme in the range of views about the extent of Akin's characters' agency, and how agency and constraint are portrayed in his films: at the other extreme, the *Spiegel* review of *Gegen die Wand* characterises the film as an ‘Ohnmachtsdrama’.³⁷ My assessment falls between these two poles: looking at *Gegen die Wand* and *Auf der anderen Seite* (the English-language titles of which are *Head-On* and *The Edge of Heaven*, respectively), and making reference to other films by Akin, I argue that the portrayal of agency in these two films is complex, and I bring out two trends. Akin uses, firstly, chance and coincidence and, secondly, the need to engage with one's background to interrogate the limits of human agency, and demonstrates that it is only by recognising these limits that one can become an agent. Akin thus illustrates one way in which it is possible to act in the world.

The trend of scholarship on Akin's cinema often focusing on transnationalism and ethnicity can also be seen in the analysis of agency in his films. In terms of specific limitations on the characters' agency in Akin's cinema, it is their ethnic background which has been most discussed. My thesis engages with this debate, but as well as making a contribution to the debate about the extent to which ‘homecoming’ is important in Akin's cinema, and informs the choices characters have, I look at a more complex picture of what ‘background’ means in different cases.

Although Akin's work is often analysed in terms of his engagement with identity, he conceptualises agency as limited by different factors, some related to

³⁶ Fatih Akin, *Im Clinch: Die Geschichte Meiner Filme* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 2011), p. 133.

³⁷ Oliver Hüttmann, ‘Fatih Akins “Gegen die Wand”. Atemloses Ohnmachtsdrama’, *Der Spiegel*, 12 March 2004 <<http://www.spiegel.de/kultur/kino/fatih-akins-gegen-die-wand-atemloses-ohnmachtsdrama-a-290229.html>> [accessed 10 October 2016].

identity and some not, and it is by looking at the broader idea of agency that this becomes clear. It is interesting to look at the need to engage with one's background and chance and coincidence in conjunction with each other as the chance occurrences in his films are at the other end of a scale: background is specific to individual people whereas chance is a universal limitation on human control. Chance and coincidence play a very significant role in both *Gegen die Wand* and *Auf der anderen Seite*, but there has been no full analysis of how Akın employs these phenomena in his films. They also serve as clear examples of Turkish-German film depicting a mixture of limitations on agency.

Agency has been at the centre of Petzold's work throughout his career. Until *Barbara*, his cinema was concerned with how people in contemporary Germany can be stuck, hampered by their lack of agency. This is exemplified most clearly in his 'ghost trilogy,' in which ghost-like characters are disconnected from a post-Wende society that has no space for them, and this ghostliness has been widely discussed.³⁸ With *Barbara*, however, we see a change of direction, as Petzold sets his film in 1980 in the GDR and places a doctor, the Barbara of the title, at the centre. I argue that both *Barbara* and *Phoenix* are Petzold's attempts to find a way to be an agent: he returns to Germany's twentieth-century past, the GDR in *Barbara* and Berlin in 1945 in *Phoenix*, to find the potential for humans to act in periods of oppression, and also in contemporary Germany.

Few academic articles on *Phoenix* have yet appeared, and although agency in Petzold's other films has already been discussed, there has been no study of agency in *Phoenix*. My analysis therefore serves as a contribution to scholarship about this film, but it also explores new developments in Petzold's work, as it is clear that there is

³⁸ See, for example, Biendarra and Scheufler.

continuation in terms of the presentation of agency from *Barbara* to *Phoenix*, and that historical dramas are a new trend in Petzold's oeuvre. This trend also continues in his next film *Transit*, to be released in 2018, which deals with refugees during the second world war, although these historical dramas may form another self-contained trilogy, as Petzold has vowed never to make another historical film.³⁹

Barbara has been the subject of a range of journal articles and book chapters, some of which engage with the portrayal of agency in the film, as will be evident below. In my analysis of *Barbara* and *Phoenix*, however, as well as in my analysis of the other four films in question and in my references to others, I will show that something which makes a film engage the viewer more successfully, and makes its portrayal of agency be better received, is a degree of ambiguity. This is identified by Daniela Berghahn as an important part of *Gegen die Wand* but a full analysis of the ambiguity found in *Barbara*, as well as *Phoenix*, is missing from the scholarship, and this is crucial to an understanding of agency at the level of the spectator. Scholars discuss the fact that *Barbara*'s portrayal of the GDR is ideologically ambiguous, and that the sparse dialogue in the film leaves room for the viewer's interpretation, yet it is also left to the viewer to judge characters' motivations, to interpret parts of the narrative which are left unexplained and to interpret the numerous cultural products which can be found in the film, as I will show. Viewers must also use the conclusions they draw to judge how much agency the film's characters, and humans more widely, have, so ambiguity is central to an understanding of the films' presentation of agency.

Historical approaches to the question of agency

³⁹ Christian Petzold, DFFB Session Nr. 4 — Christian Petzold und Simone Bär, Deutsche Film- und Fernsehakademie Berlin, 7 March 2017.

Although questions of how agency should be defined, the extent to which we are agents, and why, have been posed for millennia, for my theoretical framework I draw primarily on work in Marx-influenced cultural studies, and a brief overview of some of the historical approaches to the question of agency will help to explain what some other theorists, especially Foucault, Certeau and Mulvey, also contribute to my framework. All of these disciplines and thinkers have both drawn on and positioned themselves in opposition to others, as this overview will also show.

An understanding of Marxism, although it is not particularly illuminating with regard to the films in question, is highly useful for understanding the development of the contemporary idea of agency. Marxism presents a multileveled and qualified conception of agency with a focus on social and economic issues beyond the individual. ‘Die Menschen machen ihre eigene Geschichte,’ Marx argued, ‘aber sie machen sie nicht aus freien Stücken, nicht unter selbstgewählten, sondern unter unmittelbar vorgefundenen, gegebenen und überlieferten Umständen’.⁴⁰ The extent to which members of the proletariat are agents within these circumstances is also not simple: for Marx, capitalist societies deny agency to the proletariat in particular and it can only begin to act in the world through class consciousness, which leads to revolution and the transformation of economic and social structures. Yet at the same time, the development of forces of production under capitalism brings people together in cities and factories, which puts the proletariat in a powerful position, and creates the technological preconditions for producing enough for everyone in society, which allows the proletariat to become an agent. Marx’s focus on a *group* of people in society is also significant: for Marx, and Hegel before him, humans are social beings who act in groups and human agency is apparent when one considers the collective. It

⁴⁰ Karl Marx, *Der Achtzehnte Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte* (Hamburg: Meißner, 1869), p. 1.

is not seen as a force behind individual behaviour. The weakness of this understanding of agency is that, although it incorporates the influence of factors external to the individual, its lack of focus on a single human being's capacity to make choices means that it does not give us the tools to consider individual experiences, as depicted in the films in question.

This focus can be found in the work of earlier thinkers such as Descartes and Kant, who look at the individual, and their emphasis on the individual's autonomy and freedom to choose places them at one end of the scale of theories about the extent to which we are agents. Descartes's position was typical of the beginning of the modern period, and the end of the Christian medieval period: he argued in his 'Principles of Philosophy' (1644) that 'it is a supreme perfection in man that he acts voluntarily, that is, freely; this makes him in a special way the author of his actions and deserving of praise for what he does.'⁴¹ Each person is thus conceived as a reasoning agent, as opposed to being simply obliged to follow Christian doctrine.

The concept of the rational agent is central to Kant's thought, and his definition of agency. This is reflected in his famous dictum that 'ein jedes Ding der Natur wirkt nach Gesetzen. Nur ein vernünftiges Wesen hat das Vermögen, nach der Vorstellung der Gesetze, d.i. nach Prinzipien, zu handeln, oder einen Willen'.⁴² This idea of being able to make a rational choice is present in my definition of agency, and the influence of Kant can be seen in liberal humanism's conception of the individual as self-determining, but what Descartes's and Kant's ideas lack, unlike Marx's, is recognition of the effect of factors beyond the individual, which could contribute to some individuals being better able to make (rational) choices, and therefore having

⁴¹ René Descartes, 'Principles of Philosophy', in *Descartes: Selected Philosophical Writings*, trans. by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 172.

⁴² Immanuel Kant, *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* (Riga: Hartknoch, 1785), p. 36.

more agency, than others. Kant is *aware* of influencing factors but makes a distinction between the realm of necessity and the realm of freedom and argues that, insofar as we are rational beings, these factors are not relevant.

Adorno and Horkheimer consider external powers *and* agency on an individual level, but particularly in the best known chapter of their *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (1944), ‘Kulturindustrie. Aufklärung als Massenbetrug’, they come to a much more pessimistic conclusion than Descartes and Kant about the possibility of individual agency. They refer, for example, to the ‘städtebaulichen Projekte [...], die in hygienischen Kleinwohnungen das Individuum als gleichsam selbständiges perpetuieren sollen’ but which ‘unterwerfen es seinem Widerpart, der totalen Kapitalmacht, nur um so gründlicher’.⁴³ Also relevant to my argument will be Adorno’s ‘Spätkapitalismus oder Industriegesellschaft’ (1969), in which he makes the case that capitalism seems to make change to society impossible.

Another thinker who considers agency on an individual level and external powers is Foucault, often described as a post-structuralist. Foucault draws on Marx, but removes the Marxist focus on class from a conception of agency and describes new models of power. In his 1975 work *Discipline and Punish* Foucault is more pessimistic than the thinkers already discussed, illustrating that humans are not free, yet it is important to note that his ideas about agency change over the course of his career. In *Discipline and Punish* he discusses modern ‘disciplinary’ societies, famously using the panopticon, a building made up of a tower surrounded by a circle of cells, as a metaphor for these societies. He stresses that ‘in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without

⁴³ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung: Philosophische Fragmente* (Berlin: Fischer, 1969), p. 128.

ever being seen'.⁴⁴ Here, there are clear parallels between how Foucault and the filmmakers in this thesis conceptualise agency: space and the idea of being seen are part of the models of agency used by the directors in question too. Foucault argues that 'it is the fact of being constantly seen, of being able always to be seen, that maintains the disciplined individual in his subjection'⁴⁵ and this comment is particularly useful when discussing Petzold's use of surveillance in *Barbara*, and how this trope is used to make a point about human agency. Foucault's argument about bodies in disciplinary regimes, which he characterises as 'legible and docile',⁴⁶ is also useful for my analysis of Petzold's work, as is his argument that in a disciplinary regime with anonymous sources of power, even individual identity is not a sign of freedom but a structure of social control. He claims that 'as power becomes more anonymous and more functional, those on whom it is exercised tend to be more strongly individualized.'⁴⁷

Although Foucault's argument about an individual's agency within social structures is very helpful when considering limits on control, the denial of agency in *Discipline and Punish* does not leave scope for the human action which we can see in my corpus of films. Yet Foucault's later work demonstrates a view of human agency which is more optimistic than in *Discipline and Punish* and explores what an individual can do within limits, which is what the filmmakers in question are exploring in a different medium. His position seems to change with *The History of Sexuality. Volume I*, where, although he still argues that power is omnipresent and anonymous, writing that 'tactics' 'find [...] their base of support and their condition

⁴⁴ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 202.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

elsewhere’ and, ‘no one is there to have invented them’,⁴⁸ he also thinks about how power itself produces resistance. In volumes 2 and 3 of *The History of Sexuality*, care of the self and techniques of self-production become more important. A 1977 interview, the title of which is translated as ‘Power and Sex’, also shines a light on his later, more optimistic view, expressed here as ‘as soon as there is a power relation, there is a possibility of resistance. We can never be ensnared by power: we can always modify its grip in determinate conditions and according to a precise strategy’.⁴⁹

Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1980) is also relevant here: it accepts Foucault’s bleak view of disciplinary regimes, and individuality itself constituted by disciplinary practices, but looks for scope for individual resistance. Certeau thinks about what form this resistance can take, and his thoughts on strategies and tactics are most illuminating for this study. He defines a tactic as:

a maneuver “within the enemy’s field of vision,” as von Bülow put it, and within enemy territory [...] It takes advantage of “opportunities” and depends on them, being without any base where it could stockpile its winnings, build up its own position, and plan raids [...] It must vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers. It poaches in them. It creates surprises in them. It can be where it is least expected.⁵⁰

Certeau’s engagement with the relationship between space and agency — as well as between surveillance and agency — is clear in this comment, and the concept of ‘the space of the other’ in *The Practice of Everyday Life* is also illuminating. Certeau

⁴⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge. The History of Sexuality Volume 1*, trans. by Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 1998), p. 95.

⁴⁹ Michel Foucault, ‘Power and Sex’, in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings, 1977-1984*, ed. by Lawrence D. Kritzman (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 110-24 (p. 123).

⁵⁰ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 37.

writes ‘the space of a tactic is the space of the other. Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power’.⁵¹

In his chapter ‘Walking in the City’, Certeau considers the possibility for individual resistance in the space of the city, and two formulations from this chapter are helpful for analysing the first part of *Heaven*, set in the city of Turin, and the room for resistance there. The formulations are, firstly, the argument that ‘the city is left prey to contradictory movements that counterbalance and combine themselves outside the reach of panoptic power’⁵² and the reference to ‘a contradiction between the collective mode of administration and an individual mode of reappropriation’.⁵³ Certeau draws on Foucault’s ideas of the panopticon and an individual’s behaviour in a disciplinary society, but sees more potential for agency here.

Something else that *Discipline and Punish* and *The Practice of Everyday Life* have in common is that Foucault and Certeau, unlike Marx, do not make a distinction between more and less subjugated groups of people, and investigate how they interact with power structures. In contrast, British Cultural Studies, whilst drawing on Marxism and post-structuralism, manages to branch out from Marxism and research how cultural products and practices are linked to wider systems of power involving phenomena such as ideology, ethnicity and gender, as well as class structures. This research also includes analysis of the ways in which groups which are subordinate in some way respond to and resist political and economic domination. Cultural studies looks at cultural practices and cultural products as practised and produced by individuals but also looks at trends amongst groups of these individuals.

Cultural studies is committed to taking popular, mainstream culture seriously and thus it is highly relevant when we consider Tykwer’s thrillers or Akin’s

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Certeau, p. 95.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 96.

melodramas. Like Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, cultural studies scholars are mostly concerned with agency at the level of quotidian practices, which makes their work less helpful for the analysis of the narratives in some of the films in question. Yet the conception of the agent as ‘a fragmented, decentered human agent, an agent who is both “subject-ed” by power and capable of acting against those powers’ (to quote Lawrence Grossberg on Stuart Hall)⁵⁴ will be a useful tool for my investigation.

Most helpful for my purposes, however, is the way in which cultural studies draws on Foucault’s arguments about an individual’s agency within social structures, specifically John Fiske’s, and others’, efforts to situate agents ‘as clearly as possible at [the] interface between macro-social forces and micro-histories and -experiences’.⁵⁵ I also conceptualise the agent in this way. The practices of everyday life, although less relevant to some of the films in question, are an important part of these micro-histories and -experiences. Fiske argues that ‘the practices of everyday life within and against the determinate conditions of the social order construct the identities of difference of the social actors amongst the various formations of the subaltern’.⁵⁶

Fiske’s ‘Cultural Studies and the Culture of Everyday Life’ is illuminating due to his comments on the body, for which he also draws on Foucault. He uses Foucault to stress the importance of the body in a discussion of agency but focuses on the possibility of constructing ‘identities of difference’, and the role the body can play in

⁵⁴ Lawrence Grossberg, ‘History, Politics, and Postmodernism: Stuart Hall and Cultural Studies’, in *Bringing it All Back Home: Essays on Cultural Studies*, ed. by Lawrence Grossberg (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), pp. 174-94 (p. 180).

⁵⁵ John Fiske, ‘Cultural Studies and the Culture of Everyday Life’, in *Cultural Studies*, ed. by Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 154-73 (p. 173).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

this. Fiske 'proposes the mundane body as the synecdochal embodiment of the social order, and therefore of the social differences within that order'.⁵⁷

Another concept of Fiske's which is of vital importance to this thesis is that of 'the creative use of the conditions of constraint'.⁵⁸ With this idea, Fiske expresses how it is possible for more subjugated people to resist. He writes:

The construction, occupation, and ownership of one's own space/ setting within their place/ arena, the weaving of one's own richly textured life within the constraints of economic deprivation and oppression, are not just ways of controlling some of the conditions of social existence; they are also ways of constructing, and therefore exerting some control over, social identities and social relations.⁵⁹

As is clear here, space is also vital to Fiske's conception of agency and although his concept of 'their place/ arena' is analogous to Certeau's 'space of the other', Fiske assigns importance to the space of one's own, however small, which one can construct within this place.

The oppression to which Fiske refers can be economic but there are many factors which can make one group of people more subjugated than another. Gender, one of these factors, is an important aspect of analyses of agency and feminist film theory, specifically theory around the gaze, is another type of criticism (and the final included in this introduction) which is helpful for an analysis of agency in film in particular. The term 'the gaze' was first developed by Lacan and is used, in psychoanalysis, to describe the anxious state that results from the awareness that one can be looked at. Foucault also elaborated on the gaze in his discussion of disciplinary mechanisms in *Discipline and Punish*, in his statement that 'it is the fact of being

⁵⁷ Fiske, pp. 162-63.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 156.

⁵⁹ Fiske, p. 160.

constantly seen, of being able always to be seen, that maintains the disciplined individual in his subjection,' but, as mentioned above, the first person to popularise the concept of a male gaze was feminist film theorist Mulvey, in her essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'. Who holds the gaze, both within and outside a film, is the fundamental issue here and Mulvey considers the gaze of the characters within the film, the person behind the camera and the spectator, thereby also focusing on the agency of individuals rather than groups. The asymmetry in the power that a man and a woman in a film wield, according to Mulvey, is summarised in the title of the third section of the essay, 'Woman as Image, Man as Bearer of the Look,'⁶⁰ and Mulvey also claims that the male gaze dictates how a woman in a film looks, arguing that 'the determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly' (V, 11). Mulvey's methodology can, however, also be applied to question whether the woman, and indeed other people, in a film still have the lack of agency she describes. The issue of focalisation, or Hayward's idea of agency 'at the level of the narrative' is also of importance here: Mulvey, when discussing Hitchcock, comments that 'liberal use of subjective camera from the point of view of the male protagonist draw[s] the spectators deeply into his position' (V, 15) which means he focalises the action and affects the spectator's reading of the filmic text whilst, Mulvey argues, woman remains simply a passive image.

Over forty years on, Mulvey's essay is being used by scholars in diverse fields: in 2017 alone it has been cited in research on advertising campaigns,⁶¹ selfies,⁶² and

⁶⁰ Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, 16 (1975), 6-18 (p. 11) (hereafter referenced as 'V').

⁶¹ See Katherine Duffy, Philip Hancock and Melissa Tyler, 'Still Red Hot? Postfeminism and Gender Subjectivity in the Airline Industry', *Gender, Work and Organization*, 24 (2017), 260-73 (p. 268).

⁶² See Begonya Enguix and Erick Gómez-Narváez, 'Masculine Bodies, Selfies, and the (Re)configurations of Intimacy', *Men and Masculinities*, 2017, 1-19 <<https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X17696168>> [accessed 23 December 2017] (p. 3).

the prosecution of domestic violence,⁶³ as well as on women in film.⁶⁴ Despite the years between when Mulvey wrote the essay and today, the main way in which it is used in contemporary scholarship is to better describe what can be observed in various works of art and societal trends,⁶⁵ yet it is also used, as exemplified by the 2017 publications just mentioned, to illustrate cultural products playing with the arguments in Mulvey's analysis,⁶⁶ as a description of a problematic situation to which artists have since responded,⁶⁷ and also as a polemical work which needs to be critiqued.⁶⁸

'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' has been criticised for its psychoanalytic approach and its failure to consider the female protagonist and female spectator, amongst other things. Mulvey responded to these last two criticisms in her 1981 essay 'Afterthoughts on "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"' inspired by *Duel in the Sun* (King Vidor, 1946)' but argued that through the inclusion of a female protagonist a film was transformed into a melodrama, because the sexual aspect of the film became central.⁶⁹ Many contemporary films centred around a female character could disprove this claim, but it is important to remember that Mulvey discusses classical Hollywood cinema rather than more recent or experimental film. Despite those of her arguments that cannot be applied more widely and the criticisms outlined above, in the case of this thesis her essay is still useful for an analysis of the gaze, the power dynamics involved, and how limits on agency and agency itself can be

⁶³ See Dawn Moore and Rashmee Singh, 'Seeing crime, feeling crime: Visual evidence, emotions, and the prosecution of domestic violence', *Theoretical Criminology*, 2017, 1-17 <<https://doi.org/10.1177/1362480616684194>> [accessed 23 December 2017] (p. 3).

⁶⁴ See, for example, Raz Yosef, 'Conditions of Visibility: Trauma and Contemporary Israeli Women's Cinema', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 42 (2017), 919-43 (p. 921).

⁶⁵ See, for example, Moore and Singh, p. 3.

⁶⁶ See Duffy, Hancock and Tyler, p. 268.

⁶⁷ See Yosef, p. 921.

⁶⁸ See Enguix and Gómez-Narváez, p. 3.

⁶⁹ Laura Mulvey, 'Afterthoughts on "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"' inspired by *Duel in the Sun* (King Vidor, 1946)', in *Film Theory: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies, Volume 3*, ed. by Philip Simpson, Andrew Utterson and K. J. Shepherdson (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 68-77 (p. 74).

conveyed in film. I, like other contemporary scholars, use the essay to discuss both what of what Mulvey described in 1975 can still be found in film and how contemporary filmmakers engage with her arguments. The structures which Mulvey observed can be observed in Petzold's films but Mulvey's essay also shows that Petzold is conscious that he is taking her thesis and criticising it, particularly in *Phoenix*.

Also useful for my purposes is one of the scholars who has developed Mulvey's idea of the male gaze: Irene Visser, who writes about the concepts of the feminist and female gazes. Visser's feminist gaze is a model of resistance against the male gaze, and the power dynamics tied up with it. She describes it as 're-visionary, re-creative, ideologically committed to struggle, aligned with anger and resistance against the mechanism of the male gaze'.⁷⁰ The female gaze goes further: according to Visser it is 'the gaze that subverts, indeed eliminates the confining binaries of subject/object positions, of activity/passivity, of power and subjection'.⁷¹ It 'not only strongly resists the male gaze, but also exemplifies an entirely different, indeed "other" economy: that of gentleness, respect, and pleasure'.⁷² This idea is partly inspired by the feminine attentiveness described by Cixous in her essay 'La venue à l'écriture': Cixous refers to 'she who looks with the look that recognizes, that studies, respects, doesn't take, doesn't claw, but attentively, with gentle relentlessness, contemplates and reads, caresses, bathes, makes the other gleam'.⁷³ Visser separates the female gaze from the essentialist idea of woman which we find in Cixous, however, and focuses more on human agency, commenting that the female gaze

⁷⁰ Irene Visser, 'Reading Pleasure: Light in August and the Theory of the Gendered Gaze', *Journal of Gender Studies*, 6 (1997), 277-87 (p. 285).

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 282.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Hélène Cixous, 'Coming to Writing', in *'Coming to Writing' and Other Essays*, ed. by Deborah Jenson and trans. by Sarah Cornell and others (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), pp. 1-58 (p. 51).

‘moves beyond the specifically feminist pleasure of opposition to the male gaze, to the pleasure that is based on the alternative principles of the female gaze: those of non-mastery, and freedom’.⁷⁴ Visser’s concepts, both of the female gaze and the feminist gaze, will be particularly illuminating in my discussion of *Barbara*.

Visser’s approach to agency is the final piece of my theoretical framework. In summary, using *Discipline and Punish* to conceptualise limitations on human agency, I will also employ Foucault’s later work, Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life*, the approach evident in cultural studies and the concept of the gaze to investigate, in my different chapters, the different ways contemporary German cinema shows it is possible for individuals to be agents, despite the pessimistic views expressed by Foucault and Mulvey, and how the filmic medium can convey this agency.

As well as being illuminated by the conceptions of agency I have explored, the films I discuss here can help us to understand this theory and can contribute to discussions about agency. One way in which the films can help us understand the theory is by exemplifying the different theorists’ arguments. In Akin’s oeuvre for instance, the importance of characters’ creativity in their environments, and the possibility for agency this allows, is in line with arguments found in Fiske’s work, and exemplify how his arguments can be illustrated in film. Both *Gegen die Wand* and *Auf der anderen Seite* demonstrate that the density in what Fiske refers to as ‘the material, densely lived culture of everyday life [which] is a contradictory mixture of creativity and constraint’⁷⁵ can be expressed in the audio-visual medium of film. Film can also do something in line with but slightly departing from the arguments which we see in the theory on agency: in *Barbara*, for example, the protagonist’s colourful clothes and make-up can also be seen as an example of what Fiske calls ‘the creative use of the

⁷⁴ Visser, p. 282.

⁷⁵ Fiske, p. 157.

conditions of constraint', but in the context of her appearance rather than that of a space.

Film can also take the arguments in the theory further. I contribute to the model of individualisation described by Foucault by discussing the 'de-individuation' of the two protagonists of *Heaven* which Prager refers to in his article 'Glimpses of Freedom: The Reemergence of Utopian Longing in German Cinema'. This is also a good example of how film criticism and theory on agency can be combined to shine a new light on the film in question and the academic discussion around agency. Alternatively, the portrayal of agency in film can also differ from the conception of agency in theory. The gaze in *Barbara* and *Phoenix*, for example, does not function in the same way as Mulvey describes in her essay, when analysing classical Hollywood cinema, but the mixture of the ways in which the presentation of agency conforms to and also subverts Mulvey's model results in a complex picture of human agency within constraints.

Structural Outline

This thesis begins with a chapter on Tykwer's *The International* (2009) and *Heaven* (2002), which is followed by a chapter on Akin's *Gegen die Wand* (2004) and *Auf der anderen Seite* (2007) and then one on Petzold's *Barbara* (2012) and *Phoenix* (2014). With each chapter the portrayal of agency I discuss becomes more nuanced. I consider *The International* first, although it was made seven years later than *Heaven*, as it is by looking back at *Heaven* having considered *The International* that we see what is important about the earlier film's treatment of agency. *The International* sets out a problem, namely limits on agency in a globalised world, but in *Heaven* the

engagement with agency works on two axes. In this film individuals fail when trying to effect wide-reaching societal change but can make personal choices and carve out trajectories for themselves, illustrating one way in which it is possible to be an agent.

In the first chapter, I will address how Tykwer uses the filmic medium to explore the extent of, and limits on, human control. I will look at Tykwer's shots of cityscapes, architecture and interior spaces, arguing that it is these, and how his actors interact with these spaces, which he uses to convey agency. I will also consider the ambiguity that Tykwer creates or chooses not to create with his images. Bazin praised Italian neorealism, and the films of Orson Welles, for 'tending to give back to the cinema a sense of the ambiguity of reality'⁷⁶ and despite the generic and fantastical elements in Tykwer's films, this is what he, at his most interesting, is doing. The more specific relevance of Italian neorealism to Tykwer's work will also be discussed in more depth.

This engagement with ambiguities will take into account Susan Hayward's idea of agency at the level of the spectator, who in Hayward's account 'produces a meaning and a reading of the filmic text.' In order to further explore readings of the filmic text, this chapter will look at statements from Tykwer about his aims for his films and research about how to engage the viewer, both with reference to thrillers and the ethical cinema evident in *Heaven*. Looking at English- and German-language reviews of the two films in question will help me investigate whether what my analysis reveals was obvious to the contemporary audience, as well as the effect the films have on the audience and whether Tykwer has achieved his aims. I shall try to ascertain what the appeal of these films is to their audience and as well as looking at

⁷⁶ André Bazin, 'The Evolution of the Language of Cinema', in *What is Cinema? Volume I*, ed. and trans. by Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), pp. 23-40 (p. 37).

what Tykwer does successfully, I will consider the ways in which the films illustrate problems that filmmakers must grapple with.

In the second chapter, I first deal with how Akin engages with and rejects the idea of characters having complete control over their lives. I then look in more detail at, firstly, the role of chance and coincidence in *Gegen die Wand* and *Auf der anderen Seite* and the way that characters' lives can be changed in unexpected ways regardless of their identity, which is central to Akin's plot development and his conception of agency. Secondly, I will look at the importance of characters' backgrounds, and engaging with these backgrounds, to their scope for action in the two films. Next, I focus on the role afforded to the state and state institutions in the films in question, and argue that they are accorded less importance than in Tykwer's work, before looking at the extent to which Akin's films and portrayals of agency are grounded in specific situations or, at the other end of this scale, are universalist. I have chosen to discuss the two films together rather than consecutively in order to emphasise trends across them, and to discuss the most salient examples of these trends regardless of in which film they can be found, whilst recognising significant differences in the films' focus and style.

To further my analysis of how agency can be portrayed in the filmic medium, I look at places in Akin's globalised filmic world, on the three levels of countries, cities and domestic or public spaces, and I look at how these places are shot to portray agency. I use Fiske's idea of 'the creative use of the conditions of constraint', evidence for which can be found both in the films' plots and in their presentation of place, to illustrate how one can avoid being completely limited by one's social existence in Akin's cinema. As in the previous chapter, I consider the open, ambiguous endings of *Gegen die Wand* and *Auf der anderen Seite*, as well as

ambiguity elsewhere in the two films. Looking at English- and German-language reviews of the films will again help me investigate whether what my analysis reveals was obvious to the contemporary audience and the effect the films have on the viewer. As well as looking at what Akin does successfully, I will consider the challenges which are raised by the films in terms of the presentation of agency.

In the third chapter I will analyse the portrayal of agency in *Barbara* and then *Phoenix*. My analysis of *Barbara* will focus on three scenes, which illustrate how the power relations in the film develop, and it will unpick exactly how agency is portrayed in the language of film at these three moments. I use these scenes as a starting point to discuss other issues relevant to the portrayal of agency throughout the film. My analysis of *Phoenix* also focuses on specific scenes as a way to discuss how agency is portrayed in this film. I then go on to discuss the extent to which these narratives, rooted as they are in exceptional historical moments, are universal and show the viewer something more widely applicable about human agency. Ambiguity is also highly relevant with regard to *Barbara* and *Phoenix* and I will consider their ambiguous endings as well as the space the rest of the two films leave for the viewer's interpretation. Finally, I will use English- and German-language reviews of the films to show which aspects of my analysis also interest critics, how the films were received by critics, and what trends there are in the responses. By looking at reviews I can analyse the emotional effect which *Barbara* and *Phoenix* have on the audience and which aspects of the films are particularly successful, and particularly criticised.

Chapter 1

Agency within a capitalist system in Tom Tykwer's cinema

Tom Tykwer's *Lola rennt* was both predicted to be⁷⁷ and later recognised as⁷⁸ the beginning of a 'renaissance' of German cinema. Critics declared Tykwer 'the first person since Fassbinder to do something radically different in German cinema'⁷⁹ and claimed that the film 'vermittelt [...] erstmal das Gefühl, hier werde ein neues Kapitel der deutschen Filmgeschichte aufgeschlagen'.⁸⁰ This kind of rhetoric was also employed more recently after the release of Sebastian Schipper's 2015 hit *Victoria*,⁸¹ but the fact that even seventeen years after *Lola rennt* was released it was with the successes of this film that those of *Victoria* were compared⁸² conveys the role which Tykwer's film is seen to occupy in the history of film in the Berlin Republic.

In *Lola rennt* the eponymous heroine turns back time in order to have three chances to run through Berlin, to a techno soundtrack, and save her boyfriend's life, so as well as demonstrating what German cinema was capable of, *Lola rennt* exhibits an optimism about the ability individuals have to dictate the course of their lives and has agency at its centre. Described by Tykwer as a film 'über die Möglichkeiten der Welt, des Lebens und des Kinos', the film uses a fantastical premise and the three-part

⁷⁷ Peter Bradshaw, 'Run Lola Run', *Guardian*, 22 October 1999 <http://www.theguardian.com/film/News_Story/Critic_Review/Guardian_review/0,4267,94485,00.html> [accessed 31 August 2016] (para. 1 of 2).

⁷⁸ Cooke, p. 13.

⁷⁹ Laurence Kardish, quoted in Laura Winters, 'A Rebel with Red Hair Rumples Stuffed Shirts', *New York Times*, 13 June 1999, Arts and Leisure, p. 17.

⁸⁰ Michael Althen, 'Ein Narr, Wer den Zufall Schicksal Nennt', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 19 August 1998, p. 11.

⁸¹ See, for example, Wenke Husmann, 'Absolut Gigantisch', *Die Zeit*, 8 February 2015 <<http://www.zeit.de/kultur/film/2015-02/victoria-schipper-berlinale#comments>> [accessed 31 August 2016].

⁸² See, for example, Hanns-Georg Rodek, 'Der beste deutsche Film seit zwei Jahrzehnten', *Die Welt*, 11 June 2015 <<http://www.welt.de/kultur/kino/article142295664/Der-beste-deutsche-Film-seit-zwei-Jahrzehnten.html>> [accessed 31 August 2016].

structure to emphasise Lola's ability to learn from her mistakes in order to change the course of her life.

Now, almost twenty years after *Lola rennt*, Tykwer is still an important figure in contemporary German cinema, having directed both German- and English-language productions. Yet the portrayal of agency in his films has changed considerably since *Lola rennt*. My analysis of *The International* and *Heaven* will discuss Tykwer's portrayal of corrupt, capitalist systems in the two films, and I will also discuss the pitfalls, illustrated in these films, of depicting characters with too much or too little control. Personal agency is portrayed in an optimistic way in *Heaven* and in *The International* we see a complete lack of agency. *The International* illustrates that it is not the case that all films portray a mixture of scope for action and constraint, and also illustrates difficulties that filmmakers can face when representing human control.

The International and *Heaven* are interesting films from Tykwer's oeuvre to engage with because they demonstrate what German cinema can be. The fact that these films are (primarily) English-language and, as I will illustrate, draw on and share characteristics with both earlier and more recent American, British, and continental European cinema, as well as other recent German films, does not make them less at home in a study of contemporary German cinema. This mix of times and spaces, the latter also in terms of the films' settings, reflects the mix of traditions found in many German films today and the transnational nature of the German film industry.

The International

Lars-Olav Beier claims in his review for *Der Spiegel* that there is one image in Tykwer's *The International* which encapsulates the entire plot of the film.⁸³ This image (fig. 1) is the long shot of the main protagonist, Interpol agent Louis Salinger,



Figure 1. Salinger walks up the steps of the IBBC Headquarters (*The International*, 16.43)⁸⁴

walking up the steps of the headquarters of the IBBC, the bank which is the film's impersonal antagonist. The viewer's eye is drawn to Salinger as he is a black figure in the centre of the pristine white of the steps but the long shot emphasises the size of the glass and steel fronted building, in front of which, as Beier points out, Salinger is a tiny mark at the bottom of the frame. He looks insignificant and powerless in the face of the bank and the coldness of the building's materials reflects the coldness the viewer has seen in the bank's behaviour earlier in the film.

The shot is centred on a part of the building which looks transparent, as does the globe — a reference to the IBBC's global reach — inside it, but this transparency is deliberately misleading: Salinger will discover just how difficult it is to find out and

⁸³ Lars-Olav Beier, 'Finanzthriller "Der International": Lauter Leichen auf dem Konto', *Der Spiegel*, 5 February 2009 <<http://www.spiegel.de/kultur/kino/finanzthriller-the-international-lauter-leichen-auf-dem-konto-a-605720.html>> [accessed 31 August 2016] (para. 17 of 19).

⁸⁴ *The International*, dir. by Tom Tykwer (Columbia Pictures, 2009) (hereafter *I*).

expose what is going on inside the building, as well as globally. It is also significant that there are no other people on the steps, which reflects the fact that Salinger is often alone in his campaign against the IBBC. There are some figures who are walking along the façade of the building, towards its entrance, yet in their dark clothing they, unlike Salinger, almost blend in with their background, fitting in with the bank's portrayal as devoid of humanity. Philip French in *The Observer* emphasises the impersonality of this and many other buildings in *The International*, commenting that

the villains inhabit impersonal buildings, built of glass and steel, which reflects Owen [in the role of Salinger]'s discovery that anonymous forces operated by readily replaceable people run this world and there's nothing an ordinary citizen can do about it.⁸⁵

The shot above, in conjunction with French's comment, does indeed encapsulate a sizeable amount of the narrative of *The International* and convey the model of power found in the film, as well as exemplifying how this model is communicated. This way of portraying agency is also representative of the genre here: Temenuga Trifonova observes that using architecture as a symbol for a sense of control is a common technique in paranoia thrillers such as *The International*. She argues that the 'heightened sense of space' and the importance of architecture in these films is due to the individual's relationship to late capitalism, the label some neo-Marxists have chosen for the kind of capitalism portrayed in *The International*, which involves globalised markets and multinational flows of capital and came about after the Second World War.⁸⁶ Trifonova writes 'the inability of the subject to position

⁸⁵ Philip French, 'The International', *Observer*, 1 May 2009 <<http://www.theguardian.com/film/2009/mar/01/drama-international-tom-tykwer>> [accessed 31 August 2016] (para. 4 of 4).

⁸⁶ See, for example, Fredric Jameson, 'Five Theses on Actually Existing Marxism', in *The Jameson Reader*, ed. by Michael Hardt and Kathi Weeks (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 164-72 (pp.

himself in the economic system of late capitalism becomes displaced or manifested in the heightened spatiality of the conspiracy text',⁸⁷ and she even mentions the 'transparent bank headquarters' in *The International* as one of her examples.⁸⁸ Both this heightened spatiality and this idea of being out-of-place are indeed communicated by the shot above, with the building of the international bank symbolising the flow of capital around the world.

There are some things the image does not convey which are crucial to the film's conception of agency, however. Although the phenomenon of globalisation is an important part of late capitalism and Tykwer's model of agency in *The International*, it is not portrayed in this shot. I will begin my analysis with a discussion of globalisation, but before this a summary of the plot of the film is necessary.

Tykwer's film follows Salinger (Clive Owen) and Eleanor Whitman (Naomi Watts), an Assistant District Attorney from Manhattan, as they fly around the world investigating the IBBC, a bank based in Luxembourg. The first scene depicts the murder of Salinger's colleague Thomas Schumer, at the hands of the IBBC, after he speaks to a whistleblower at the bank about why it is buying missile guidance systems from Umberto Calvini, the head of an Italian weapons manufacturing company. Calvini later tells Salinger and Whitman that the IBBC is attempting to increase its power by controlling the flow of weapons to the developing world and therefore controlling the conflicts which take place, before Calvini is also killed by the IBBC's assassin so the bank can try to make a deal with his sons. Salinger tells Whitman to leave him to fight the IBBC alone, in order to protect her and her family, to which she

165-66) and for the origin of the term see Werner Sombart, *Der Moderne Kapitalismus*, 3 vols (Leipzig: Duncker und Humblot, 1902), I, p. 72.

⁸⁷ Trifonova, pp. 110-11.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

reluctantly agrees. Salinger then tells Calvini's sons that the IBBC is responsible for their father's death and they stop negotiations with the bank but Jonas Skarssen, its chairman, is able to travel to Istanbul and strike up a deal with an arms manufacturer there. The film ends with Skarssen being assassinated by Calvini's sons' hitman as revenge for their father's death, but, as is shown in a series of newspaper articles during the film's closing credits, the bank and its project live on.

Agency in a globalised world

Philip French is correct that similar buildings crop up again and again in *The International*, with Tykwer often emphasising the size of them too, by having his camera pan up their height. Yet it is not just 'the villains', i.e. the IBBC, who inhabit these buildings: they are rather occupied by the Italian arms manufacturers, the Federal Police Department in Berlin and even Salinger's employer Interpol. Whilst the captions describing where the action is taking place change (a trope likely familiar to the viewer from the *Bond* and *Bourne* film series), the buildings stay the same. This conveys visually the problem which is at the heart of *The International*. In the film, institutions are — as indicated by the title — global and networked, and they are part of a corrupt system. The film is very critical of the banking industry, with one character, rather heavy-handedly, given the line 'this is the very essence of the banking industry: to make us all, whether we be nations or individuals, slaves to debt' (*I*, 33.35), and other institutions rely on the IBBC. This point is hammered home in the scene in which Wexler, an ex-Stasi official who works for the IBBC, gives Salinger names of organisations who rely on the bank: 'Hezbollah, CIA, Colombian drug cartels, Russian organised crime, governments of Iran, Germany, China, your

government, every multinational corporation, everyone' (I, 1,25.47). This list of institutions from the world beyond the film that the viewer will know from the news — as well as having a generic role which I explore later — is included to make the bank seem like a case study which illustrates a wider problem and make the idea of a corrupt network seem rooted in reality.

The corrupt network in *The International* fits in with a wider exploration of limits on agency in a globalised world, in Tykwer's cinema and in other contemporary German films. Tykwer's most explicit critique of globalisation is his contribution to *Deutschland 09 — 13 kurze Filme zur Lage der Nation*. This 2009 anthology film, with its 13 short films directed by 13 different directors, includes Tykwer's *Feierlich Reist*, in which the eponymous protagonist travels around the world, staying in each destination's Marriott, having meetings in which everyone has the same Blackberrys, and drinking the same Starbucks coffees. He eventually suffers a mental breakdown. Starbucks in particular is an instantly recognisable symbol of globalisation, which Naomi Klein, in the aptly titled 'no choice' section of her anti-globalisation polemic *No Logo*, refers to as 'one of the Pac-Man chains',⁸⁹ referencing the video game character which eats everything in its path. Tykwer's critique is similarly explicit and the subtitle of the anthology film, *13 kurze Filme zur Lage der Nation*, indicates the importance that he assigns to the phenomenon of globalisation and its effects.

Tykwer's attitude towards globalisation is symptomatic of a wider trend in contemporary German cinema. The most obvious film for contrast is *Unter dir die Stadt* (Hochhäusler, 2010), the first German film about the 2008 financial crisis. Hochhäusler, like Christian Petzold, is one of the leading figures in the Berlin School movement and his slow, contemplative film, in which banker's wife Svenja wanders

⁸⁹ Naomi Klein, *No Logo*, 10th anniversary edn (New York: Picador, 2009), p. 130.

around Frankfurt and has a cold affair with her husband's colleague Roland, is aesthetically very different to *The International*. Yet it still includes the same glass and steel architecture and dialogue that thematizes the same issues, such as:

Roland: Mein Londoner Büro sieht genauso aus wie das hier. Selbst
die Bilder sind identisch.
Svenja: Ich stelle mir das schrecklich vor. Man ist ja immer schon da.
Roland: Man ist immer schon da.
Svenja: Und fliegen muss man trotzdem.
(*Unter dir die Stadt*, 25.39-25.52)⁹⁰

Here, Hochhäusler does with words what Tykwer does with images in *Feierlich Reist*, and in *The International*, albeit less explicitly in the latter film. Both Feierlich and Salinger fly around the world but are not confronted with anything new or different. They see the same architecture, Feierlich sees the same portrait in the lobby of every Marriott and Salinger sees the same corruption in every country. It is this filmic world, in which space is globalised and standardised, in which Tykwer's conception of agency is situated.

Transparency and elusiveness

Despite Salinger being the sole recognisable figure in the image above and despite Philip French's comment, the forces which run the filmic world in *The International* are not anonymous: as is criticised by Dietmar Kammerer in the *Tageszeitung* review, from early on in the film we see the faces of the management of the IBBC, and know what their aims are.⁹¹ These people are, as French observes,

⁹⁰ *Unter dir die Stadt*, dir. by Christoph Hochhäusler (Piffel Medien, 2010).

⁹¹ Dietmar Kammerer, 'Kontrolle ist alles', *Die Tageszeitung*, 6 February 2009 <<http://www.taz.de/!5168398>> [accessed 31 August 2016] (para. 7 of 8).

readily replaceable, as is shown in the case of Skarssen in the shots of newspaper articles, and this adds to the presentation of the IBBC as inhuman and machine-like, as well as diminishing the power ‘ordinary citizens’ have to stop the organisation, but this model of power differs from the Foucauldian model. The argument that power is omnipresent is illustrated both in Foucault’s work and in *The International*, and Foucault (in *Discipline and Punish*) and Tykwer (in this film) share a pessimism about human agency. John Farrell even uses Foucault to explain the centrality of paranoia, which can be found in *The International*, in modern Western culture, arguing that Foucault, along with Sartre, Althusser and Lacan, ‘carried the suspicion of society to new depths’, as he ‘speaks in terms of an unlocatable and alien power that infiltrates every particle of social being’.⁹² Yet the difference between Foucault’s and Tykwer’s conceptions of human control is evident in Anthony Giddens’s comment that Foucault’s history ‘tends to have no active subjects at all. It is history with the agency removed.’⁹³

This is an oversimplification which primarily reflects the Foucault of the 1960s and 1970s: as part of his *The History of Sexuality* project he stresses, in contrast, that ‘the history of the last centuries in Western societies did not manifest the movement of a power that was essentially repressive’.⁹⁴ Foucault also modifies his model of power by bringing in the idea of resistance, arguing in ‘Power and Sex’, as quoted above, that ‘as soon as there is a power relation, there is a possibility of resistance. We can never be ensnared by power: we can always modify its grip in determinate conditions and according to a precise strategy’. This statement,

⁹² John Farrell, *Paranoia and Modernity: Cervantes to Rousseau* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), p. 4.

⁹³ Anthony Giddens, ‘Structuralism, Post-structuralism and the Production of Culture’, in *Social Theory Today*, ed. by Anthony Giddens and Jonathan Turner (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), pp. 195-223 (p. 214).

⁹⁴ *The Will to Knowledge*, p. 81.

particularly the ‘we’, indicates the presence of an active subject, which Giddens argues is lacking in Foucault’s work, but Giddens’s assessment of Foucault is shown to still be helpful when one is considering his later work and his argument about the origins of power relations.

Foucault explains as part of his *The History of Sexuality* project that

the rationality of power is characterised by tactics that are often quite explicit at the restricted level where they are inscribed [...], tactics which, becoming connected to one another, attracting and propagating one another, but finding their base of support and their condition elsewhere, end by forming comprehensive systems: the logic is perfectly clear, the aims decipherable, and yet it is often the case that no one is there to have invented them, and few who can be said to have formulated them.⁹⁵

Here, Foucault discusses the shared practices which people become part of and reproduce, arguing that norms and habits determine people’s behaviour. In *The International*, the viewer is also not given an explanation of where the aims behind the system come from — an explanation of how the IBBC came into being, for example, is beyond the remit of the film — yet Tykwer’s focus, and his argument about the significance of this focus, is very different from Foucault’s. Foucault writes in the same section of *The Will to Knowledge* that ‘neither the caste which governs, nor the groups which control the state apparatus, nor those who make the most important economic decisions direct the entire network of power that functions in a society (and makes it function)’.⁹⁶ Yet *The International*’s IBBC, which could be described as ‘those who make the most important economic decisions’, does direct a vast network of power, and the identities of the people at the top of the organisation

⁹⁵ *The Will to Knowledge*, p. 95.

⁹⁶ *The Will to Knowledge*, p. 95.

are also made clear. By giving his powerful villains faces, as well as families and back stories, Tykwer provides a more understandable argument about how power operates, as well as fulfilling a requirement of the film's genre, although, as I will go on to explore, the model of power in the film accords too much power to a small group of people: in reality, individuals in one institution do not control the world.

Tykwer's inclusion of the identities of those at the top of the IBBC also does not stop these men being elusive within the diegesis. On the contrary, their portrayal fits in with an ironic use of transparency in the film. Using architecture to discuss control is nothing new, as is exemplified by Foucault once more in his use of the metaphor of the panopticon, and as is explored by Trifonova in her article. Yet what is particularly interesting in the shot of the IBBC headquarters, and in the scene that follows inside the building, is, firstly, how Tykwer uses transparency and penetrability in architecture to portray characters' agency and, secondly, that he is able to put his point across very easily by using a visual medium.

This scene is also picked up on in the *Spiegel* review, indicating Tykwer's success here. Beier introduces his article with the words

Ein Mann wartet in der Zentrale einer Luxemburger Bank. Hinter ihm eröffnen riesige Scheiben einen Ausblick auf einen Bürokomplex. Der Mann blickt hoch und beobachtet, wie ein paar Banker in teuren Anzügen über ihm auf einem Steg gehen, der halb transparent ist. Ihre Schuhe zeichnen sich deutlich ab. Sie bewegen sich zu einem gläsernen Aufzug hin und betreten ihn.

Der Mann sieht, wie die Banker an ihm vorbei in die Tiefe gleiten und aus seinem Blickfeld verschwinden. Durchsichtiger könnte das Gebäude, in dem die Finanzleute in Tom Tykwers neuem Film "The International" arbeiten, kaum sein. Doch was sie darin treiben, ist völlig undurchschaubar.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Beier, para. 1-2 of 19.

There is an abundance of glass in the image which begins the sequence which Beier describes (fig. 2). Through the huge window panes which Beier refers to, other office



Figure 2. Salinger waits in the IBBC Headquarters (I, 17.09)

buildings with large windows are visible, but this sequence emphasises that, despite the transparency these buildings seek to convey, there is an impenetrable barrier between Salinger and the objects of his investigation. This is most clearly communicated when Skarssen and some of his colleagues are in the glass lift mentioned by Beier (fig. 3). The context of this scene in the IBBC Headquarters is that Salinger has arranged a meeting with Skarssen and, when waiting for him, sees him on the floor above, only for him to disappear in the lift and for Salinger to be given a meeting with Skarssen's lawyer. This close-yet-far dynamic is conveyed in figure 3. The reflection in the glass emphasises its presence and the fact that despite its transparency, the glass still keeps Salinger out. The viewer's eye is drawn to Skarssen as his head is central in the frame, with the vertical lines on either side of him framing him within the shot. Skarssen looking right into the camera when he is looking at Salinger means that we share his point of view, and feeling of exclusion.

Yet the reflection in the glass also complicates the clarity of the image. In figure 3

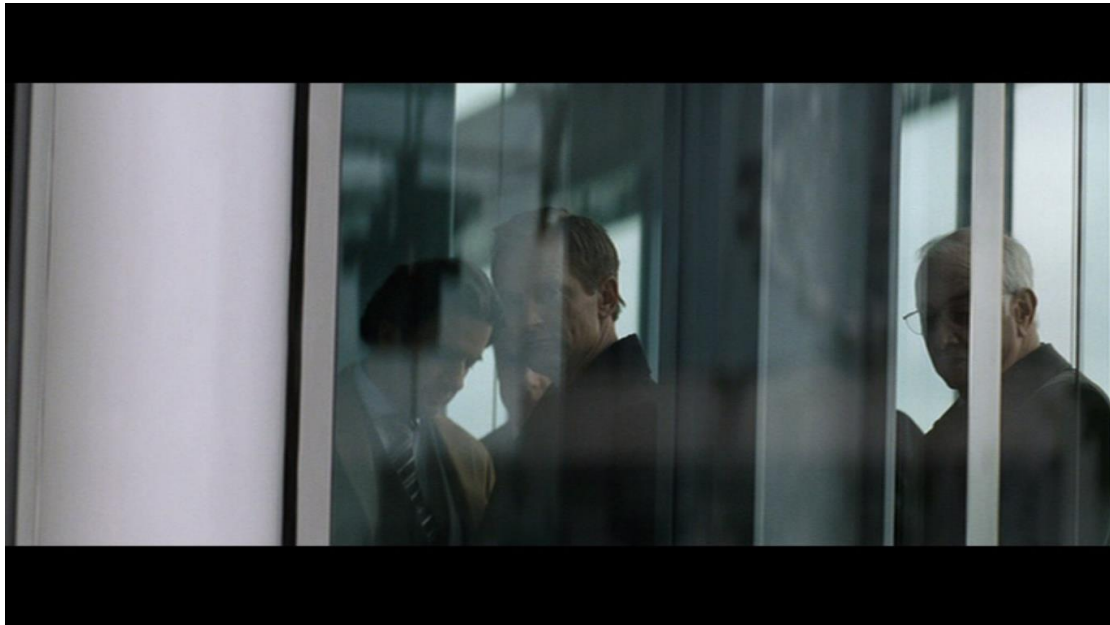


Figure 3. Skarssen looks at Salinger through the glass wall of the lift (I, 17.55)

Skarssen's face is partly obscured by the reflection and in figure 1 the viewer cannot even always be sure whether what they are seeing is in the building, on the far side of the building or a reflection of something behind the camera. This visual confusion, as well as simply constituting part of the film's style, mirrors Salinger's confusion when dealing with the IBBC.

Tykwer's attempts to engage the viewer

The fact that the sequence in the IBBC headquarters begins with a shot of other glass and steel buildings (reflecting each other, and thus making it hard to see where one ends and another begins) makes the sequence another comment on institutions worldwide, and their lack of transparency. Kammerer in *Die Tageszeitung* emphasises the importance of the genre of *The International* to this idea of a global network, commenting 'dass irgendwie alle darin verwickelt sind und davon

profitieren, von Mafia bis CIA, und die Schurken austauschbar sind, gehört zu den ewigen Weisheiten des Genres'.⁹⁸ The genre that Kammerer is referring to here is the thriller, or more specifically the conspiracy or paranoia thriller, the best known of which were made in the 1970s. In an interview, Tykwer labels *The International* a 'political paranoia thriller'⁹⁹ and discusses one of his influences for the film:

A very, very important film for me in particular relation to *The International* was *Marathon Man*, [...] more a film that focuses on the thriller than the paranoia, but still there's a company that's called "The Company" that works beyond the CIA or within the CIA — you don't really understand — and it all represents this kind of fear system that people obviously found a lot of truth in. It represented a contemporary fear, but it's now transformed into global economy representing this, much more our daily life being controlled by them than by the secret services.¹⁰⁰

This shift from *Marathon Man* (Schlesinger, 1976) to *The International* is reflective of a wider shift in the paranoia thriller genre: Trifonova observes that

while 1970s conspiracy thrillers presuppose a secret conspiratorial power endowed with agency, in later hyperlink conspiracy thrillers like *Traffic* (2000) and *Syriana* (2005) the conspiracy is no longer a secret power, but part of the very structure of contemporary global relations.¹⁰¹

The International is not a hyperlink film — *Auf der anderen Seite*, with its multiple narratives, is the film in my thesis which reflects the presence of this trend in German cinema — yet in Tykwer's conspiracy thriller there is this idea that everything is

⁹⁸ Kammerer, para. 6 of 8.

⁹⁹ Tom Tykwer in an interview with Nick Dawson, 'Tom Tykwer, *The International*', *Filmmaker Magazine*, 13 February 2009 <http://filmmakermagazine.com/1355-tom-tykwer-the-international/#.WbvXS_MjHIU> [accessed 15 September 2017] (para. 5 of 31).

¹⁰⁰ Tykwer in an interview with Nick Dawson, para. 13 of 31.

¹⁰¹ Trifonova, p. 122.

connected, and the conspiracy is on a global scale. This also has repercussions for the meaning of the word ‘paranoia’ in a paranoia thriller. As Trifonova, again, puts it:

Paranoia is no longer an irrational projection of connections between things actually unrelated; now the paranoid’s projected connections have become real—there are no insignificant or irrelevant details to which he attributes undue significance, and the connections between things are no longer imaginary, because all things are, indeed, interconnected.¹⁰²

Interestingly, ‘everything is connected’ is also the tagline for both *Syriana* and Tykwer’s (and the Wachowskis’) later film *Cloud Atlas* (2012), which shows a further connection to conspiracy thrillers in Tykwer’s oeuvre.

Tykwer did not make a thriller just for the sake of making a thriller, however. It is clear from his comments on *Marathon Man* that a large part of this film’s appeal for him lies in the fact that he sees it as dealing with a ‘contemporary fear,’ and *The International*, despite the fact that (as I discuss later on) the model of power in the film does not reflect how the global economy exerts control over individuals in reality, also has at its centre what Tykwer sees as a contemporary issue.

This idea of the appeal of art lying in its relevance to its audience is in fact discussed in the film. Visual art plays a prominent role in *The International* with scenes taking place in the Guggenheim Museum in New York and the Alte Nationalgalerie in Berlin. The former sequence has received more attention, as it involves a lengthy shootout, yet the latter sequence includes the following exchange between Wexler and ‘The Consultant’, the IBBC’s hitman, as they sit in front of Arnold Böcklin’s *The Deposition*, which depicts Christ on the ground after having

¹⁰² Trifonova, p. 122.

been removed from the cross. This overt discussion of a work of art can be read as Tykwer's, or the screenwriter Singer's, argument for why some films, or more specifically their film, should appeal.

Wexler:	This canvas appeals to you?
The Consultant:	I like the look of agony.
Wexler:	Why?
The Consultant:	Because I know it's true. (<i>I</i> , 12.49)

This dialogue is followed by a demonstration of what the filmic medium can add to this visual art. Wexler narrows his eyes, then there is a cut to a series of point of view shots from his perspective: a close-up of Christ's face, a pan up the painting and a close-up of Mary's agony-stricken face. When the camera illustrates how Wexler looks at the painting, or any audience might look at it, this illustrates how the filmic medium can add another layer of what is true, or seems true to the viewer. With *The International*, Tykwer and Singer are trying to speak to (what turned out to be) a post-financial crisis audience about their lives and to make another film which people 'found a lot of truth in'.

Specific content aside, thrillers can be an effective genre in terms of engaging the viewer, despite mobilising recognisable tropes which flag up the narratives as fiction. Torben Grodal argues in his work on thrillers that 'many thrillers and horror fictions have problems of cognitive consistency and of paranoia, as both major elements in the creation of emotion and as means of involving the viewer in a claustrophobic, non-distanced experience.'¹⁰³ The 'paranoia' in *The International* has already been discussed above and 'problems of cognitive consistency' are also posed

¹⁰³ Torben Grodal, *Moving Pictures: A New Theory of Film Genres, Feelings, and Cognition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 245.

in the film, in which the protagonists are caught between two interpretations of a set of facts, such as those concerning the death of Salinger's colleague Schumer in the first scene. Yet the film's attempts to involve the viewer in a 'claustrophobic, non-distanced experience' reach far beyond its use of paranoia and cognitive inconsistency.

From the first shot of *The International*, it is obvious that Tykwer is attempting to make Salinger's concerns the viewer's concerns. The film opens with a close-up of his face as he looks intently at something beyond the camera, which inspires curiosity about what he is looking at and thinking about. This use of *in medias res*, also evident in the first line, uttered by Schumer as he talks to the whistleblower at the IBBC, 'Listen, I'm from the Bronx, so you need to keep it simple. Why is the bank buying all this missile-guidance stuff from Calvini?', means there are lots of unanswered questions. After this line alone it is unclear who the bank is, who Calvini is, what the 'missile-guidance stuff' is and who the three men we have seen so far are, let alone the answer to the question posed. Then throughout the film, the IBBC is often referred to as 'The Bank' — echoing 'The Division' (which Tykwer incorrectly refers to as 'The Company') in *Marathon Man* — despite the fact that the viewer learns its name. This vague label, and thriller trope, reflects how little Salinger, Whitman or the viewer know about the IBBC's operations, as does the fact that some mysteries in the film are never solved, such as exactly how Schumer is murdered.

The fast paced, pulsating music which returns again and again throughout *The International*, as well as numerous other thrillers, is included to add tension and intrigue. The music also encourages the viewer to pose concrete questions. When we hear ominous, swelling music and see a close-up of Wexler's face for the first time

we are encouraged to wonder what kind of character can justify that introduction. Yet the film frequently leaves questions unanswered before cutting to a different scene involving different people in a different country: a trope also familiar from the *Bond* and *Bourne* film series. In this case these cuts should leave the viewer disorientated and curious about this film which is trying to tell them about their life, but whether Tykwer's aim to disorientate and intrigue the viewer is achieved is another issue. This is an issue which is frequently addressed in reviews of *The International*, and an analysis of these reviews is therefore necessary.

A lack of originality and ambiguity

Some critics judged that in *The International* Tykwer successfully creates an atmosphere that engages his audience, with Trevor Johnston, for example, commenting that the film is 'less about the performers than sustained subtle unease, adeptly orchestrated by the electric undertow of Tykwer, Reinhold and Klimek's suavely insidious score'.¹⁰⁴ This same score was derided by another critic, A. O. Scott in the *New York Times*, as 'dial-tone', however, and Scott also refers to *The International*'s 'rote and draggy second half' and describes the film as 'undistinguished' and 'pedestrian'.¹⁰⁵ It is clear that, for Scott, Tykwer's desire to make a genre film does not result in him doing much that is new.

A feature of Tykwer's film which has been more widely criticised is the dialogue, which also seems to impede his ability to reach his audience. Scott criticised the lack of originality in the dialogue as well as the film as a whole: he describes the

¹⁰⁴ Trevor Johnston, 'The International', *Time Out*, 24 February 2009 <<http://www.timeout.com/london/film/the-international>> [accessed 31 August 2016] (para. 2 of 2).

¹⁰⁵ A. O. Scott, 'A Bank That Specialises in Payback (and Not the Kind With Interest)', *New York Times*, 12 February 2009, p. C8.

script as ‘heavy with platitudes,’ the second half as home to ‘howlingly bad dialogue’ and the characters as exchanging ‘koans and bromides’.¹⁰⁶ In his review, Roger Ebert comments on *The International*’s reliance on dialogue¹⁰⁷ and the film is indeed very speech-heavy, both in terms of characters talking to each other and characters delivering monologues. Tykwer’s shots of cityscapes, architecture and interior spaces manage to show rather than tell and allow the viewer to interpret the images but the film’s dialogue, whilst allowing the film to discuss agency more explicitly and therefore making it interesting for my purposes, is full of lengthy explanations. One thing that the architecture cannot explain, perhaps indicating a limit of visuality as part of a complex narrative, is exactly how the film’s model of power works, and for this Tykwer relies on the script.

Philip Green, in his article on ideology and ambiguity in film, argues that ‘though ideological discourse is central to cinematic narration, at the same time there are inherent limits to the directness and forcefulness with which it can be successfully deployed’,¹⁰⁸ and Tykwer oversteps these limits in *The International*: his explanations seem rather crowbarred in and entirely unrepresentative of how people normally communicate with each other and discover information. Catherine Wheatley also discusses coercion versus spectatorial autonomy in her study of Michael Haneke, another filmmaker from the German-speaking world, and throughout this thesis I will also situate my comments on ambiguity in relation to Wheatley’s argument. As part of this study, Wheatley writes with regard to Haneke’s films that:

¹⁰⁶ Scott, p. C8.

¹⁰⁷ Roger Ebert, ‘The International’, 11 February 2009 <<http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/the-international-2009>> [accessed 31 August 2016] (para. 5 of 8).

¹⁰⁸ Philip Green, ‘Ideology and Ambiguity in Cinema’, *Massachusetts Review*, 34 (1993), 102-26 (p. 112).

The key problem in the post-*Funny Games* films is situated at the border between coercion and spectatorial autonomy. On one level, Haneke's films become more controlling of their spectators in order to preclude over-simplistic or aggressive responses to the films; that is, to preclude what we might term the "wrong" responses. But at the same time Haneke attempts to avoid over-determining what the alternative to these "wrong" responses should be; that is, to render the reader autonomous.¹⁰⁹

Wheatley's characterisation of Haneke's attempts is in line with what we find in his films, yet I concur with Ben Morgan's comment in his review of Wheatley's book that she, along with Haneke, exhibits 'a desire to force people to do what is good for them'.¹¹⁰ Her contradictory comment here hints at this desire: a spectator, or 'reader', cannot be autonomous if a film is controlling of this spectator, and in Haneke's work it is clear that the impulse to control trumps the impulse to render autonomous. His films are didactic, as Wheatley herself illustrates in her statement that 'he attempts to teach [his spectators] something about the relationship to the film-going experience. In this manner his films [...] are extremely manipulative.'¹¹¹

The International does not give the viewer the sense that there is a 'wrong' response, and Tykwer does not seem to want the viewer to *do* anything in particular, yet the dialogue in the film does not leave much room for their interpretation, and therefore, in a different way from Haneke's films, also limits the viewer's autonomy. In this regard, *The International* can be read as a symptomatic failure, grappling with the problem of how to deploy 'ideological discourse' in film.

The explicitness of the dialogue is part of a wider picture of a lack of ambiguity in the film. Kammerer argues that *The International*'s dramaturgy lacks

¹⁰⁹ Catherine Wheatley, *Michael Haneke's Cinema. The Ethic of the Image* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), p. 9.

¹¹⁰ Ben Morgan, 'Michael Haneke's Cinema. The Ethic of the Image', *Modern Language Review*, 107 (2012) 996-98 (p. 996).

¹¹¹ Wheatley, p. 11.

‘Überraschung und Doppelbödigkeit’,¹¹² despite Tykwer’s attempts to leave mysteries unsolved, and, as mentioned above, Kammerer criticises the fact that ‘die Gesichter der Gegenseite sind von Anfang an bekannt, ebenso ihre Interessen’.¹¹³ In a paranoia thriller, ambiguity and the element of surprise would normally be created by the film leaving open, up to a certain point, whether the protagonist or protagonists are simply paranoid or whether the conspiracy they believe in exists, yet in *The International* the IBBC’s shady operations are discussed in the first scene. This would not necessarily be a problem if some ambiguity about these operations were maintained but the issue here is that the information the viewer is given does not develop very much more. Tykwer seems to have difficulty in reconciling, on the one hand, his desire to make the aims of his villains clear, in order to articulate the film’s model of power and the workings of a problem which the viewer would find believable, and, on the other hand, the ambiguity which would leave the viewer intrigued and also afford them spectatorial autonomy, to come to their own conclusions about how much control the characters, and humans more widely, have.

The film’s ending makes this conflict particularly clear and is important in a discussion of the film’s lack of ambiguity. The ending has extra significance if one compares it with the ending of *Heaven*, as I will go on to do in the section on this film. During the closing credits of *The International* the camera directs the viewer’s eye towards the headlines in the series of shots of newspaper articles, which include ‘IBBC posts record third consecutive quarterly growth’ (I, 1,48.47) and ‘Former Manhattan ADA Eleanor Whitman to head investigation of offshore banking’s role in upsurge of global hostilities’ (I, 1,49.03). This technique of ending with headlines, also found in the 1976 conspiracy thriller *All the President’s Men*, one of the films in

¹¹² Kammerer, para. 8 of 8.

¹¹³ Ibid., para. 7 of 8.

Alan J. Pakula's 'paranoia trilogy', is effective in succinctly conveying how the plot continues after the events depicted in the film and illustrating *The International*'s argument about the powerlessness of individuals. The message here is completely unambiguous, however: one institution, in this case a bank, is responsible for the illicit finance of conflict in the developing world. This montage is a perfect illustration of Bazin's argument that 'montage by its very nature rules out ambiguity of expression'.¹¹⁴ This claim is not supported by every film — the shots of animals cut into Werner Herzog's *Jeder für sich und Gott gegen alle* (1974), a counter-example from the German context, are not at all easy to interpret — but in *The International* Tykwer is using montage to concisely convey a clear message.

The final shot of the film zooms in on the headline 'Senate task force to investigate illicit finance of third world conflict', which is central at the top of the frame, with much of the rest of the article out of focus and the headline of the article to the left cut off (fig. 4). This obvious effort to draw the viewer's eye to this headline



Figure 4. The newspaper article which concludes the film (I, 1,49.03)

¹¹⁴ Bazin, p. 36.

could, if the shot were in isolation, inspire reflections about the legal and political as well as financial systems that allow ‘the illicit finance of third world conflict’ to occur. Yet this reflection on these systems, which would fit in with a Marxist or post-structuralist view of the world, is discouraged due to something the viewer is explicitly reminded of in this image: the editing. The line of the credits which can be seen in this frame is the name of the editor and it is the editing of this sequence, specifically montage, which creates a line of causation between the events described in the headlines. This causation is emphasised by the decision to fade the articles in and out, creating a link between two articles as they share the screen. This simplification of reality and the resulting lack of reflection on legal, political and financial systems means the viewer is less inspired to reflect on agency, more specifically who the agents are here and the extent to which individuals are able to change the world. Wheatley argues that Haneke tries to preclude over-simplistic responses to his films and Tykwer seems to encourage an over-simplistic response here, but what the filmmakers have in common is their attempts to deny the viewer autonomy.

A film which the viewer ‘found a lot of truth in’?

It seems that Tykwer does not succeed in engaging the viewer with his thriller. The reviews above are also likely to be partly responsible for *The International* failing to reach a wide audience: it was seen by 695,575 people in German cinemas in 2009, making it the 58th most-viewed film of the year from any country and the 18th

most-viewed German film.¹¹⁵ Yet what still remains to investigate is whether Tykwer fulfils his other aim for *The International*, i.e. whether it is something which its viewers ‘found a lot of truth in’, and reviews of the film are also useful here as this issue is central to many of them. As Peter Bradshaw points out in his *Guardian* review, *The International* draws on three real-life financial and political scandals in the 1970s, 80s and 90s: the BCCI (that is the Bank of Credit and Commerce International, changed to International Bank of Business and Credit in Tykwer’s film) money laundering scandal in 1991, the death of alleged Mafia banker Roberto Calvi in 1982 and the assassination in 1978 of Bulgarian dissident Georgi Markov (who, like Schumer, died after a poisoned pellet was fired at him in the street).¹¹⁶ This is despite the film’s disclaimer that ‘any similarity to or identification with the location, name, character or history of any person, product or entity is entirely coincidental and unintentional’ (I, 1,52.57).

Other reviews indicate that Tykwer has not just drawn on past scandals; he has rather made a film that reflects reality in the 2000s: Beier comments that ‘fast alles, was er in seinem Film zeige, sei in der Wirklichkeit denkbar — oder schon passiert’.¹¹⁷ Scott’s (otherwise largely critical) review begins

A movie devoted to the villainy of banks should be an easy sell these days, and “The International,” a sleek travelogue thriller directed by Tom Tykwer, at least flirts with timeliness, winking at an angry and anxious public mood. That multinational weapons manufacturers can be portrayed as more decent, civic-minded and principled than global financiers surely says something about the state of the world.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Filmförderungsanstalt, ‘Jahreshitliste (International) 2009’ and ‘Jahreshitliste (National) 2009’ <<http://www.ffa.de/filmhitlisten.html>> [accessed 15 September 2017].

¹¹⁶ Peter Bradshaw, ‘The International’, *Guardian*, 27 February 2009 <<http://www.theguardian.com/film/2009/feb/27/the-international-clive-owen-tykwer>> [accessed 31 August 2016] (para. 1 of 4).

¹¹⁷ Beier, para. 6 of 19.

¹¹⁸ Scott, p. C8.

And Roger Ebert's review ends

Here [Tykwer]'s concerned not merely with thriller action but with an actual subject: the dangers of a banking system that operates offshore no matter where your shoreline is. We're gradually getting it into our heads that in the long run, your nuclear capability may not be as important as your bank balance. Banks are not lending much money these days, but if you want to buy some warheads, they might take a meeting.¹¹⁹

The shooting period of *The International* (September 2007 - January 2008) predates the peak of the financial crisis in 2008 but the film was released in 2009, hence the 'angry and anxious public mood' to which Scott refers, and the fact that the film was seen to be 'say[ing] something about the state of the world' and even helping the viewers to get the dangers of the banking sector 'into our heads'.

Kammerer in *Die Tageszeitung* points out the differences, however, between the behaviour of real-life banks in the lead up to the financial crisis and the behaviour of the fictional IBBC:

Wegen ihr sterben Menschen. Nicht so, wie Kritiker es dem Finanzwesen ohnehin vorwerfen, also durch Schuldenfalle, Entzug von Kredit und Lebenschancen. Sondern durch Blausäure, Gewehrkugeln und kunstliebhabende Auftragskiller.

Und weil wir hier im Unterhaltungskino sind und nicht in der Gegenwart, geht es nicht um Credit-Default-Swaps, Leerverkäufe oder andere Konstrukte, die angeblich sogar für Experten zu nebulös geworden sind, sondern um Einsätze, die jeder Zuschauer versteht: Waffenhandel, Millionenbeträge, Macht.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ Ebert, para. 8 of 8.

¹²⁰ Kammerer, para. 1-2 of 8.

The argument that credit default swaps and short sales are too nebulous for the viewer to understand — a problem of explanation — is accompanied by an argument about the difficulty of portraying the financial crisis in an audio-visual medium — a problem of representation. Oliver Stone, the director of the financial crisis drama *Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps* (2010), commented ‘I don’t know how you show a credit default swap on screen’.¹²¹ Yet these arguments are called into question by a more recent film: *The Big Short* (McKay, 2015), also a film for entertainment rather than explicitly educational purposes which deals with the 2008 financial crisis, and portrays ordinary people as at the complete mercy of the financial sector. It includes a narrator and cameos from stars who explain financial terminology, directly to the camera, making it easier for the viewer to understand. This unashamed breaking of the fourth wall, and the narrative, is a more successful technique than Tykwer’s characters explaining what is going on as part of the dialogue but McKay’s solution would disrupt the atmosphere Tykwer is aiming for in his thriller, if he had been aiming to predict or explain the financial crisis with the film. *The Big Short*, a drama rather than a genre film, has fewer difficulties of representation and explanation as it can incorporate different generic moments more easily.

Perhaps a better context to consider *The International* within is that of the conspiracy thriller, mentioned above: the ‘Macht’ which Kammerer mentions is of vital importance here. Unlike in *The Big Short*, the model of power in *The International* does not attempt to reflect a historical reality, but one answer to the question of why we tell ourselves conspiracy stories again and again is not simply that they depict reality. They rather speak to people about how they think the world works, and how much agency they think they have, as is shown by Beier’s comment on *The*

¹²¹ Jeff Kinkle and Albert Toscano, ‘Filming the Crisis: A Survey’, *Film Quarterly*, 65.1 (2011), 39-51 (p. 47).

International that ‘fast alles, was er in seinem Film zeige, sei in der Wirklichkeit denkbar’. In this belief, people are partly drawing on their knowledge of real world events: financial and political scandals in the 1970s, 80s and 90s; the 2008 financial crisis; and the ‘Panama papers’ leaked in 2016, which indicate the extent of people around the world hiding money offshore (albeit not money used for international arms dealing) and hiding information from public scrutiny. Luxembourg has even been at the centre of its own financial scandal, namely 2014’s ‘Luxembourg leaks’ regarding companies based in the country, as are depicted in *The International*.

Jameson also explains the recent prevalence of conspiracy stories with reference to the contemporary economic landscape. He argues that conspiracy ‘is the poor person’s cognitive mapping in the postmodern age; it is a degraded figure of the total logic of late capital, a desperate attempt to represent the latter’s system’.¹²² When Trifonova discusses the use of architecture in paranoia thrillers, writing ‘the inability of the subject to position himself in the economic system of late capitalism becomes displaced or manifested in the heightened spatiality of the conspiracy text’, she is drawing on Jameson’s idea that there is a link between conspiracy plots and one’s attempt to find their place in late capitalism. In contrast, Knight, in 2000, finds Jameson’s theory ‘too powerful’, arguing that ‘Jameson’s notion of the “poor person’s cognitive mapping” always finds a repressed understanding of economics’ and that ‘conspiracy culture fulfils diverse functions in different arenas’.¹²³ Yet a trend that we find in cinema in the new millennium, including in films in the German context made (unlike Knight’s comments) or released after the financial crisis, as well as in financial crisis dramas and earlier Hollywood films such as *Traffic* and *Syriana*, is an

¹²² Fredric Jameson, ‘Cognitive Mapping’, in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 347-57 (p. 356).

¹²³ Peter Knight, *Conspiracy Culture: From Kennedy to the X-Files* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2000), p. 20.

interest in economics, specifically in globalisation. It seems that not just conspiracy narratives are a result of people's impression of the world under late capitalism.

Representing individual and supra-individual forces

The phrase 'late capitalism' implies that capitalism will come to an end, and that this end will be soon, which is not a view that is presented in *The International*. The transformation of economic and social relations is shown to be necessary in the film, which is in line with Marxist arguments (as well as a range of other political positions), but revolution is crucially not possible. Adorno is a model for this sort of approach, as his idea of late capitalism seems to preclude change. In 'Spätkapitalismus oder Industriegesellschaft', he explains the absence of class consciousness with a discussion of the proletariat's integration into bourgeois society. He argues:

Ohne daß die Massen, und zwar gerade wegen ihrer sozialen Integration, ihr gesellschaftliches Schicksal irgend mehr in die Hand hätten als vor 120 Jahren, entraten sie nicht nur der Klassensolidarität, sondern des vollen Bewußtseins dessen, daß sie Objekte, nicht Subjekte des gesellschaftlichen Prozesses sind, den sie doch als Subjekte in Gang halten.¹²⁴

Tykwer does not focus on the 'Massen', or the working class, in *The International* but consciousness of the mechanics of society also seems to be missing from the film. Although it addresses the globalised nature of the problem at its centre, it is the management of the IBBC who are its villains. In this regard, it illustrates an issue

¹²⁴ Theodor W. Adorno, 'Spätkapitalismus oder Industriegesellschaft', in *Gesammelte Schriften* 8, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972), pp. 354-70 (p. 358).

found in the majority of films about the financial crisis: Kinkle and Toscano, in their 2011 survey of these films, comment that ‘whether in fiction or documentary, the temptation has been not so much to dramatize as to personify systemic and impersonal phenomena’.¹²⁵ The systemic and impersonal nature of these phenomena is then of course not fully conveyed.

In *The International*, consciousness of the mechanics of society, particularly an awareness of the system in the film, also does not translate into the protagonist’s actions, which makes change impossible. This is partly a question of ease: an institution is obviously easier to combat than a system, and a fight against an institution is also easier to convey in a film, but Jerry White, in his article on conspiracy thrillers, identifies the issue here when he comments on Ken Loach’s *Hidden Agenda* (1990) that Loach ‘directs his wrath at one specific group of individuals, not at the corrupt political system that created them’.¹²⁶ This sentence could be a comment on Salinger’s behaviour in *The International*.

The question remains, however, of exactly what a ‘system’ is in White’s argument, and how the ‘systemic’ phenomena in Kinkle and Toscano’s argument function. A ‘system’ seems to be a collection of individuals and an added ingredient. To elucidate White, Kinkle and Toscano’s uses of the words ‘system’ and ‘systemic’, and also my use of these terms, let us return to Foucault’s comments on power relations in *The Will to Knowledge*:

the rationality of power is characterised by tactics that are often quite explicit at the restricted level where they are inscribed [...], tactics which, becoming connected to one another, attracting and propagating one another, but finding their base of support and their condition

¹²⁵ Kinkle and Toscano, p. 39.

¹²⁶ Jerry White, ‘Conspiracy Thrillers’, *Jump Cut*, 38 (1993) <<https://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC38folder/HiddenAgenda-JFK.html>> [accessed 26 September 2017] (para. 5 of 21).

elsewhere, end by forming comprehensive systems: the logic is perfectly clear, the aims decipherable, and yet it is often the case that no one is there to have invented them, and few who can be said to have formulated them.¹²⁷

When considering this comment earlier, I focused on Foucault's argument about who has the power in a society, but his thoughts here are also helpful due to their engagement with 'comprehensive systems'. The Foucauldian idea of 'tactics' which intersect and remain when those who invented them are absent (not to be confused with Certeau's concept of tactics, explored in more detail later) is a useful way to think about systems, and how they can be more than just a collection of people. It is this understanding of tactics that is missing from *The International*, as is shown by Salinger's attempt to bring down the IBBC, i.e. a single institution.

Yet this absence in Tykwer's film points to another difficulty for filmmakers more widely: a problem they would face is how to portray tactics as such and how to draw attention to tactics without portraying their source. The complexities of the interactions of different tactics would also be difficult to portray in film. I have already looked at two different methods of dealing with complexity, namely the use of dialogue in *The International* and the explanations directly to the camera in *The Big Short* and this latter work is once again useful for thinking about this issue of tactics, and the wider issue of how to represent both individual and supra-individual forces in the filmic medium.

The film is not afraid to be complex throughout: Michael Lewis, the author of the book *The Big Short*, commented in an interview when discussing the prospect of a

¹²⁷ *The Will to Knowledge*, p. 95.

film adaptation that ‘the only way you’d do it well is to embrace the complexity’¹²⁸ and it is indeed this complexity that communicates that a ‘comprehensive system’ of tactics is in operation in the financial world. The individual tactics, in *The Big Short*, are also dealt with in explanations to the camera. We hear, for example, the narrator of the film deliver the line ‘Wall Street loves to use confusing terms to make you think only they can do what they do, or even better, for you to just leave them the fuck alone’ (*The Big Short*, 13.38).¹²⁹ This ‘tactic’, in Foucauldian terms, which functions so that Wall Street retains power, has a source, but the metonymic ‘Wall Street’ (and the term ‘the banks’, which we also hear throughout the film, with echoes of *The International*) creates a distance between, on the one hand, those who invented the tactics at the centre of *The Big Short* and created the system and, on the other hand, the individual bankers we see in the film. What is emphasised in the narrator’s statement is the tactic and the system.

Individuals are also central to the narrative in that the film focuses on four men within, or formerly within, the system who bet against the US housing market. In an interview, the director Adam McKay stresses the importance of these characters, commenting ‘really what excited me about the book was the idea that you were able to be taken into this really elaborate complicated world through these characters’.¹³⁰ Both the book and the film thus succeed in stressing the importance of individual and supra-individual forces rather than just concentrating on powerful individuals or an impersonal system. Considering individuals is important because it can help the viewer be interested in and understand a system, as McKay points out, which leads to a more nuanced understanding of human control, and a film needs to look at

¹²⁸ Adam McKay Explains Pop Culture Cameos in ‘*The Big Short*’, online video recording, YouTube, 2 December 2015 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NcV2FPXg5is>> [accessed 31 August 2016].

¹²⁹ *The Big Short*, dir. by Adam McKay (Paramount Pictures, 2015).

¹³⁰ Adam McKay Explains Pop Culture Cameos in ‘*The Big Short*’.

individuals because it is individuals that can change and effect change — the system does not change on its own — but simply removing individuals or an individual institution from the system, as Salinger attempts to do in *The International*, does not lead to change, and this film therefore paints a very negative picture of human agency.

The appeal of conspiracy thrillers

There is another important reason behind the model of power in *The International*, however. White argues that the two conspiracy thrillers which he focuses on, *Hidden Agenda* and *JFK* (Stone, 1991), ‘forsake their potential to be empowering films in favor of being entertaining ones’¹³¹ and the desire for conspiracy thrillers to be entertaining is another reason behind the complete inability to change the world in the film.

Mark Fenster claims that this issue of a lack of empowerment is true of conspiracy theories in general. He writes that ‘conspiracy theory ultimately fails as a political and cultural practice. It [...] fails to inform us how to move from the end of the uncovered plot to the beginning of a political movement.’¹³² In *The International* (an example of a conspiracy theory as a cultural practice) a political movement is indeed what would be needed to rid the filmic world of its corrupt network. Yet Knight argues that Fenster ‘judge[s] conspiracy theory by unreasonably strict standards of proper political thought and action which it will never live up to’¹³³ and with his work Knight ‘instead of measuring the culture of paranoia against a political

¹³¹ White, para. 21 of 21.

¹³² Mark Fenster, *Conspiracy Theories: Secrecy and Power in American Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), pp. 225-26.

¹³³ Knight, p. 21.

yardstick it will always fall short of', takes pains to 'explore the meaning of conspiracy culture for both those who produce and those who consume it'.¹³⁴

It is clear from reviews that the extent to which *The International* is entertaining is important to those who consume it. Yet one might ask what is entertaining about the complete inability to change the world which we see in the film. This inability is just as much of a fantasy as Lola's superpowers in *Lola rennt* but it is perhaps in the viewer's best interests to believe in the kind of model of power we see in *The International* as it absolves them of responsibility. In the film we see Salinger and Whitman get nowhere in their campaign against the IBBC, despite their best efforts and despite their idealism and heroism, qualities which are suggested by the names of the two American writers that they bear, if the viewers have the cultural knowledge required to spot the allusions. The viewer can leave the cinema having been entertained and thinking that there is nothing they can do to change the state of the world either, so it would make no sense to try. This idea of responsibility shines an interesting light on the theorisation of agency too. If, as argued in *The Will to Knowledge*, and seen in *The International*, the aims behind power are 'decipherable, and yet it is often the case that no one is there to have invented them', then no-one bears any responsibility for allowing a society with limited human control to come about, or for trying to change it.

Other reactions to *The International*'s model of power are imaginable. The viewer could be left with the sense that the world should not be so. Yet the issue here is, once again, the genre of the film rather than its entertainment factor: the effect of genre, as well as being affected by a film's specific narrative, is mediated by the sorts of habits which the viewer brings to the cinema. If we return to White's comment

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 22.

above, the viewer's *expectation* that a thriller will be entertaining rather than empowering is also important. A viewer who is used to watching thrillers for entertainment and watches *The International* in order to be entertained is likely to leave the cinema having fulfilled their aim.

It is important to note here that the marketing for the film very much flagged up its generic aspects, which would have encouraged fans of thrillers to see it. The theatrical poster, for example, (fig. 5) includes a highly stylised image of part of the



Figure 5. The theatrical poster for *The International*

spiral of the Guggenheim, where the film's most noted set piece takes place: a shootout which results in many deaths and the destruction of the museum. The poster also includes Clive Owen shooting with Naomi Watts standing behind him, calling to mind Godard's well-known remark about classical Hollywood film 'all you need to

make a movie is a girl and a gun'.¹³⁵ Watts is in actual fact not in the scene in the Guggenheim but the 'girl' has obviously been deemed central enough to the generic conventions to be included here. There is a tagline on the poster (They control your money. They control your government. They control your life. And everybody pays.) which does highlight the theme of human agency, yet once again focusing on an institution rather than a system. The four lines of text mirror the four levels of the spiral and the repetition of 'they control your' also brings the form of the tagline to the forefront. The image and the text seem to be part of one big set piece. This foregrounding of style over substance emphasises the film's genre and entertainment value rather than any ability it has to empower the viewer or even to inspire reflection.

An interesting film for contrast here is 2015's Best Picture (and Best Original Screenplay) winner at the Academy Awards, Tom McCarthy's *Spotlight* (2015), which, like *The Big Short*, is a drama rather than a thriller. Although this film's conspiracy is based on a true story, the popularity of *Spotlight* indicates the enduring appeal of a narrative in which, as Wexler in *The International* puts it, 'everyone is involved' (I, 1,25.40). *Spotlight*, although a drama, has a lot in common with 1970s conspiracy thrillers: journalists are often the protagonists of these films; the phenomenon which the film deals with, child sexual abuse by Roman Catholic priests in Boston, is widespread and systemic; and, although the *Spotlight* team of journalists expose the abuse, the system lives on at the end of the film. Parallels have been drawn between *Spotlight* and *All the President's Men*¹³⁶ (from which Tykwer seems to have taken not only the ending but also the phrase 'everyone is involved', consciously or

¹³⁵ Cooke also explores the relevance of this phrase to *The International*. See Cooke, p. 217.

¹³⁶ See, for example, Peter Bradshaw, 'Spotlight review — Catholic church called to account over child abuse', *Guardian*, 28 January 2016 <<http://www.theguardian.com/film/2016/jan/28/spotlight-review-catholic-church-called-to-account-over-child-abuse>> [accessed 31 August 2016] (para. 2 of 4) and Robbie Collin, 'Spotlight review — "skin-prickling"', *Telegraph*, 28 January 2016 <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/film/spotlight/review/>> [accessed 31 August 2016] (para. 3 of 15).

otherwise) so McCarthy's film showcases another way in which contemporary directors can draw on conspiracy thrillers, and other films, from the 1970s.

What is the most interesting difference between *Spotlight* and *The International*, however, is the fact that in the former the protagonists are implicated in the cover-up. At the end of the film, Robby, the head of the Spotlight team, admits that he had not followed up on an article about abuse by priests nine years earlier and another journalist, Ben Bradlee Jr., repeatedly casts doubt on the people corroborating the case against the Catholic Church. McCarthy makes the case that ordinary Bostonians did not want to find out about how great the problem was; it is not the case that there is a clear line between the protagonists who uncover the truth and antagonists who try to hide it. It is important to note here that a filmmaker's decision to complicate the viewer's relation to protagonists is a formal decision, and complicated protagonists are artificial in comparable ways to unambiguous ones. Yet it is this line between protagonists and antagonists, found in *The International* and most other conspiracy thrillers, which enables the audience to distance themselves from the antagonists rather than prompting them to reflect on the more unpleasant parts of human behaviour or nature, or ask themselves what they would do in the antagonists' situation.

The International clearly illustrates the interest in agency which can be found in contemporary German film, and more specifically the trend of a focus on limits on agency in a globalised world. This discussion of *The International* has also shown how films can help us think about agency. Films can give us a richer insight into agency if we question why these cultural products are made and consumed. They can inspire reflection on why we tell ourselves certain stories and our *sense* of agency, and why having this sense might be in our interests. Film can also help us think about

agency if we close read scenes: in the case of *The International*, Tykwer illustrates that the medium can harness the power of architecture as a metaphor for an agent's relation to his or her environment and the power of the visual, creating images which include symbolic meanings, emphasised by filmic techniques such as colour, framing and camera movements, but which allow the viewer to interpret them.

A limit of *The International*, however, is that the film's lack of ambiguity and originality means that it largely fails to engage the viewer. The bleak picture of human agency in the film is also an issue as it absolves the viewer of any responsibility for effecting change. Yet *The International* illustrates problems that filmmakers must face, particularly in the context of genre film. It can be seen as a symptomatic failure, grappling with the difficult problem of how to deploy 'ideological discourse' in film and how to represent and explain both individual and supra-individual forces. It is with these issues in mind that we can see what is important in terms of agency when we look back at Tykwer's earlier film *Heaven*.

Heaven

Unlike in the case of *The International*, it is impossible to provide a summary of *Heaven* with one image. It is very much a film of two different parts which works on two axes. In the first two thirds of the film (one hour and three minutes of its one hour and thirty three minutes running time), set in the city of Turin, parallels with *The International* are clearest: a protagonist, this time the English teacher Philippa Packard, tries and fails to stop a corrupt network, involving a drug baron and the Carabinieri, and to effect wide-reaching societal change. Yet, on the other axis, it is evident that Filippo, a Carabiniere and the second protagonist, can make personal

choices and carve out his own trajectory as he helps Philippa. In the final third of the film, set in the Tuscan countryside, it becomes clear that this is also possible for Philippa, illustrating one way in which it is possible to be an agent. Before an analysis of how *Heaven* portrays this agency and constraint on a stylistic level, however, a summary of the plot of the film is necessary.

The film opens with Filippo (Giovanni Ribisi) in a helicopter simulator, learning how to fly, and then the viewer is introduced to Philippa (Cate Blanchett) in a sequence in which she plants a bomb in a bin in a man's office, only for it to be emptied by a cleaner and for the bomb to detonate in a lift, killing the cleaner, a father and his two children. Philippa is arrested and the reason behind this act becomes clear: Vendice, her target, is a drug baron she sees as responsible for her husband's overdose and the deaths of children in the school where she teaches. It also becomes clear that Philippa has informed the Carabinieri about Vendice many times but they are involved in the cover-up. Filippo, her interpreter for the interrogations and the son of the former chief of the Carabinieri for Turin, decides to help her, as long as she gives him her permission. He communicates with her by giving her tapes and hides her in the attic of the police headquarters, his childhood hiding place. Filippo then lures Vendice to the building and Philippa kills him, before they escape in a milk van, first to the train station and then to Montepulciano in the Tuscan countryside. Philippa sees a friend of hers, Regina, at a wedding in the town and she feeds and provides accommodation for the couple in her farmhouse. Yet after one night the Carabinieri arrive in a fleet of black cars and a helicopter and search for Philippa and Filippo. When no-one is looking at the helicopter, they steal it, flying higher and higher until they disappear from view.

Architecture, cityscapes and interior space

Philippa's powerlessness at the beginning of the film is made clear through the cinematography, specifically how Turin is shot. The size of the building in which she plants the bomb alone is suggestive of power and its glass and steel architecture and straight lines suggest cold precision. We also see the building from a pedestrian's perspective, as the camera tilts up to the building's top to show the extent to which it towers over Philippa (fig. 6), and in this image the skyscraper even seems to be the



Figure 6. Turin buildings surround Philippa as she goes to plant her bomb (*Heaven*, 05.08)¹³⁷

same height as the sun, which can be seen on the right hand side of the shot. Tykwer comments on the inaccessibility, conspicuousness and arrogance of the building, and by extension of a capitalist corporation:

I thought the skyscraper needed to appear [...] as something inaccessible [...]. To me it is a classical New Economy building thrown in the middle of an older architectural ensemble. Like a destructive,

¹³⁷ *Heaven*, dir. by Tom Tykwer (Miramax Films, 2002) (hereafter *H*).

blinding wedge, it stands out and appears more important than other buildings that have been there for centuries.¹³⁸

This effect is certainly achieved in figure 6, although the inaccessible appearance is somewhat negated by the fact that Philippa simply strides into the building, up the stairs and into Vendice's office. It also seems that the narrow streets in the foreground of the image here, made up of 'buildings that have been there for centuries', are used to convey a sense of restriction. Here, the overlapping of the houses at the sides and the skyscraper in the middle of the shot creates the impression that there is no escape from the street: that the exit is blocked by the imposing building. On her journey to plant the bomb, this shot conveys the idea that there is no way out of Philippa's situation and she must go forwards and into the building in which Vendice works. Moreover, later in the film there are two shots in which the camera glides over Turin (see fig. 7, for example), providing the viewer with a God's-eye view of the city. As



Figure 7. The main title shot, with the title superimposed on a God's-eye view of Turin (*H*, 10.50)

¹³⁸ Tom Tykwer, Krzysztof Kieślowski and Krzysztof Piesiewicz, *Tom Tykwer: Heaven. Drehbuch, Storyboard-Zeichnungen, Interviews* (Munich: Belleville, 2002), p. 103.

the *New York Times* review of the film points out, Turin ‘resembles a mazelike grid from which any escape would seem miraculous.’¹³⁹ This effect is emphasised by the camera movement over the city: Turin’s rectangular blocks seem endless. Yet escaping from the city is exactly what Philippa and Filippo need to do.

In figure 7, the title of the film is superimposed on the shot of Turin, signalling the end of the opening sequence. The straight lines of the letters complement the straight lines of the buildings, creating visual consistency, but there is a disconnect between the meaning of the word and the image we see. ‘Heaven’, if we take the name of the type of shot used here to its logical conclusion, is where this image is viewed from, not what we see. What we see is, in contrast, very much of the Earth, as we are reminded by the colour of the dense, prison-like blocks.

Tykwer comments on the link between the city of Turin and a prison, stating that ‘the way the city is built actually looks like a ... it looks like a prison if you look from top of... from the top on it’,¹⁴⁰ which perhaps indicates the reason behind the setting for this part of the film. This parallel is further emphasised through the editing of *Heaven*: the camera glides over the grid just after Philippa is arrested and then the image dissolves into one of Philippa in a cell (fig. 8). Later, another shot of Philippa in her cell dissolves into another God’s-eye view shot of Turin. A parallel is created between Philippa’s rectangular cell and the rectangular blocks of Turin and this pairing of shots serves as a reminder that Philippa is not only imprisoned in her cell but also the city beyond it.

¹³⁹ Stephen Holden, ‘Heaven (2002) Film Review; When Fate Intrudes, Death on Screen as Well as Off’, *New York Times*, 4 October 2002 <<http://www.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9B07E2DF1F38F937A35753C1A9649C8B63>> [accessed 31 August 2016] (para. 11 of 12).

¹⁴⁰ ‘Feature Commentary by Director Tom Tykwer’, *Heaven*, dir. by Tom Tykwer (Miramax Films, 2002).

Miriam Meissner, in her article ‘Portraying the Global Financial Crisis’,



Figure 8. A God's-eye view of Turin dissolves into a shot of Philippa in a cell (*H*, 11.14)

comments on ‘the gridded urbanism as it is displayed in GFC films’ which ‘symbolises a form of control over space — a controlling power that can only be realised from above, by the imposition of a plan that provides a total vision of the space below’.¹⁴¹ Although *Heaven* was filmed and released long before the financial crisis, this film's shots are of Turin rather than the city of New York and the control in the Turin in *Heaven* is not financial, there is a remarkable similarity between the shots in this film and in films about the financial crisis, and particularly between figure 7 and a still in Meissner's article, taken from Charles Ferguson's 2010 documentary *Inside Job* (fig. 9). The fact that the main title shots of both *Heaven* and *Inside Job* include these God's-eye view images illustrates their importance, and the similarity with *Inside Job* reinforces the issue of control. ‘Control over space’, clear in Wall Street's effect on people's lives in New York and beyond, is also clear in Vendice's effect in the Carabinieri and schools of Turin and the Carabinieri's control around the

¹⁴¹ Miriam Meissner, ‘Portraying the Global Financial Crisis: Myth, Aesthetics and the City’, *NECSUS. European Journal of Media Studies*, 1 (2012), 98-125 (p. 102).

country in *Heaven*, and the ‘total vision of the space below’ is also shown to be a



Figure 9. The main title shot of *Inside Job*: a God’s-eye view of New York City (6.47).¹⁴²

privilege which these characters have. Maggiore Pini, the Carabinieri who is carrying out Vendice’s orders, is frequently shot standing at and looking out of a window in the Carabinieri headquarters in Turin, surveying the space he controls, and he also watches and listens to Philippa when she is in the police headquarters. As Klemens Czyzydlo argues in his article on *Heaven*, ‘the motif of state surveillance plays an important role in *Heaven*. Philippa is under constant surveillance in her cell, and there is a scene showing the police officers eavesdropping on her as she listens to the tapes sent to her by Filippo.’¹⁴³

In the scene in which the viewer first sees Vendice he is also looking out of the window in his office, in the skyscraper in figure 6. His power is underlined by his raised hand to silence his personal assistant and his out of reach position beyond a doorway, which we see from Philippa’s point of view (fig. 10). The fact that the viewer sees this man from this woman’s point of view, in an inversion of the male

¹⁴² *Inside Job*, dir. by Charles Ferguson (Sony Pictures Classics, 2010).

¹⁴³ Czyzydlo, p. 42.

gaze, and he does not see her (vital for the plot as otherwise he would recognise her



Figure 10. Vendice looks out over Turin (*H*, 07.31)

and question her presence in his office) reflects that Philippa has some degree of control here, but this is undermined by her failure to kill Vendice. Although this is partly a matter of bad timing, even after she plants the bomb Vendice remains literally and figuratively out of reach and Philippa's lack of agency, communicated in the shots of Turin, is made clear once again.

Ideological discourse and anonymity

The shot of Vendice beyond a doorway — echoed the first time that Filippo sees him, glimpsing him beyond a doorway in the police headquarters — is also significant because this positioning of Vendice reflects the protagonists' and the viewer's relationship to him: he is at a remove. Unlike with the villains in *The International*, although we see Vendice's face, we know little of his life, his motives or his aims. There is a gesture towards imparting this information in the most

humanising conversation he takes part in, just before he is killed. He tells his interlocutor ‘don’t wait up for me. I’ll wake you when I get back’ (*H*, 50.09), hinting at a personal life, but this does not explain his behaviour in the film. The viewer sees Vendice from early on in *Heaven* and thus an individual force is quickly established as part of the film’s model of power, but an effort to explain this force is hindered by the decision to preserve more anonymity and mystery than we see in *The International*. The sense of involvement for the viewer, arising from the use of generic tools, has clearly been deemed more important than an explanation here. Oliver Hüttmann in *Der Spiegel* comments that in the first part of *Heaven* ‘Dichte und Spannung in der Tradition italienisch-französischer Thriller aus den siebziger Jahren entwickelt’,¹⁴⁴ indicating that this withholding of information is successful, but the downside of this approach is that the model of power is not as detailed as it could be.

A film does not necessarily need a model of power to be effective, but the mise-en-scène in *Heaven* and, most importantly, the scenes in which Philippa is interrogated show that communicating this model is also important to Tykwer, and that he is more successful in this endeavour here than in *The International*. It is evident that architecture, cityscapes and interior spaces, and how they are shot, play a significant role in the representation of agency and constraint in *Heaven*, as does the mise-en-scène more generally, but as *The International* made clear, there is a limit to how much mise-en-scène can communicate, and this can also be seen in Tykwer’s earlier film. In *Heaven* Tykwer avoids the unnatural dialogue we see in *The International* as lots of its exposition is accomplished during the scenes in which the Carabinieri interrogate Philippa, and an interrogation room seems a natural space for a character to explain something. As Stephen Holden in the *New York Times* review

¹⁴⁴ Oliver Hüttmann, ‘Tom Tykwers “Heaven”: Die Allmacht der Ohnmacht’, *Der Spiegel*, 22 February 2002 <<http://www.spiegel.de/kultur/kino/tom-tykwers-heaven-die-allmacht-der-ohnmacht-a-183701.html>> [accessed 31 August 2016] (para. 7 of 7).

comments, ‘the film reveals (somewhat ham-handedly) that the police are corrupt and on Vendice’s payroll’¹⁴⁵: this is a reference to Vendice being glimpsed beyond a doorway from Filippo’s point of view. Yet the scenes in the interrogation room function better. It is in this space that the viewer discovers the full extent of Vendice’s influence, both in terms of the deaths he has caused and his support amongst the Carabinieri, and this film’s model of power.

The exposition in *Heaven* is aided by the fact that the discourse in this film is less explicitly ideological than in *The International*: the film does not draw on real-life political scandals, the political beliefs that can be read into the film are less wide-ranging and personal agency plays a more significant role. Czyzydlo criticises the film’s lack of references to a social or political context beyond the narrative,¹⁴⁶ but, as Green argues in reference to ideological discourse, as quoted above, ‘there are inherent limits to the directness and forcefulness with which it can be successfully deployed’.¹⁴⁷ In addition to making the discourse less ideological, *Heaven* seems to get around this problem, exemplified in *The International*, by using a case study in one country rather than trying to make a point about the entire world. In conjunction with this, techniques are used to encourage the viewer to see the narrative as a case study rather than an isolated incident: in the first interrogation scene, we hear the frustration in Philippa’s voice as she tells the Carabinieri, and the viewer, about her repeated attempts to contact them (‘I’ve been calling, I’ve been writing, I’ve been trying to get your attention for years,’ (*H*, 17.11)). Although Czyzydlo’s argument that in *Heaven* ‘engagement is rendered [...] universalist’¹⁴⁸ goes too far, the viewer can most probably identify with this idea of going through the same motions again

¹⁴⁵ Holden, para. 7 of 12.

¹⁴⁶ Czyzydlo, p. 42.

¹⁴⁷ Green, p. 112.

¹⁴⁸ Czyzydlo, p. 39.

and again without any effect, and also recognise this from paranoia thrillers. This lack of agency is not unique to one person's life in Turin and this is communicated through the strength of Blanchett's performance rather than explicit explanation, such as Wexler in *The International* listing names of organisations who rely on the IBBC.

Resistance and freedom

Despite Vendice's and the Carabinieri's influence, symbolised by the 'total vision of the space below', there is some room for resistance in *Heaven*. The film reflects Foucault's argument that 'as soon as there is a power relation, there is a possibility of resistance. We can never be ensnared by power: we can always modify its grip in determinate conditions and according to a precise strategy'.¹⁴⁹ Philippa's unsuccessful attempt to kill Vendice with her bomb is an act of resistance which goes wrong but she and Filippo evading the Carabinieri is a more successful modification of its grip. The two formulations quoted above from Certeau's 'Walking in the City' are also helpful for analysing the room for resistance there is for Philippa and Filippo, although it is Certeau's thoughts on strategies and tactics which are most illuminating for this study. The formulations, once again, are the argument that 'the city is left prey to contradictory movements that counterbalance and combine themselves outside the reach of panoptic power'¹⁵⁰ and the reference to 'a contradiction between the collective mode of administration and an individual mode of reappropriation'.¹⁵¹ These ideas of being 'outside the reach of panoptic power' and 'reappropriation' are instructive: when Philippa and Filippo hide in the attic of the Carabinieri they cannot be seen because they have remained in the panoptic tower and they reappropriate

¹⁴⁹ 'Power and Sex', p. 123.

¹⁵⁰ Certeau, p. 95.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 96.

(some of) this space. The headquarters are also shown to be not just a place where the rule of law is exercised but also a place where a young Filippo could play and an older Filippo and Philippa can seek refuge.

It is important to note, however, that this resistance, this agency that Philippa and Filippo have, is personal rather than political. They evade the Carabinieri but it ultimately remains untouched and even when Philippa does manage to kill Vendice it is clear that she has not wiped out his network. In *Heaven*, unlike in *The International*, the viewer is not shown what happens after the end of the narrative but the viewer would most likely be aware that the removal of one man in a city's illegal drug industry would not lead to its collapse, especially as Philippa does not manage to expose Vendice's activities before she kills him. She makes a similar mistake to Salinger in *The International*: he attempts to bring down a single institution and Philippa is focused on one man.

Yet this personal agency Philippa and Filippo have is not insignificant. In this film Tykwer, like Fiske, situates his agents 'as clearly as possible at [the] interface between macro-social forces and micro-histories and -experiences'¹⁵² and shows that these micro-experiences are also important, especially in the final third of the film. In this part of *Heaven*, Philippa and Filippo have escaped from the city and are in the countryside. *The International* takes place entirely in cities, with the exception of one scene by Lake Garda, but in *Heaven* Tykwer employs a familiar pastoral trope and uses the landscapes of the Tuscan countryside to enable and symbolise freedom: it is here that Philippa and Filippo can carve out their own trajectories. The section begins with the protagonists on a train, coming out of a tunnel and Tykwer comments on this scene that 'the film comes out of a dark hole and flies suddenly into a landscape that

¹⁵² Fiske, p.173.

appears infinite and liberating when compared with a city as brutally structured as Turin'.¹⁵³ It is also significant that the train comes into the light and the light-coloured landscape, reflecting Tykwer's comment on *Heaven* 'I think it's a film about redemption and somebody who seems to be completely lost who's taken out of the darkness and brought into the light'.¹⁵⁴ It is important to stress that Philippa partly brings *herself* into the light — she does, after all, need to agree to Filippo helping her — but it is after they have left Turin that Philippa is no longer 'lost' and is able to lead the way, to Montepulciano and to her friend's farmhouse. The train, like the city in the first part of the film, is shot from above (figure 11) but this time this is to portray



Figure 11. Philippa and Filippo's train goes through the Tuscan countryside (*H*, 1,02.29)

the trajectory Philippa and Filippo will follow, in the form of the train tracks cutting through the landscape, and the open space which contrasts with the built-up environment we see in the first two thirds of the film and symbolises the couple's increased freedom.

¹⁵³ Tykwer et al, p. 104.

¹⁵⁴ 'The Story of Heaven', *Heaven*, dir. by Tom Tykwer (Miramax Films, 2002).

Something else which takes place in this final third of the film and symbolises and allows Philippa and Filippo's increased agency is the merging of their identities. The fact that they both shave their heads and start wearing white T-shirts and blue jeans is normally simply interpreted as an effort to disguise themselves but it is interesting in the context of Foucault's arguments about individualization. Brad Prager has picked up on what he refers to as the 'de-individuation' of Philippa and Filippo in the film, commenting

In distinction to, say, the protagonists of George Orwell's dystopian novel *1984* (1949), who assert their individual identity by becoming less like those around them, these two desire mainly to de-differentiate from each other. Utopian emancipation is here depicted through de-individuation.¹⁵⁵

Foucault's argument that in a disciplinary regime, individual identity is a structure of social control can also help to illuminate this phenomenon. It is significant that by shaving their heads and shunning colourful and elaborate clothing Philippa and Filippo look more like each other and, despite Peter Bradshaw's comment that 'they stand out a mile',¹⁵⁶ they look more anonymous. Filippo's father, when looking for them, walks straight past them. Yet not only can the Carabinieri not see the couple when they are in the countryside, Philippa and Filippo have also got rid of the markers which the regime in *Heaven* knows about, to disguise themselves but also to rebel against and reject social control, as they reject the limiting blocks of Turin.

'The space of the other'

¹⁵⁵ Brad Prager, 'Glimpses of Freedom: The Reemergence of Utopian Longing in German Cinema', in *Collapse of the Conventional*, ed. by Fisher and Prager, pp. 360-86 (p. 380).

¹⁵⁶ Peter Bradshaw, 'Heaven', *Guardian*, 9 August 2002 <<https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2002/aug/09/artsfeatures3>> [accessed 31 August 2016] (para. 3 of 4).

Despite this rejection of social control, the fact that the Carabinieri are looking for and ultimately find Philippa and Filippo in the countryside underlines the fact that it is still under state control — ‘the space of the other’¹⁵⁷ as Certeau puts it — albeit less explicitly than the police headquarters in Turin. The sequence in which the fleet of the Carabinieri’s black cars drive through the countryside to Regina’s house, where Philippa and Filippo are hiding, (see fig. 12) resembles one (see fig. 13) from the final



Figure 12. The Carabinieri’s cars approach Regina’s house (*H*, 1,26.17)

scene of Christian Petzold’s *Die innere Sicherheit* (2000), another German film about a couple on the run, in this case with their daughter and as a result of their terrorist activities in 1970s West Germany. At the end of this film, made before Petzold turned his hand to the more optimistic historical dramas I look at in my third chapter, the black cars, presumably from the Ministerium für Innere Sicherheit alluded to in the title, surround the family’s white one and knock it off the road, killing the couple. Although *Heaven*’s ending affords its couple more agency, in both films the black cars, symbolising the state, contrast with the rural landscape, as is emphasised by the

¹⁵⁷ Certeau, p. 37.

long shots. They suddenly cut through and dominate the countryside and the frame,



Figure 13. The Ministerium für Innere Sicherheit's cars surround the family (*Die innere Sicherheit*, 1,37.55)¹⁵⁸

reminding the viewer that this space is under state control.

The choice to put the Carabinieri at the centre of *Heaven* parallels Foucault's desire, expressed in 'Power and Sex', to trace the relations of power 'not only in their governmental forms but also in the infra-governmental or para-governmental ones; to discover them in the material play'.¹⁵⁹ Tykwer too points out, in the director's commentary to the film, that the Carabinieri is 'the small representation of the state',¹⁶⁰ indicating he is interested in this group for the same reason as Foucault would be, and it is the corrupt Carabinieri who remain even when Philippa has killed Vendice, meaning she is not even close to wiping out the system, and they limit her agency throughout the film, even when she has escaped to the countryside.

Foucauldian and Certeauian 'tactics'

¹⁵⁸ *Die innere Sicherheit*, dir. by Christian Petzold (Pegasos Film, 2000).

¹⁵⁹ 'Power and Sex', p. 119.

¹⁶⁰ 'Feature Commentary by Director Tom Tykwer'.

The portrayal of the Carabinieri at the end of the film is relevant for another reason: the contrast between these black cars which swarm across the countryside and the shots in which the viewer is shown Vendice's face is interesting in terms of the question of how to represent and explain both individual and supra-individual forces. As explored above, an individual force is quickly established as part of the film's model of power, and the emphasis on a powerful individual in *Heaven* might seem odd if a viewer brings knowledge of the illegal drug industry, and its size and complexity, to the film: apart from Vendice's links to the Carabinieri and a reference to a 'deal with Leonardo' when he is talking on the phone, we see and hear nothing of his network. Yet the character of Vendice brings a face to and, as Czyzydlo argues, also symbolises late capitalism, or a supra-individual force. Czyzydlo states that 'Vendice, a respected businessman who secretly controls the drug scene in Turin, can be seen as representative of Tykwer's vision of contemporary capitalism, powerful and immoral — a vision that is revisited in his conspiracy thriller *The International* (2009)'.¹⁶¹

Heaven also stresses the importance of supra-individual forces in the final scene: the black cars are symbolic not only of the state but also of this film's 'system'. The anonymity and sheer size of the system are emphasised here, however: the uniform black and identical model of the cars keep them anonymous and when individual men, or people who seem to be men, get out of these cars, they are also identical, clad completely in black. The fact that their bodies, heads and faces are completely covered makes it difficult to discern the gender of these people, further adding to their loss of identity and individuality. The number of cars and carabinieri in

¹⁶¹ Czyzydlo, p. 48.

this scene is also stressed: the cars are mostly shot in long shots to fit several into the frame and aerial shots emphasise that the Carabinieri in this scene are also large in number. In the final sequence, in which there is an aerial shot of the black-clad men shooting at the helicopter, it is clear that Philippa and Filippo are leaving not just the earth behind but a system that limits their agency.

The Carabinieri here, in keeping with Foucault's thoughts about how systems are formed, illustrate 'tactics' which 'find [...] their base of support and their condition elsewhere' and, as Foucault describes, 'no one is there to have invented them'.¹⁶² For reasons of genre, *Heaven* cannot draw attention to the tactics in the film in the way that the earlier example of *The Big Short* can, but an understanding of Foucault's theory of tactics, as well as an awareness of the co-screenwriter Kieślowski's earlier work, can provoke thought about and illuminate the ending.

The script of *Heaven* was written by Polish director and screenwriter Krzysztof Kieślowski and his long-term co-writer Krzysztof Piesiewicz and Tykwer has identified Kieślowski as a major influence on his work, stating 'I revere Kieslowski, for me he is the father-figure (Übervater) of all auteurs'.¹⁶³ It is telling that the film ends with men with guns trying to find Philippa and Filippo and shooting at the helicopter as it flies higher and higher in the context of Kieślowski's other work, particularly *A Short Film About Killing* (1988), later adapted into *Decalogue: Five* (1989). This film is an attack on capital punishment and in *Heaven* the viewer is likely to also find the actions of the Carabinieri problematic after the way the protagonists, the Carabinieri and the act of killing have been presented for the duration of the film. Yet it seems senseless to blame individual carabinieri, particularly because of the anonymous way they are presented, or even Maggiore Pini, who emerges from the

¹⁶² *The Will to Knowledge*, p. 95.

¹⁶³ Quoted in Thomas Binotto, 'Ins Licht. Ein Werkstattgespräch mit Tom Tykwer', *Film-Dienst*, 5 (2002), 8-13 (p. 12).

helicopter and seems to be behind the operation. The act of trying to kill people who have killed is an established norm but, to return to Foucault, it is a ‘tactic’ in a Foucauldian sense and its ‘base of support’ and inventor are elsewhere. Instead, the Carabinieri here act as cogs in a comprehensive system.

In ‘the space of the other’, however, Philippa and Filippo have available to them what Certeau calls ‘tactics’ — which are discussed briefly above and which are distinct from tactics as described in *The Will to Knowledge* — and *Heaven* successfully conveys this phenomenon. The plot lends itself to exemplifying Certeau’s theory as his idea has roots in military theory and Philippa and Filippo are battling the Carabinieri, the one of Italy’s two police forces which is part of the army. As mentioned above, Certeau defines a tactic as:

a maneuver “within the enemy’s field of vision,” as von Bülow put it, and within enemy territory [...] It takes advantage of “opportunities” and depends on them, being without any base where it could stockpile its winnings, build up its own position, and plan raids [...] It must vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers. It poaches in them. It creates surprises in them. It can be where it is least expected.¹⁶⁴

This phenomenon is most explicitly communicated in the film’s ending, when Philippa and Filippo steal the helicopter. They are within the Carabinieri’s field of vision but they are able to take advantage of an opportunity created by the lack of eyes on the empty helicopter, or a ‘crack in the surveillance’. The idea of being where it is least expected is even voiced by Filippo earlier in the film, when he tells Philippa ‘at the right moment, you have to do what nobody expects’ (*H*, 46.05). There is a question of whether or not the helicopter crashes — the flight simulation scene at the

¹⁶⁴ Certeau, p. 37.

beginning of the film makes clear that there is a limit to how high a helicopter can fly — and if it does not crash, there is a question of where the couple would land. Yet it is with this ability to do what nobody expects that Tykwer makes clear that it is possible for Philippa and Filippo to be agents. Macro-social forces, symbolised by the Carabinieri, mean that there are limits on their agency, but there is space for the protagonists to act.

Ambiguity in the narrative

Another significant aspect of the ending, in this case in terms of the agency of the spectator, is its ambiguity. Tykwer refers to the ‘moral and structural ambiguity’¹⁶⁵ of the film and ambiguity in terms of how the narrative is structured is evident here (moral ambiguity will be discussed later). *Heaven* inhabits two filmic worlds: one which is down-to-earth, and works through characterisation and mise-en-scène, and the other which is more fantastical and symbolic. It is in the latter filmic world that ambiguity is created. For example, the fact that Philippa and Filippo have almost the same name and the same birthday can be seen as metaphors for them being soul mates but this relationship is not made explicit: the viewer is simply presented with this information and can do what they want with it. Similarly, in Kieślowski’s *The Double Life of Véronique* (1991) there is this idea of doubling — Véronique and Weronika are two women who, as well as almost having the same name, look identical and there are parallels between their lives — but Kieślowski leaves open what this doubling is a metaphor for. The golden Italian countryside in the second part of *Heaven* is another example of ambiguity: it has been described as ‘a landscape that

¹⁶⁵ ‘Feature Commentary by Director Tom Tykwer’.

suggests an Italian Eden,¹⁶⁶ in which the pure Filippo and Philippa are Adam and Eve, yet Nick Roddick in the *Sight and Sound* review sees the landscape as a reflection of the heaven in the title. He comments ‘the wistful, muted colours of the Tuscan landscape [are] a precise, painterly equivalent of their function in the story (a glimpse of *Heaven* on earth)’.¹⁶⁷ It is clear that the imagery in this landscape is ripe for interpretation but Tykwer leaves open how it should be read, granting the viewer agency in terms of the creation of meaning.

The ending of *Heaven* is particularly significant in this regard, as the ambiguity here, as well as granting the viewer agency (in direct contrast with the ending of *The International*), allows them to reflect on the question of how much control Philippa and Filippo, and humans in general, have. In the final sequence we see the couple fly higher and higher, in peaceful near-silence, until all the viewer can see is an empty sky, and then a black screen with the word ‘heaven’ in the middle, in the same colour and font as in the main title shot but this time on a black background (fig. 14). In contrast to the ending of *The International*, in which the newspaper articles in the montage appear and disappear too quickly for the viewer to read all the information in them, the single, simple shot of a helicopter slowly getting smaller gives the viewer plenty of time to reflect on what this ending means. There are several possible answers to this question. ‘Heaven’ could be the label for Philippa and Filippo’s final destination; the couple could die but, in a more secular or allegorical reading of the film, there could be no afterlife; or the couple could stay alive after they leave the viewer’s sight. As I will show, the way the ending is structured means that no one of these interpretations is more privileged than the others. Ambiguity is built in

¹⁶⁶ Holden, para. 10 of 12.

¹⁶⁷ Nick Roddick, ‘Fatal Attraction’, *Sight and Sound* <<http://old.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/review/1631>> [accessed 31 August 2016] (para. 5 of 10).

here. Tykwer characterises this ending as ‘an endless shot of a helicopter leaving not



Figure 14. The final shot (*H*, 1,30.11)

only this spot but leaving earth and the characters going to heaven literally’¹⁶⁸ but, after looking at some arguments that corroborate this statement, I argue the ending comes across as more ambiguous than Tykwer perhaps intended.

In the opening sequence of the film, which seems like an odd beginning until we reach the ending, Filippo flies too high on the helicopter simulator and crashes. This establishes that a helicopter won’t cope with a steep ascent and privileges the two interpretations of the film in which Philippa and Filippo die. Margaret Setje-Eilers also supports these interpretations, or more specifically the one in which the couple go to heaven, when she makes a link between the endings of *Heaven* and *Miracolo a Milano*. She refers to ‘the remarkable ending of De Sica’s film, in which the dove’s magic enables Toto and his friends to soar into the sky on broomsticks behind the final superimposed message, “to a better future”’ and argues that ‘a similar closing sequence in *Heaven* [2002] underscores De Sica’s strong influence on

¹⁶⁸ ‘Feature Commentary by Director Tom Tykwer’.

Tykwer's filmmaking.¹⁶⁹ Tykwer's reference to De Sica's film would seem to be an indication that Philippa and Filippo too are headed 'to a better future': the 'heaven' which is the final image of the film. Another scholar who agrees with Setje-Eilers on the couple's destination is Czyzydlo but his reading is more allegorical: he argues that the final scene 'can be read as a symbolic visualization of Christ's ascension'.¹⁷⁰ Finally, for even more contrast, in his review Roger Ebert disagrees that the couple are headed to a better future, commenting 'many lesser films — almost all commercial films these days, in fact — contrive happy endings. This one is poetic in its sadness,'¹⁷¹ which hints at the second possible interpretation: one of death without an afterlife.

The fact that we are not shown the helicopter crashing and the black screen behind the word 'heaven' mean it is left open whether we are seeing a label of Philippa and Filippo's final destination or simply the title of the film. As already discussed, in the main title shot we are not shown an image reflecting the word we see. The viewer's own beliefs are also important here: someone who equates death (of a person who is good or, like Philippa, has been redeemed) with going to heaven is more likely to interpret this word as the place rather than film title.

Koepnick argues that 'Tykwer's adaptation of Kiesłowski's script here plays with the dual meaning of "Himmel," "sky," and "heaven," leaving it up to the viewer to decide exactly where to locate the film's protagonists after the end of the narrative.'¹⁷² The script was originally written in Polish, which, like German, has the same word for 'sky' and 'heaven' — 'niebo' — and 'sky' is what we see before the

¹⁶⁹ Margaret Setje-Eilers, 'Princess Antigone, or Fairy Tale, Tragedy, Chance, and Choice in Tom Tykwer's *Der Krieger und die Kaiserin*', *Colloquia Germanica: Internationale Zeitschrift für Germanistik*, 40 (2007), 67-86 (p. 70).

¹⁷⁰ Czyzydlo, p. 48.

¹⁷¹ Roger Ebert, 'Heaven', 18 October 2002 <<http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/heaven-2002>> [accessed 31 August 2016] (para. 10 of 10).

¹⁷² Koepnick, p. 23.

screen goes black. The lexical ambiguity in the Polish and German versions of the script — Tykwer translated it into German — is lost in the English version but this idea of ‘leaving it up to the viewer to decide’ is not. The ambiguity in the final sequence of the film means that there is no ‘wrong’ response here. Instead, the film engages with the spectator and inspires them to reflect on the ending and the question of how much agency the characters, and humans in the extrafilmic world, have.

Moral ambiguity

Other aspects of *Heaven* that illustrate an attempt to engage with the spectator are its complex protagonist and the questions the film poses. The spectator’s relationship to Philippa is complicated throughout the film and both Tykwer and Badowska and Parmeggiani, in their book on Kieślowski’s *Dekalog*, comment on the prevalence of complex protagonists in Kieślowski’s films. The two scholars state ‘in Kieślowski, there is nothing quite as simple as a confrontation between a righteous individual and a corrupt social group’¹⁷³ and in *Heaven* too there is a corrupt social group in the form of Vendice and the Carabinieri but, due to Philippa’s crime, there is not a line between those who kill innocent people and those who do not. Tykwer comments on the scene in which Philippa does kill Vendice that

This is a typical Kieslowskian twist, that we have an expectation towards heroes and towards the way heroes develop in films and that he’s giving us a hard time by not having the heroes do what we expect them to do or what we want them to do to keep them as morally clean as possible.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ Eva Badowska and Francesca Parmeggiani, ‘Introduction: “Within unrest, there is always a question”’, in *Of Elephants and Toothaches: Ethics, Politics and Religion in Krzysztof Kieślowski’s Decalogue*, ed. by Eva Badowska and Francesca Parmeggiani (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), pp. 1-14 (p. 4).

¹⁷⁴ ‘Feature Commentary by Director Tom Tykwer’.

This ‘hard time’ involves the viewer having to think about questions posed in the film. The *Time Out* review of *Heaven* states that ‘moral, social and political questions are bundled inextricably together’¹⁷⁵ and the moral questions, which reflect the moral ambiguity mentioned above, include: Is it ethical to kill one person in an attempt to save other people’s lives? What about if justice is impossible? Can someone who has killed five people deserve our sympathy? Can moral questions be answered in the abstract or only on a case-by-case basis? This ethical cinema, with open questions illustrated by characters, can be found in other Kieślowski scripts and it is very much cinema engaged with and centred around the spectator, which allows vastly different responses and avoids the didacticism Wheatley finds in Haneke’s cinema. The answer to the third question above in the *New York Times* review is ‘the immediacy of feeling [Blanchett] conveys in “Heaven” is astonishing. It also allows her to carry off the seemingly impossible feat of making us care passionately about a woman who has committed an unforgivable crime’¹⁷⁶ whereas David Gritten argues in the *Telegraph* review that ‘her plan goes badly wrong, and innocent people die. (In the wake of September 11, this makes Heaven a tough sell)’.¹⁷⁷

Also open to debate is the extent to which not just the ending of *Heaven* but the film as a whole can be considered Christian. Tykwer’s reading of the script seems to be a very theological one: his whole statement about what the film is ‘about’ is ‘I think it’s a film about redemption and somebody who seems to be completely lost who’s taken out of the darkness and brought into the light and the light comes from

¹⁷⁵ TR, ‘Heaven’, *Time Out* <<http://www.timeout.com/london/film/heaven-2001>> [accessed 31 August 2016] (para. 1 of 1).

¹⁷⁶ Holden, para. 3 of 12.

¹⁷⁷ David Gritten, ‘A Heaven that’s hard to believe in’, *Telegraph*, 9 August 2002 <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/3581204/A-heaven-thats-hard-to-believe-in.html>> [accessed 31 August 2016] (para. 2 of 5).

above and that's where they're brought to'.¹⁷⁸ His use of God's-eye view shots could also fit in with this emphasis on 'the light from above', as well as being a convention used to symbolise characters' control over space, as already explored. Roger Ebert agrees about the necessity of a theological reading of the film, arguing, in an attempt to ask all four questions above, that 'we require theology to get to the bottom of the story: It is wrong to commit an immoral act in order to bring about a good outcome. No matter how beneficial the result, it is still a sin.'¹⁷⁹ Yet the redemption in the film seems to be reclaimed from the Church. When Philippa confesses her sins in a church in Montepulciano, it is not to a priest but to Filippo and it is not in the confessional but in the pews. We witness a wedding in the film but it isn't that of Philippa and Filippo, but during the film the new couple do reach their own state of purity. A consideration of Kieślowski's ten-part television series *Dekalog*, for which he drew his inspiration from the Ten Commandments, can shine a light on the extent to which *Heaven* should be considered religious art.

The inspiration for these hour-long films might seem to make them more explicitly religious than Kieślowski's other work yet Badowska and Parmeggiani argue that 'faith and religion are constantly invoked and endlessly queried in *The Decalogue*, but rarely do they seem to offer a solution that the protagonists can accept as final or viewers can take repose in'.¹⁸⁰ The Ten Commandments are used as a narrative device in *Dekalog* rather than providing simple answers about how one should behave. It therefore seems unlikely that Kieślowski intended *Heaven* to be interpreted with a straightforward theological framework and that he rather wanted the morality in the film to be ambiguous. His approach seems to refute Ebert's comment above, as does his comment on *Dekalog* that 'I don't think it will be a treatise about

¹⁷⁸ 'The Story of Heaven'.

¹⁷⁹ Ebert, 'Heaven', para. 10 of 10.

¹⁸⁰ Badowska and Parmeggiani, p. 4.

any moral code. I don't know if such a thing really exists, if it can function. These films are simply about life'.¹⁸¹ Badowska and Parmeggianni argue, quoting Kieślowski's translator Annette Insdorf, that 'if *The Decalogue* at all belongs under the rubric of religious art, it is only insofar as there is "a spiritual dimension embedded in [Kieślowski's] sensual textures"'.¹⁸² *Heaven* takes this spiritual dimension further than in *Dekalog* but his aim for the film seems to be similar, and links the ambiguity of his work back to spectatorial agency: Kieślowski stated that he 'would like [*The Decalogue*] to be a dialogue with the viewer on life, as sincere as possible'.¹⁸³ The idea behind the ambiguity in *Heaven* is that the viewer plays an equal role in this dialogue because they are free to respond to the moral ambiguity and interpret the ambiguous images in different ways.

Audience response

A more comprehensive look at reviews of the film helps to gauge how viewers do actually respond to it. *Heaven*, like *The International*, failed to reach a wide audience: it was seen by 446,559 people in German cinemas in 2002, making it the 81st most-viewed film of the year from any country and the 16th most-viewed German film.¹⁸⁴ Yet it was reviewed widely and a survey of the English- and German-language reviews reveals that judgements range from 'terrifically good'¹⁸⁵ in *Time*

¹⁸¹ 'On the Set of *The Decalogue*', *The Decalogue*, dir. by Krzysztof Kieślowski (Facets Video, 2003).

¹⁸² Badowska and Parmeggiani, p. 4.

¹⁸³ Krzysztof Kieślowski and Krzysztof Piesiewicz in an interview with Alberto Crespi, 'La mia Bibbia senza certezze', in *Kieślowski*, ed. by Malgorzata Furdal and Roberto Turigliatto (Turin: Museo Nazionale del Cinema, 1989), p. 183, quoted in Badowska and Parmeggiani, p. 5.

¹⁸⁴ Filmförderungsanstalt, 'Jahreshitliste (International) 2002' and 'Jahreshitliste (National) 2002' <<http://www.ffa.de/filmhitlisten.html>> [accessed 31 August 2016].

¹⁸⁵ TR, para. 1 of 1.

Out to ‘the direst film of 2002’¹⁸⁶ in the *Guardian*. Interestingly, different reviews mostly mention the same aspects of the film (aspects of the film which I have also discussed), but this is in some cases to heap praise upon them and in some cases in order to ridicule them.

One element of *Heaven* which seems to be universally praised in reviews, however, is its thriller-esque beginning, which perhaps gave Tykwer confidence to make the out-and-out thriller *The International*. As well as Hüttmann’s comment in *Der Spiegel* that in the first part of *Heaven* ‘Dichte und Spannung in der Tradition italienisch-französischer Thriller aus den siebziger Jahren entwickelt’,¹⁸⁷ both the *Guardian* and *Telegraph* reviews, otherwise critical of the film, admire its credit sequence. David Gritten in the *Telegraph* writes ‘Heaven starts out captivatingly, as a tense thriller; Philippa’s planting of the bomb takes place in real time’¹⁸⁸ and Peter Bradshaw writes ‘the opening credit sequence [...] culminating in the explosion, is admittedly well handled’.¹⁸⁹ The thriller tropes seem to be effective in terms of engaging the viewer but the fact that Tykwer did not intend the whole film to be a genre film means that it avoids being criticised as ‘rote’, ‘undistinguished’ or ‘pedestrian’, as *The International* is.

An aspect of the film which has divided critics more is the actors’ performances. Holden argues, in line with his comment above about the ‘immediacy of feeling’ that Blanchett conveys, that in *Heaven* ‘Cate Blanchett gives the most compelling screen performance of her career as a principled terrorist whose desperate act of violence tragically backfires, leaving her broken and reeling with despair and

¹⁸⁶ Bradshaw, ‘Heaven’, para. 1 of 4.

¹⁸⁷ ‘Tom Tykwere “Heaven”’, para. 7 of 7.

¹⁸⁸ Gritten, para. 3 of 5.

¹⁸⁹ Bradshaw, ‘Heaven’, para. 2 of 4.

self-loathing’.¹⁹⁰ Roger Ebert too argues that ‘Blanchett’s performance confirms her power once again. She [...] just plays the character straight ahead as a woman forced by grief and rage into a rash action, and then living with the consequences.’¹⁹¹ Giovanni Ribisi also receives some praise, with the *Time Out* review stating that ‘Ribisi is brilliant as the boy who imagines piloting a helicopter straight up to heaven, a place he already knows in his heart’.¹⁹² In contrast, the same reviewer comments that ‘Blanchett isn’t quite up to Philippa’s wrenching inner conflicts’¹⁹³ and Peter Bradshaw goes as far as to describe the acting as ‘terrible’¹⁹⁴ and refers to ‘Giovanni Ribisi, whose face in each scene looks like it’s been slapped with a large haddock just before the cameras started rolling’.¹⁹⁵ Yet these criticisms are in the minority: most critics seem to emphasise at least Blanchett’s performance as a strength of the film, and the words used in the reviews (‘principled’, ‘desperate’, ‘tragically’, ‘forced’) make it clear that she does not come across as a villain but a complex character who is constrained by her circumstances. Even the *Time Out* review recognises that ‘wrenching inner conflicts’ are what Blanchett is aiming for.

Another aspect of *Heaven* which is much debated in reviews is the film’s images, described in *Die Tageszeitung* as ‘wie aus Träumen, als wachte man auf um vier Uhr nachts und erinnerte sich an die Schemen, die eben noch den Kopf bevölkerten’.¹⁹⁶ As illustrated above, the *Sight and Sound* review particularly praises Tykwer’s use of colour, commenting ‘the wistful, muted colours of the Tuscan landscape [are] a precise, painterly equivalent of their function in the story (a glimpse

¹⁹⁰ Holden, para. 1 of 12.

¹⁹¹ Ebert, ‘Heaven’, para. 10 of 10.

¹⁹² TR, para. 1 of 1.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Bradshaw, ‘Heaven’, para. 1 of 4.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., para. 2 of 4.

¹⁹⁶ Cristina Nord, ‘Der Moment des Abhebens’, *Die Tageszeitung*, 7 February 2002 <<http://www.taz.de/1/archiv/?dig=2002/02/07/a0171>> [accessed 31 August 2016] (para. 5 of 6).

of *Heaven on earth*)’¹⁹⁷ and the *Spiegel* review highlights ‘die erlesenen Kameraperspektiven und elegischen Farben, die hier die Antwort geben’ and ‘einfachen und zugleich adäquaten Symbolen und Doppelungen’.¹⁹⁸ Yet, in contrast, Peter Bradshaw in the *Guardian* describes the imagery as ‘flatulent’¹⁹⁹ and even the *Spiegel* and *Tageszeitung* reviews agree it is ‘kitsch’,²⁰⁰ with Hüttmann in *Der Spiegel* using this word to describe the Tuscan landscape so praised in *Sight and Sound*. Another comment made by Nord in the *Tageszeitung* explains this attitude: she compares *Heaven* to work by the Danish director Lars von Trier and argues ‘[weil Tykwer] so opulent wie breitwandtauglich fotografieren lässt, kommt es nie zu der Intensität, die bei Lars van Trier zum Widerspruch treibt’.²⁰¹

Again, it seems that critics praised this aspect of *Heaven* more frequently than they criticised it but the criticisms here reflect the dangers of Tykwer’s/ Kieslowski’s approach in this film. The symbolism could be seen as pretentious, as is implied by Bradshaw’s ‘flatulent’ comment, which could stop the viewer reflecting on and interpreting it. There is also a sentimentality, a lack of nuance and an element of cliché implied by the adjective ‘kitsch’ and the idea of Italy as ‘il bel paese’ (‘the beautiful country’) is certainly a familiar, unnuanced, sentimental one, so emphasising the beauty of the Tuscan countryside, to portray it as either ‘heaven on earth’ or ‘an Italian Eden’, could lead to a viewer dismissing these scenes rather than engaging with them and the symbolism therein. The beauty here could also impede engagement for another reason: as reflected in the *Tageszeitung* review, the tasteful and beautiful imagery lacks the intensity of the first half of the film. If the imagery were self-conscious, it could function as a defamiliarizing technique that portrayed a

¹⁹⁷ Roddick, para. 5 of 10.

¹⁹⁸ ‘Tom Tykwers “Heaven”’, para. 4 of 7.

¹⁹⁹ Bradshaw, ‘Heaven’, para. 1 of 4.

²⁰⁰ ‘Tom Tykwers “Heaven”’, para. 7 of 7 and Nord, para. 4 of 6.

²⁰¹ Nord, para. 4 of 6.

redemption that it simultaneously called into question, but in its current form the images could just wash over the viewer. As explored above, in *The International* Tykwer relies too heavily on explanations in dialogue; in this case Tykwer keeps the dialogue to a minimum, which is praised by Hüttmann in his comment ‘es ist das Schweigen der Charaktere, das hier berührt’,²⁰² but here some limits to the powers of visuality are clear.

The ending of the film is more widely criticised in reviews. It does receive some praise, with Holden in the *New York Times* commenting that ‘that strange opening scene finally pays off in an unforgettable final image of romantic and spiritual transcendence that leaves you breathless’²⁰³ and Roger Ebert, as mentioned above, describing it as ‘poetic in its sadness’.²⁰⁴ These differing interpretations also reflect the ambiguity in the final sequence of the film, as explored above. Yet it is described in the *Telegraph* as ‘an ethereal anti-climax’,²⁰⁵ implying that Tykwer’s open ending seems to some like a non-ending, or a lack of commitment to one. Ebert also shares the view that the ending is an avoidance of confrontation, commenting ‘the ending of “Heaven” is disappointing. It becomes just what it should not be, the story of an escape’²⁰⁶ and ‘this is a good movie that could have been great if it had ended in a form of penance’.²⁰⁷ It is clear, however, that the ending has inspired Ebert to reflect on agency and the freedom that Philippa and Filippo should have, or be portrayed as having.

It is also telling that Ebert praises the sadness of the ending but criticises the escape, as this fits in with another trend that emerges from these reviews: the first two

²⁰² ‘Tom Tykwes “Heaven”’, para. 4 of 7.

²⁰³ Holden, para. 11 of 12.

²⁰⁴ Ebert, ‘Heaven’, para. 10 of 10.

²⁰⁵ Gritten, para. 5 of 5.

²⁰⁶ Ebert, ‘Heaven’, para. 9 of 10.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, para. 10 of 10.

thirds of the film are praised more highly than the last third. This could be related to the differing styles of these two sections, but the question arises of whether this, like Ebert's comments on the film's ending, has something to do with agency. Blanchett is praised when she communicates that her character is 'forced by grief and rage into a rash action' and 'broken and reeling with despair and self-loathing' but critics are quicker to criticise the images of the Tuscan countryside, symbolising and enabling freedom, as 'kitsch'. Does this portrayal of agency lack the 'intensity' which Nord argues is missing from the cinematography here? In a post-poststructuralist world, is a positive portrayal of human control seen as 'kitsch'? Or is personal agency, and giving up on political agency seen in this way? I have argued above that in the section in which Philippa and Filippo have escaped from Turin they are in 'the space of the other' but it is not always clear that power is omnipresent, in the manner described by Foucault: until the end of the film, we hear of rather than see the dominance of the Carabinieri, which limits the threat they seem to pose and renders the couple's agency less nuanced and more sentimental, ideas encompassed by 'kitsch'. There are some sentimental responses to the film, most notably *Time Out*'s reference to 'the boy who imagines piloting a helicopter straight up to heaven, a place he already knows in his heart' but the general trend is for critics to be sceptical of this sentimentality, reflecting my argument above about conspiracy thrillers. These films speak to people about how they think the world works, and how much control they think they have, and it follows that the final third of *Heaven* would not speak to the majority of its audience about their sense of agency, and they would be inclined to dismiss it as kitsch.

A comparison of *The International* and *Heaven* reveals a trend in terms of how Tykwer portrays agency but also problems filmmakers grapple with and different approaches to them. In *Heaven*, as in *The International*, the protagonist is pitted against a corrupt network and Tykwer illustrates how film can use architecture, as well as cityscapes and interior spaces, to communicate how an agent relates to his or her environment. There is some room for resistance in *Heaven*, but characters can achieve things on different axes, and the film prefers the level of personal choice over (Philippa's problems with) solving immediate social problems. The landscapes of the Tuscan countryside in *Heaven* are used to enable and symbolise personal freedom, although the viewer is reminded, especially by the fleet of black cars which arrives at the end of the film, that these landscapes are under state control.

Heaven illustrates a different approach to the question of how to deploy 'ideological discourse' in film, making it less explicitly ideological than *The International* and avoiding the international dimension we see later on, instead using a case study in one country. It does, however, as part of this case study, manage to stress the importance of both individual and supra-individual forces and in this film Tykwer is able to construct a complex situation which is analogous to Foucault's and Certeau's different models of tactics.

Heaven also manages to avoid the lack of ambiguity we see in *The International* and the inclusion of ambiguity is one thing that helps the film to engage the viewer more successfully. The ending of *Heaven* is particularly significant in this regard, as the ambiguity here, as well as granting the viewer agency, allows them to reflect on the question of how much control people within and beyond the film have. As well as this ambiguity on the level of the images, moral ambiguity can be found

throughout the film. It has a complex protagonist and poses questions which engage the spectator and allow vastly different responses.

The reviews of *Heaven* indicate that in aggregate, Tykwer largely achieved his aims with the film, whilst they illustrate some problems that filmmakers must face. Yet it seems that the final third of *Heaven* does not speak to all of its audience about their perceived potential for action in the world, and some viewers are inclined to dismiss it as kitsch. This also raises the larger question of how people use cinema, and one answer seems to be as a way to reinforce their sense of how the world works. *The International* then seems to be a response to this need to address the viewer's sense of agency but, as I have shown, the danger here is that the model of power we see in *The International* absolves the viewer of responsibility. Is the way of being an agent in *Heaven* perhaps not the way the viewer is looking for? Is there a way of being an agent, or of portraying agency in film, which reflects the viewer's sense of agency and is not seen as kitsch?

Czyzydlo argues that the focus on personal rather than political agency in *Heaven* is also cliché, which could add to the kitsch. He states that '*Heaven's* turn towards the personal is indicative of a broader change in cinematic discourse' and 'this change is [partly] a result of the waning of the paradigm of political modernism'.²⁰⁸ The examples that Czyzydlo uses to illustrate his point are 'transnational' films but the rest of the films in this study, which occupy different points on the national-transnational scale, are also more interested in and focused on personal agency, and the characters in them have more control than those in *The International*. They do, however, manage to avoid being criticised as kitsch, as I will

²⁰⁸ Czyzydlo, p. 47.

go on to illustrate. I now turn to another filmmaker who, like Tykwer, deals with the effects of globalisation, but responds very differently to this phenomenon: Fatih Akin.

Chapter 2

Agency in contemporary multi-ethnic society in Fatih Akin's cinema

Fatih Akin's *Gegen die Wand*, like *Heaven*, premiered at the Berlinale, where Akin's film won the Golden Bear, the prize for the best film, and it became the first German film to win the festival's top prize since 1986, when it was awarded to Reinhard Hauff's *Stammheim*. At the time of writing, no German film has received the Golden Bear since *Gegen die Wand*. Akin's success at the Berlinale had an effect beyond his own career: it led to increased attention being paid to other Turkish-German directors²⁰⁹ and these German directors with Turkish heritage were seen to have the potential to offer Germany the internationally acclaimed, auteur-driven films last seen in the period of New German Cinema.²¹⁰ Akin also went on to make other successful films, the most critically acclaimed of which was *Auf der anderen Seite*, and remains one of the most prominent contemporary German directors.

Distinct from the Tykwer films considered above, Akin's narrative feature films are (at least partly) set in Germany and have (at least some) German characters at their centre.²¹¹ Looking at Akin's films therefore leads us to consider, in addition to wider questions regarding agency and how it is portrayed in film, agency within the context of Germany and contemporary German culture. Also unlike the Tykwer films I have discussed, Akin's films engage with individual personal situations and backgrounds rather than concentrating on a system and not taking into account the different identities of people caught within it. *Gegen die Wand* and *Auf der anderen*

²⁰⁹ Daniela Berghahn, *Head-On* (London: Palgrave, 2015), p. 37.

²¹⁰ Daniela Berghahn, 'No Place Like Home? Or Impossible Homecomings in the Films of Fatih Akin', *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film*, 4 (2006), 141-57 (p. 141).

²¹¹ The sole exception here is *The Cut* (2014), which deals with the Armenian genocide and is set in the Ottoman Empire in 1915.

Seite provide an insight into the complex picture of the limitations on an individual in the contemporary German context, and the scope an individual has for action.

As in *Heaven*, the level on which Akin's characters can make free choices and act on them is that of what Fiske calls 'micro-histories and -experiences'. Gözde Naiboğlu claims that *Auf der anderen Seite* 'overtly strives to carry a political immediacy',²¹² and after the success of the love story *Gegen die Wand* Akin expressed a desire to make a film which would be 'more political and more serious'²¹³ yet it is not on a political level that characters can make a difference in Akin's cinema. Even in *Auf der anderen Seite*, which has Ayten Öztürk, a member of a Turkish political resistance group, at its centre, this character ultimately abandons her political activism.

The centrality of this character in this German film is one indication of the fact that the Germany portrayed in Akin's films is not a Germany cut off from the rest of the world: the filmic world in which Akin's characters operate, like Tykwer's filmic world and that of many of Petzold's films, is one of movement. Gone are the days of the *Gastarbeiter*, first-generation immigrants moving from Turkey to Germany for work and then staying in one place, and the Turkish-German and West German cinema from the 1970s and 1980s which deals with their lives.²¹⁴ In Akin's films characters move from Turkey to Germany and vice versa, meaning that the cities in these countries are populated by people who, like the films themselves, exhibit diverse influences.

²¹² Gözde Naiboğlu, "'Sameness' in Disguise of 'Difference'? Gender and National Identity in Fatih Akin's *Gegen die Wand* and *Auf der anderen Seite*", *German as a Foreign Language*, 3 (2010), 75-98 (p. 87).

²¹³ *Fatih Akin — Tagebuch eines Filmreisenden*, dir. by Monique Akin (Corazón International, 2007).

²¹⁴ For a discussion of this, see Deniz Göktürk, 'Turkish Delight — German Fright: Migrant Identities in Transnational Cinema', in *Mapping the Margins: Identity Politics and the Media*, ed. by Deniz Derman and Karen Ross (Cresskill: Hampton Press, 2002), pp. 177-92.

In a different way from Tykwer, Akin illustrates what German cinema can be. *Gegen die Wand* is a German-Turkish co-production and *Auf der anderen Seite* is a German-Turkish-Italian co-production; both films include, as well as culturally complex German and Turkish characters, dialogue in German, Turkish and English and are set in various locations in Germany and Turkey. Both films also demonstrate influences from and commonalities with other films and cultural products from these cultures, and from beyond them: Akin characterises his approach as ‘sampling’, stating in an interview ‘I’m a kid of the hip-hop culture. I sample what I need and the rest I don’t’.²¹⁵

The rejection of complete control

My analysis of Tykwer’s *Heaven* and its reception amongst film critics flagged up the danger of a positive portrayal of agency being seen as kitsch in a post-poststructuralist world. Akin, on the other hand, engages with and then rejects the idea of characters having complete control over their lives, and *Gegen die Wand* can be seen as Akin showcasing the potential results of fantasies of complete agency. Before a discussion of this film, however, I briefly outline the plots of the two films in question.

Gegen die Wand begins with a musical introduction, of traditional Turkish music performed by a singer and her band, filmed on a bank of the Bosphorus in Istanbul, and similar musical interludes recur throughout the film, marking the beginning and end of the acts. This introduction is followed by shots of Cahit, the male protagonist, picking up bottles in a Hamburg club, drinking heavily and being

²¹⁵ ‘No Place Like Home?’, p. 144.

thrown out of a bar for being violent. The sequence ends with him deliberately driving his car into a wall. We then see him in a psychiatric clinic, where he meets Sibel, the female protagonist and a fellow German with Turkish heritage, who has also tried to kill herself by cutting her wrists, as a response to her controlling family. Sibel thinks of a new solution to her problem: a sham marriage to Cahit, who her family will accept because of his Turkish background. After some persuasion, Cahit marries Sibel and she gives his apartment a makeover, although Cahit later wrecks it in anger; she gives him a haircut; and she cooks traditional Turkish food for him. As part of their agreement, both parties can have sexual relationships with whom they like, and they both make good on this arrangement, but they, unsurprisingly, fall in love. Their blossoming romance is disrupted when Cahit accidentally kills Niko — his friend and one of Sibel's lovers — and he goes to prison and Sibel flees to Istanbul, fearing her family's reaction to the news. The final 40% of the film is predominantly set in Istanbul. Here, Sibel starts working as a chamber maid in the hotel in which her cousin Selma works but she eventually gives this up, resenting the early starts and monotony. She seeks solace in drugs and alcohol but this culminates in her collapsing in a bar, where she is raped, and then being stabbed in an alleyway after provoking a group of men. When released from prison, Cahit goes to Istanbul to find Sibel, who was found by a taxi driver after being stabbed and now has a partner and child. The film ends with Cahit setting off alone for his hometown, the Turkish city of Mersin, to discover his roots. Sibel decides not to go with him and to stay with her family.

The plot of *Auf der anderen Seite* is somewhat more complicated to outline, due to its six protagonists and multiple narratives. I start, as the film does after a brief prologue, with Ali, an elderly Turkish man living in Bremen, who we encounter as he is walking past the parade in the city on the 1st of May. In the first act, he visits Yeter,

a Turkish sex worker, and invites her to live with him in exchange for sex. She initially accepts and moves in with him but when she tries to leave Ali, he hits her and accidentally kills her. He is imprisoned and eventually (in the third act) repatriated, returning to his hometown on the Black Sea coast. Ali's son, Nejat, a lecturer in German literature at the University of Hamburg, shuns his father and flies to Istanbul to find Yeter's daughter, Ayten, and pay for her education as Yeter has been doing. He eventually pauses his academic career and buys a German-language bookshop there. In the film's second act, which starts simultaneously with the first one in the diegesis, we meet Ayten, who is a political activist in Istanbul, at this city's demonstrations on 1st May. It is implied that she is a member of the PKK, the Kurdistan Workers' Party, but this organisation is never named. After a policeman's gun lands at her feet at the demonstrations she takes and hides it and then comes to Germany illegally to try to find her mother. She meets and begins a relationship with Lotte, a German student, also at the University of Hamburg. When Ayten is arrested, after panicking and fleeing when Lotte's car is pulled over, she applies for asylum but her claim is rejected. She is also repatriated and then imprisoned, joining other members of her political resistance group. Lotte travels to Istanbul to help Ayten, where she meets Nejat in his bookshop and starts living with him. She refers to Ayten by a fake name when telling him about her, so the new flatmates do not realise they want to help the same person, and before they can work this out Lotte is killed. Lotte visits Ayten in prison, who gives her instructions to find the gun she hid on 1st of May, and Lotte successfully finds the gun but is shot and killed by a boy after he steals it. In the third act, Susanne, Lotte's mother, travels to Istanbul too and starts living with Nejat. With Susanne's help, Ayten repents and is released from prison. Susanne has a conversation with Nejat which makes him realise he should reconnect

with his father and he travels to the Black Sea coast. The film ends with Nejat looking out over the Black Sea, waiting for Ali to return from a fishing trip.

From the beginning of *Gegen die Wand* it is clear that Cahit and Sibel have fantasies of unlimited agency. They try to commit suicide — the last expression of complete control — and we see Cahit's suicide attempt at the end of the first scene, which foregrounds this theme. In her article on *Gegen die Wand* and *Auf der anderen Seite*, Naiboğlu seeks to illuminate these suicide attempts by quoting from Foucault's *The Will to Knowledge*, in which he states that suicide 'testified to the individual and private right to die, at the borders and in the interstices of power that was exercised over life'.²¹⁶ Here, suicide is situated in a context of power relations and characterised as an act that can be carried out by an individual in the face of macro-social forces. This assessment is certainly true in Sibel's case: she is rebelling against the fact that her family's culture and religion dictate how she is allowed to behave, more specifically what she may and may not do with her body, and trying to gain complete control over her body and her life.

Cahit also destroys places, and people, but this representation of power is a far cry from the image of Philippa and Filippo carving their trajectory through the Tuscan countryside; and in her marriage to Cahit Sibel seeks the freedom that her single ethnically German contemporaries enjoy as well as the benefits of being a married Turkish woman. She expresses her desire to 'leben und [...] tanzen und [...] ficken. Und nicht nur mit einem Typen' (*Gegen die Wand*, 13.39)²¹⁷ yet, having slept with Niko once, she threatens him with the words 'Ich bin eine verheirate Frau. Ich bin eine verheirate türkische Frau. Und wenn du mich nicht in Ruhe lässt, bringt mein Mann dich um' (*G*, 1,04.21). Akın's inclusion of this threat is playful as, although a

²¹⁶ Naiboğlu, p. 81.

²¹⁷ *Gegen die Wand*, dir. by Fatih Akın (Timebandits Films, 2004) (hereafter *G*).

stereotype is invoked here, Cahit does kill Niko. In the bar in which he works, Niko baits Cahit about his relationship with Sibel, Cahit strikes him once with an ashtray and he immediately dies, in the first of Akin's sudden, accidental deaths, which becomes something like a signature in his later films. Leal and Rossade celebrate the increased flexibility available to Germans of Turkish descent in films from the 1990s onwards, in their article that covers the two films in question here and Akin's *Kurz und schmerzlos* (1998), as well as films by Thomas Arslan, another Turkish-German filmmaker who is associated with the Berlin School. They comment 'No longer do Turkish and German experiences and identities have to be singular and incompatible. They can be multiple and lived out in a variety of ways by those who identify themselves with more than one culture'.²¹⁸ This hybridity is clear in Sibel, as well as Nejat from Akin's later film, but through Niko's death Akin engages with and rejects the idea that Sibel has complete freedom to pick and choose from German and Turkish cultures, and the lives of single and married women.

The beginning of the scene in which Cahit kills Niko is also interesting in conjunction with the previous discussion about kitsch: we see Sibel at a fairground, first on a ride and then spying a Lebkuchenherz with 'ich liebe dich' on it, which she buys for Cahit. There is no better word to describe the pastel colours, sparkles and lights on the ride, or the pink icing, hearts and flowers on the Lebkuchenherz, than 'kitsch'. Yet, unlike in *Heaven*, these images are over-the-top enough to be obviously knowingly kitsch, perhaps in reference to the conventional presentation of new-found love, happiness and problem-free existence in film. Akin does not simply reproduce this kitsch, however: even whilst we are watching these images they are undercut by the extradiegetic music, Wendy Rene's 'After Laughter (Comes Tears)'. The scene

²¹⁸ Leal and Rossade, p. 60.

opens with a medium close-up of Sibel laughing on the fairground ride, followed by the first line of the song, which is also its title. The song continues, now seemingly diegetic music playing in the bar, as Cahit kills Niko and thus the music in this scene serves as a reminder to the viewer about the protagonists' lack of control over their lives.

Irony is evident in Niko's death scene: Cahit clearly does not want to kill his friend, as shown by his panicked expression and instruction 'ruft einen Arzt!' when he realises the severity of what he has done, whereas when Cahit and Sibel want to kill themselves they aren't able to. Akın reminds the viewer that whatever fantasies of complete control one might have, some things, particularly death, are out of our hands, and there are limitations on human agency. Akın demonstrates a somewhat simplistic view of *Gegen die Wand* in his comment that "“Life is What You Make It” [...] ist die Moral von der Geschicht’".²¹⁹ In both *Gegen die Wand* and *Auf der anderen Seite* the characters in fact learn that they do not have complete control and life is not straightforwardly what they make it.

Chance and coincidence

Niko's death is one illustration of the very significant role which chance and coincidence play in limiting the characters' agency in both *Gegen die Wand* and *Auf der anderen Seite*. It is important to mention that Akın is not unique in his use of these techniques: chance and coincidence are not unusual in film, and many of the issues I explore below relate to the portrayal of agency and constraint in film more widely, particularly in melodramas. The films in question here can also be seen to draw on

²¹⁹ *Im Clinch*, p. 133.

this genre: Berghahn discusses *Gegen die Wand*'s use of narrative conventions found in melodrama and argues that the film 'fully exploit[s] melodrama's improbable dramaturgy of the fortuitous and the coincidental'.²²⁰ The assessment of *Auf der anderen Seite* in the *Telegraph* is, similarly, 'at times it slides into melodrama'²²¹ and it is true that this genre, like Akin's films, includes coincidences, as well as events unmotivated by the plot such as illness, accidents and accidental deaths.²²² In my discussion of Akin's work I will distinguish between chance events and coincidences and argue that Akin's films are remarkable firstly because of how they use chance to completely disrupt a comfortable situation and send the plot in a new direction, and how they serve as a clear example of contemporary Turkish-German film using a mixture of limitations on agency, and exhibiting diverse influences. Akin also uses coincidences in *Auf der anderen Seite* to show that sometimes chance does not disrupt but, in a more muted manner, it prevents one reaching one's goals, and to illustrate that missed opportunities are a part of life.

Before an analysis of Akin's use of chance and coincidence, there is a question of what counts as chance and coincidence in film, and a scholarly debate around this, which shall be evident below. In everyday life, these phenomena are comparatively simple to define: we see chance behind events which no-one chooses to make happen, which cannot be predicted and the reasons behind which cannot be explained. Coincidences, similarly, are instances when events or circumstances converge in a way one considers unlikely to happen and remarkable in some way, which goes against what we expect and, again, which no-one makes happen. There is obviously a

²²⁰ *Head-On*, p. 50.

²²¹ Sukhdev Sandhu, 'Film reviews: My Blueberry Nights and The Edge of Heaven', *Telegraph*, 22 February 2008 <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/filmreviews/3671330/Film-reviews-My-Blueberry-Nights-and-The-Edge-of-Heaven.html>> [accessed 15 November 2016] (para. 16 of 16).

²²² For a discussion of chance in melodrama see Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), p. 136.

degree of subjectivity in deciding whether an event is a result of ‘chance’ or of ‘fate’, and is pre-determined, and this decision depends on whether or not one believes in the latter, but chance in narratives is even more complex.

Simultaneously, none of and a great deal of a film could be seen as a result of chance. None of the film because everything is scripted, or as Gerrig and Allbritton put it, ‘authors have total control over causality’.²²³ Heidbrink, who grapples with this issue in her article on ludic forms in film, argues that ‘it is in the eyes of the interpreting audience that the fictive events might become coincidental or accidental,’²²⁴ which shifts some of the power away from the author, or screenwriter, and is an interesting contribution to the previous discussion about spectatorial agency, and the viewer deciding how much control characters have. Yet the ‘interpreting audience’ do not have as much power as Heidbrink’s comment implies. Although it is true that different viewers will be more or less inclined to interpret events as caused by chance, as opposed to fate or the decisions of the screenwriter, viewers will distinguish between occurrences which are motivated by another part of the plot and those which are not. Part of an author’s or screenwriter’s control is over which parts of a narrative should mimic chance events in the world outside the artwork, and be read as chance events, thus functioning as a comment on human agency and one of the most universal limitations on it.

Conversely, a great deal of a film could be seen as a result of chance: if the viewer accepts that some events in a film are supposed to be caused by chance, such as Niko’s death in *Gegen die Wand*, then they could also read chance into a lot of the rest of the film. We could also see chance behind the fact that Cahit and Sibel survive

²²³ Richard G. Gerrig and David W. Allbritton, ‘Literary Character and Cognitive Psychology’, *Style*, 24 (1990), 380-91 (p. 381).

²²⁴ Henriette Heidbrink, ‘1, 2, 3, 4 Futures — Ludic Forms in Narrative Films’, *SubStance*, 130 (2013), 146-64 (p. 149).

their suicide attempts, that they are in the same psychiatric clinic, and that Sibel hears Cahit's name and becomes aware of his Turkish background, when clearly all these things need to happen for the intended plot to take place. If a viewer were to see a sequence of events as caused by chance, this would mean that they would struggle to find any meaning in a narrative, apart from a lack of human control.

David Bordwell explores this issue in an essay on coincidences, arguing that these events, which allow the protagonists of a film to meet each other, are caused by chance, but he makes a distinction between the events that take place at the beginning of a narrative and those that occur later on. He explains

one precept of Hollywood screenwriting has been that coincidences are permissible when you're setting up the narrative. Indeed, they're often necessary: Circumstances have to come together in some way to launch an extended action. A sudden rainstorm brings boy and girl together under the same awning, creating the cute meet, and things can build from there.²²⁵

I dispute the idea that boy and girl being brought together is a *coincidence* — as the viewer has not seen the characters before, the event lacks the remarkability to be described as such — but this is certainly, within the diegesis, a chance event. This principle from Hollywood also seems to be applicable in the case of *Gegen die Wand*: although the meeting in this film is less 'cute', in many ways it follows the conventions of a Hollywood romance. Their chance meeting allows Sibel and Cahit to fall in love, and this growing love is then presented as a result not of chance but of the relationship they have with one another. Unlike in a Hollywood romance, however, chance — in the form of the accidental death mentioned above — later disrupts the

²²⁵ David Bordwell, 'No Coincidence, No Story', *Observations on Film Art* (26 August 2010) <<http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2010/08/26/no-coincidence-no-story/>> [accessed 11 November 2016] (para. 8 of 69).

love and prevents the happily-ever-after ending the viewer would expect of this genre. Instead, this calamity reflects the influence of melodrama on Akin's work. Bordwell's comment begs the question, however, of when chance or coincidences are not permissible, and whether the chance death in *Gegen die Wand* and other chance events later on in Akin's films fall into this category.

In *Gegen die Wand* and *Auf der anderen Seite*, apart from the chance events which help set up the narratives — the prime example in the latter is Lotte happening to be walking past as Ayten is looking for someone to give her money for lunch — the unmotivated, surprising occurrences which stand out are Akin's sudden, accidental deaths in both films and the coincidences which bring Nejat and Ayten close together, but without them meeting, in *Auf der anderen Seite*. The deaths and the coincidences play different roles in terms of plot development and the portrayal of human agency, but Bordwell gives an example of non-‘permissible’ coincidences and this statement is a good explanation for why both Akin's deaths and coincidences function well in the narratives. Bordwell argues:

a plot can't replace all causal connections with a string of coincidences. If everything happens by convenient accident, then we can't form any expectations about what will happen next. And without expectations, our cognitive and emotional engagement with the story is likely to be slight.²²⁶

The films' beginnings notwithstanding, the coincidences or chance events in them are not strung together. Instead, in the case of the accidental deaths, the developing plot, with its causal connections, allows the viewer to form expectations about what will happen next, and then a single chance event, the *inconvenient* accident of the death,

²²⁶ Bordwell, para. 16 of 69.

disrupts our expectations and disrupts an idea that everything happens for a reason and can be predicted. Chance is also noticeably used as a plot device in Tykwer's films: in *Heaven*, for example, it is chance that Philippa kills her four unintended victims rather than Vendice, and *Lola rennt* demonstrates the positive and negative differences that chance events can make during Lola's runs through Berlin. Yet, unlike Tykwer, Akin frequently uses chance to disrupt characters in comfortable situations, propelling the plot in a different direction and illustrating that at no time is anyone safe from unmotivated, unpredictable, unexplainable events. Chance is used in other Turkish-German films too, or films which deal with Turkish-German characters (films which will be explored in more detail in the following section). There is a sudden death of the grandfather in the family in Yasemin Şamdereli's *Almanya — Willkommen in Deutschland* (2011), another high-profile Turkish-German film, this time a comedy, and in Christian Petzold's *Jerichow* (2008), Ali, a Turkish-German who is one of the protagonists, discovers an incurable heart problem which is also unmotivated by the plot. These films are other examples of German films with characters with migration backgrounds portraying a mixture of limitations on agency, some related to individual characters' identity and some more universal.

Nejat and Ayten's coincidental almost-meetings in *Auf der anderen Seite* work differently from the deaths, however. The fact that these characters never meet also disrupts viewer expectations but the almost-meetings do not disrupt the plot in any way. Yet before looking at these coincidences in more detail, a closer analysis of the deaths in Akin's films is necessary.

As already discussed with reference to *Gegen die Wand*, one of Akin's signatures are sudden, accidental deaths. Although death is central to this film, in the 'trilogy' entitled 'Liebe, Tod und Teufel', comprised of *Gegen die Wand*, *Auf der*

anderen Seite and Akın's 2014 film *The Cut*, it is supposedly *Auf der anderen Seite* which is centred around death,²²⁷ with the themes of love and the Devil represented by *Gegen die Wand* and *The Cut* respectively. *Auf der anderen Seite* includes two more sudden, accidental deaths, which further emphasise the role of chance and the lack of control one has over when lives end. Yeter is killed by Ali: he hits her, once, and she falls, in an echo of Niko's death in *Gegen die Wand*. She hits her head on a metal bed frame and immediately dies, the shock the viewer feels mirrored on Ali's face, which the camera rests on for four seconds, with the only clue to what has happened the ringing sound of a head hitting metal and then silence, before we see Yeter's body. Lotte is also shot by a boy who happens to steal her handbag when it has a gun in it, who Lotte happens to find again, and who happens to be a very good shot. As Cahit and Ali deliver one blow, the boy fires one shot, this time at a distance and with his eyes closed, but chance dictates that it is fatal. The differences between Yeter's and Lotte's deaths are significant: one happens in Germany, one in Turkey; Yeter is killed in her home, Lotte in the public realm; Yeter is killed by someone she knows, whereas Lotte is not. The gendered dimension here is also somewhat undermined by that the fact that the person who dies in *Gegen die Wand* is a man. These differences serve to highlight what the deaths have in common — that they are accidental, and happen partly by chance — and that anyone can be the victim.

The chance nature of these deaths, and the significance of them, is further underlined by the film's intertitles. During the first 'act', entitled 'Yeters Tod', the viewer anticipates the death, yet we are led to expect it at the hands of the two Turkish men who hear Yeter speaking Turkish to Ali as he leaves her brothel, and who threaten her with the words 'don't let me catch you there again' and 'it would be a

²²⁷ *Im Clinch*, p. 143.

shame about you'.²²⁸ Similarly, during the second act, entitled 'Lottes Tod', the viewer fears for Lotte's safety when Ayten gives her instructions to find the gun, telling her 'somebody will find you and get it,' but when she loses the gun we expect her to be killed by the members of the political resistance group, one of whom has already told Ayten 'don't mess with me, or I'll kill you'. The deaths we anticipate, seemingly set up by intertitles and the narrative, contrast with the sudden, accidental deaths which actually take place, and emphasise the unexpected nature of death.

These intertitles are one of the devices that Akin's multiple narrative film shares with other films with this storytelling strategy, and this is evidence that Akin, as well as being a German filmmaker, is part of an international, transnational collection of filmmakers. Akin also recognises his influences in this regard, stating 'PULP FICTION kam 1995 in den Kinos. Die Erzählstruktur von Tarantino hat mir den Weg bereitet'²²⁹ and '21 GRAMM von Alejandro Iñárritu hat mich sehr beeindruckt.'²³⁰ Tarantino and Iñárritu are also interesting names to mention in this context as Tarantino is an American filmmaker who also draws on a wide range of influences from different cultures, ranging from East Asian cinema to the French New Wave to Spaghetti Westerns, and Iñárritu is a Mexican filmmaker who now works in the United States and set his multiple narrative films in diverse countries.

Unlike these films which influenced Akin, however, instead of just being made up of different narratives which are connected, *Auf der anderen Seite* is rife with coincidences which bring characters, in this case Nejat and Ayten, into close proximity with each other again and again, such as Nejat and Yeter riding a tram and Lotte and Ayten being in a car at the same time on the same street in Bremen, immediately after Ayten has asked Lotte 'can you help me to find my mother?' (*Auf*

²²⁸ English translations of Turkish dialogue are taken from the English subtitles.

²²⁹ *Im Clinch*, p. 45.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

der anderen Seite, 59.57).²³¹ The parallel between the two pairs of characters is emphasised visually here: there is a ten-second shot of Ayten and Lotte in Lotte's car and through the window of the white car, with the windows framed with black, we can see the white tram, with black window frames (fig. 15). Then, as the car speeds up,



Figure 15. Ayten and Lotte look for Yeter (A, 1,00.20)

Nejat is revealed sitting in the tram (fig. 16) and the camera tilts up to show us Nejat and Yeter directly above where Ayten and Lotte had been. There is a similarly lengthy (18-second) shot of Nejat and Yeter, before the tram too leaves the camera behind, exiting frame right. All the characters sit in silence throughout the scene and the same music continues as we see both pairs, creating further links between them.

Another example of one of these coincidences is Nejat and Lotte, who both want to help Ayten but don't know it, starting living together in Istanbul. The scene in which Lotte lies about the name of her friend who is in prison, which means that Nejat and Lotte fail to realise the connection between them, draws attention to this line. At the beginning of the scene Nejat and Lotte are at the bottom of Nejat's street, far from

²³¹ *Auf der anderen Seite*, dir. by Fatih Akin (The Match Factory, 2007) (hereafter A).

the camera, but by the time their conversation has got to Nejat's question 'wie

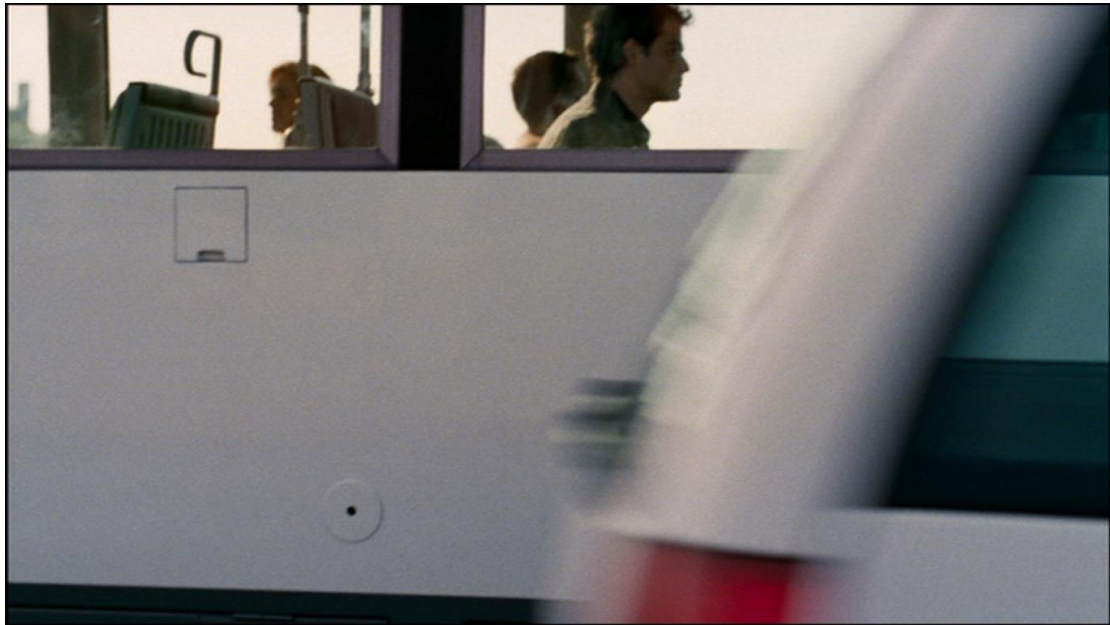


Figure 16. Nejat is revealed in a tram behind Lotte's car (A, 1,00.30)

heißt denn deine Freundin?' (A, 1,13.25) they are filmed in a two shot and as Lotte utters her answer 'Gül. Gül Korkmaz' (A, 1,13.29) Nejat is in the centre of the frame, with the viewer's eye led to his blank expression as he fails to recognise the name. Before the next shot, the camera has zoomed out again and frames the characters in a long shot, further underlining the importance of the exchange that has just taken place. The attention the camera gives to the coincidences throughout *Auf der anderen Seite* adds to it being set up as a film centred around the search for a person, and the missed opportunities seem to represent obstacles to this goal, and limitations to the characters' agency.

Although Akin does not make the mistake explored above, of stringing coincidences together, his approach here has the potential to undermine his portrayal of agency, by being too contrived and unbelievable. As Philip French puts it in the *Observer* review of *Auf der anderen Seite*:

Coincidences in so-called real life fascinate us. We collect and happily share them as they make life seem less random. We are, however, deeply suspicious of coincidences in fiction and drama, despite their recurrence in the literature of the past from Sophocles through Shakespeare to Dickens. We feel that those who create stories, rather than living them, should not cheapen serious work with such melodramatic contrivances.²³²

This attitude is reflected in some other reviews of *Auf der anderen Seite*: Dave Calhoun in the *Time Out* review writes ‘there’s no escaping the contrivances of Akin’s script’²³³ and Peter Bradshaw in the *Guardian* comments ‘the web of happenstance and dramatic reversals of fortune may teeter on the brink of unbelievability’.²³⁴ As well as the fact that there are coincidences, the number of them and the fact that Nejat and Ayten fail to realise their proximity to each other every single time makes the plot seem more contrived.

Something which makes the plot ‘teeter on the brink of unbelievability’ rather than be dismissed as utterly implausible, however, is the fact that the coincidences, these almost-meetings, do not affect the plot. After Lotte and Ayten drive past Nejat and Yeter in the example above, or after the scene in which Ayten sleeps in one of Nejat’s lectures in Hamburg before he goes to Istanbul to look for her, the narrative goes on as if these coincidences had never happened. Bordwell, again, comments ‘the Hollywood wisdom goes, don’t use a coincidence to develop or resolve the plot’²³⁵ and this seems to be a guide that Akin is following here: these coincidences do not take us to the happy ending we expect. Despite their coincidental proximity

²³² Philip French, ‘The Edge of Heaven’, *Observer*, 24 February 2008 <<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2008/feb/24/drama.worldcinema>> [accessed 10 November 2016] (para. 1 of 7).

²³³ Dave Calhoun, ‘The Edge of Heaven’, *Time Out*, 18 February 2008 <<http://www.timeout.com/london/film/the-edge-of-heaven>> [accessed 10 November 2016] (para. 4 of 4).

²³⁴ Peter Bradshaw, ‘The Edge of Heaven’, *Guardian*, 22 February 2008 <<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2008/feb/22/worldcinema.drama>> [accessed 10 November 2016] (para. 4 of 6).

²³⁵ Bordwell, para. 9 of 69.

throughout the film, Nejat continues to fail to find Ayten and he never does find her but this lack of success and the coincidences turn out not to matter. As is revealed at the end of the film, it is more important that Nejat goes on a different quest for himself, to be reunited with his father.

Throughout the film, Nejat and Ayten are oblivious to their coincidental proximity to each other, and the opportunities they miss to meet each other. The coincidences and missed opportunities do not make any difference to character development, or to the plot, as mentioned above. They only affect the viewer. Roger Ebert comments on and praises this aspect of the film in his review:

This is one of those films of interlocking narrative strands, called a hyperlink movie, but the strands never link. True, they link for us, because we possess crucial information about the characters -- but they never link for the characters, because they lack that information. I liked it that way.²³⁶

The effect, and perhaps the appeal, of this technique is that it makes space for the viewer, and in order not to just be frustrated by the film the viewer needs to realise that missed opportunities are a part of life, and do not mean that one cannot, to a certain extent, be the author of one's own destiny. Indeed, it is only by recognising and accepting these limits that one can become an agent. This is not quite what we see the characters doing as they are not aware of these missed opportunities, but an acceptance of these limits is apparent in Nejat's decision to leave Istanbul and look for his father.

The need to engage with one's background

²³⁶ Roger Ebert, 'The Edge of Heaven', 12 June 2008 <<http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/the-edge-of-heaven-2008>> [accessed 19 October 2016] (para. 1 of 10).

In Akin's cinema, engaging with one's background is also essential to becoming an agent. One meaning of 'background' here is cultural background: Sibel, Cahit and Nejat all end up in Turkey at the end of the films, despite having lived in Germany for most or all of their lives.²³⁷ What is more, these are not isolated incidents in the landscape of contemporary cinema by Turkish-German directors, and German films which deal, at least in part, with characters with a migration background. Akin's *Kurz und schmerzlos* and *Solino* (2002) both include Germans with migration backgrounds who move to the country their parents are from or they themselves have come from as children: in the former, German-born Gabriel sets off for his parents' homeland of Turkey at the end of the film and in *Solino* Italian-born Gigi, who moved to Germany as a child, moves back to his hometown as an adult. Similarly, *Almanya — Willkommen in Deutschland* ends with Muhamed, who moved from Turkey to Germany as a child, deciding as an adult to stay in Turkey after a family trip to the country; and in *Jerichow*, Ali, who we learn moved from Turkey to Germany at the age of two, plans to spend his retirement there.

These narratives could seem like very conservative presentations of the freedom Turkish-Germans, and other Germans with migration backgrounds, have to dictate their life paths, and Katja Nicodemus, in the *Zeit* review of *Auf der anderen Seite* indeed discusses the wider ramifications of the portrayal of Nejat. She comments that the film '[liefert] der Integrationsdebatte eine hübsche Pointe, wenn Nejat, der als Germanistikprofessor sozusagen den Superjoker der sozialen Migrantenskala gezogen

²³⁷ Cahit is a first-generation immigrant, born in Turkey, who moved to Germany at a young age, and Sibel is a second-generation immigrant, born in Germany. In *Auf der anderen Seite*, it is not stated which of these categories Nejat belongs to, but the implication is that he is German-born.

hat, plötzlich Heimatgefühle entdeckt und in Istanbul bleiben will'.²³⁸ Yet there is a debate amongst scholars about the extent to which Akin's characters must try and fail to find a home. Daniela Berghahn's article entitled 'No Place Like Home? Or Impossible Homecomings in the Films of Fatih Akin' makes her position clear, and at the other end of the scale is Vuslat Demirkoparan, and her book chapter 'Identity and the Politics of Space: Fatih Akin's *The Edge of Heaven*', in which she argues that this film 'destabilizes essentialist tendencies as it situates spectators at the interstices of multiple and fragmented linguistic, religious, ethnic, generational and stylistic contexts'.²³⁹ I will engage with both of these critics but argue that, in both of the films in question, in order to act in the world Akin's characters must engage with their backgrounds, but backgrounds that do actually form part of their experiences and identity. Akin makes a distinction between Turkish culture, particularly that of cosmopolitan Istanbul, to which his Turkish-German characters have been exposed, and the culture of their parents and ancestors, which would only form part of their identity if one has a very essentialist understanding of the concept.

To return to Nicodemus's comment, Istanbul is not simply Nejat's *Heimat*: Akin points out that 'Die Türkei ist eben nicht die Herkunft der Figuren meiner Filme. Sie kommen aus Deutschland. Die Türkei ist etwas Fremdes.'²⁴⁰ This comment was made in an interview conducted after *Gegen die Wand* was released but it is true for Nejat in Akin's later film, as well as for Lotte and Susanne. It is also true for the characters in *Kurz und schmerzlos*, *Solino*, *Almanya — Willkommen in Deutschland*

²³⁸ Katja Nicodemus, 'Zwei Särge und die Liebe', *Die Zeit*, 26 September 2007 <<http://www.zeit.de/2007/40/Fatih-Akin-Film>> [accessed 13 October 2016] (para. 10 of 12).

²³⁹ Vuslat Demirkoparan, 'Identity and the Politics of Space: Fatih Akin's *The Edge of Heaven*', in *Postcolonial Film: History, Empire, Resistance*, ed. by Rebecca Weaver-Hightower and Peter Hulme (New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 201-22 (p. 201).

²⁴⁰ Akin, interviewed by artechock.

and *Jerichow*, mentioned above. By travelling to Turkey — or Italy in Gigi's case — they are attempting to discover something new.

It is also important to stress the exact locations of the Turkish-German characters at the end of Akin's two films. They all have familial roots in Turkish cities to the east of Istanbul, but the films do not provide a picture of Turkish-Germans having no choice but to return to their ancestral roots, in order to fully understand themselves and be able to act in the world. At the end of *Gegen die Wand*, Cahit is on his way to Mersin, where he was born — and below I discuss how Akin presents this venture's likelihood of success — but in *Sibel* and *Nejat* Akin provides alternatives to this narrative of attempted self-discovery. *Sibel* has no desire to go to Zonguldak, where her family is from, and stays in the relatively cosmopolitan Istanbul. Berghahn stresses this cosmopolitanism in her reference to Akin's music documentary *Crossing the Bridge: The Sound of Istanbul* (2005), which 'makes the point that Istanbul is, indeed, the bridge between East and West, a multi-cultural melting pot in which diverse musical traditions and cultural influences happily exist'.²⁴¹ This easy co-existence can be seen in *Gegen die Wand* too: the Marmara Hotel, in which Selma works, encapsulates this with its slogan 'Turkish Hospitality, European Style', shown in close-up. Yet even Istanbul is not *Sibel's Heimat* from the beginning, although she later makes it her home: soon after her arrival, she is greeted with the words 'you're not from around here, are you?' (G, 1,20.22) in a fast food restaurant, when she, with her short hair, bomber jacket and combat trousers, sits down next to two young men and attempts to join their conversation, not conforming to a Turkish idea of how women should look or behave. In the instance of *Auf der anderen Seite*, at the end of the film and in a scene, later repeated, which functions as the film's prologue, we see

²⁴¹ 'No Place Like Home?', p. 142.

Nejat in the Black Sea region, having travelled to where Ali grew up, but he has come here to forgive his father rather than to discover his familial roots. As Demirkoparan argues, ‘any relationship with this place and its supposedly autochthonous culture has been severed so much that it cannot function as a source of authentic revelation about Nejat’s being [...] He is a German with a Turkish name’.²⁴²

A close reading of the scene that both begins *Auf der anderen Seite* and is repeated towards its end, which is of extra importance as it is the only repeated scene in the film, supports Demirkoparan’s argument and serves as a rebuttal to the idea that descendants of immigrants need to follow their family line back to an ancestral *Heimat*. In this sequence Nejat is on his way to Trabzon, to see Ali, and stops at a petrol station in the Black Sea region. A cultural product from this region, the song ‘Ben Seni Sevdugumi’ by Kazım Koyuncu and Seval Sam, is foregrounded, playing before the viewer even sees Nejat, and the link between the music and Nejat’s surroundings is emphasised as the film begins with the camera slowly panning across the scene with the music in the background, as if it is fitting extra-diegetic music for this setting. Nejat walks into the shop at the petrol station and the music becomes louder, signalling that it is, in fact, diegetic and there is the following exchange:

Nejat:	What’s the music?
Shopkeeper:	It’s Kazım Koyuncu. Don’t you know him?
Nejat:	No.
Shopkeeper:	His music’s very popular here on the Black Sea coast.
Nejat:	I’ve never heard of him.
(A, 01.18 - 01.30)	

The phrase ‘here on the Black Sea coast’ is rather contrived, but Akın puts his point across from the beginning of the film. The setting is the Black Sea coast and the

²⁴² Demirkoparan, p. 212.

character, literally and metaphorically foregrounded in a medium close-up, with the shopkeeper in the background, is not from here. Demirkoparan's assessment of this scene is a little extreme: she states that 'Nejat remains indifferent. He neither knows anything about his father's homeland nor cares to learn'.²⁴³ By 'homeland' Demirkoparan means the Black Sea region rather than Turkey as a whole and Nejat's 'indifference' is a little overstated but we are shown unequivocally that this is not Nejat's culture and he has a limited interest in it: he asks about the music, but he keeps his back to the shopkeeper for the majority of the conversation. Akin shows the viewer from the very beginning that this is not a film about homecoming, and the idea that his characters have no choice but to come home.

Yet, although Akin claims, whilst discussing Sibel's move to Turkey, 'mich interessiert nicht der Ort, sondern der Zustand',²⁴⁴ it is no coincidence that all of his Turkish-German characters find themselves in the country where they, or their parents, were born at the end of the narrative rather than another foreign land. Leal and Rossade state that Akin 'insists on the continued relevance of a bi-cultural heritage to constructions of 'hyphenated' identities in contemporary Germany'.²⁴⁵

It is made clear in the first act of *Auf der anderen Seite*, the majority of which is set in contemporary Germany, that although Nejat has navigated German society more successfully than the two Turkish-German characters in *Gegen die Wand*, he has not, like Cahit, ignored his ethnic background. Nejat does not feel a particular connection to his father's region, but Demirkoparan's comment 'he is German with a Turkish name' oversimplifies the situation. Cahit speaks terrible Turkish; does not know what is expected of him at a Turkish wedding; and refers to other Turks as 'Scheiß Kanaken' whereas Nejat speaks fluent Turkish; reads Turkish literature, as is

²⁴³ Demirkoparan, p. 212.

²⁴⁴ Akin, interviewed by artechock.

²⁴⁵ Leal and Rossade, p. 85.

made clear by the book he gives to his father; and eats Turkish food. Nejat does feel a connection with Turkish culture and the easy hybridity we see in this character is even presented as a possible reason behind his success in Germany. Yet when Nejat's comfortable life is disrupted by his father's act of manslaughter, it is a reminder of his father's culture, the stories that are part of it and a conversation about one of these stories which inspire him to take his life in a different direction. If we consider the scene in which Nejat makes the decision to go to the Black Sea coast, the importance of his cultural background is clear.

The scene begins with shots of different minarets in Istanbul, with the sound of a call to prayer in the background, and a shot of men walking down the steps opposite Nejat's apartment. Nejat looks somewhat downcast and distant, presumably because, as it transpires, the festival and the story behind it remind him of his estranged father, and he explains to Susanne that the local men are going to the mosque to celebrate Bayram, the Festival of Sacrifice. It should be noted that this scene directly precedes the one in which the shopkeeper on the Black Sea coast explains his culture to Nejat, and the juxtaposition of these two scenes underlines what is and is not part of Nejat's cultural background. He then tells Susanne that he was afraid of the story behind this festival as a child but his father assured him that he would not sacrifice him if he were in Ibrahim's position, and would be prepared to make God his enemy in order to protect him. Before Nejat asks Susanne whether she can look after his bookshop for a few days, signalling that he has decided to go to find Ali, the camera follows three men as they walk down the steps to the mosque. The man in the centre of the screen and at the front of the group is roughly the same age as Ali (fig. 17), reminding Nejat of his father and that this is his father's culture, as well as part of his background.



Figure 17. Local men go to the mosque to celebrate Bayram (A, 1,40.46)

To return to Nicodemus's comment once again, *Auf der anderen Seite* leaves open whether Nejat wants to remain in Istanbul forever, but in Turkey, the Turkish-German protagonists can simultaneously learn something new and something about themselves and a culture which is already part of their identity, to add to their sense of self gained from living in Germany.

Akın, along with the other filmmakers mentioned above, does not seem to believe that everyone with Turkish heritage should be 'returning' to Turkey, however. Ali and Yeter, who unlike Nejat, Cahit and Sibel have grown up in and already got to know Turkey and Turkish culture, do not seem to have any desire to return, and when they do it is a result of their repatriation and death, respectively. This inverts the desires one might expect of the younger and older generations, in light of Akın's comment that

There is something which I repeatedly observe with Turks of the second generation and also with myself. I definitely do not have the same temperament as my parents or as Turks who live in Turkey. The

temperament of the motherland gets lost with the second generation, it melts with the German spirit.²⁴⁶

This supposed difference in temperament suggests a disconnect from and potential disinterest in the ‘motherland’. Yet Akin’s comment underlines the fact that the younger Turkish-Germans’ need to engage with their backgrounds in his films stems partly from a need to discover something new.

Akin also does not show us characters whose problems are completely solved by moving to Turkey, or connecting with their pasts. This move is rather part of a process. Berghahn, like Nicodemus, uses the word ‘Heimat’ to explain what Akin’s protagonists are looking for but she describes it as ‘a structuring absence as well as a utopian promise’.²⁴⁷ The idea that a place where the characters can feel completely at home is unattainable is also evident in her comment that *Gegen die Wand* ‘remains ambiguous about the redemptive promise of Cahit’s return to his cultural roots’.²⁴⁸ I will return to this ambiguity later as it is significant in terms of the viewer’s agency but what is important at this stage is that it is questionable whether Cahit, who is a ‘German with a Turkish name’ to a greater extent than Nejat, would feel at home in Mersin. Looking to the end of Akin’s later film is also instructive here: *Auf der anderen Seite* continues the narrative of a Turkish-German discovering his ancestral roots further than *Gegen die Wand* and as mentioned above, Nejat does not feel a connection to the culture of the Black Sea coast. Cahit would arguably feel more alienated from this town than Nejat is from Ali’s hometown, as he is more estranged from Turkish culture in general. Yet despite this open ending, Akin shows us a character who has found a new project — to discover his roots — and this project has

²⁴⁶ Fatih Akin, interviewed by Ralf Krämer, ‘Nur Sport und Kunst können die Welt verändern’, *Planet Interview*, 10 December 2012 <<http://www.planet-interview.de/interviews/fatih-akin/35700/>> [accessed 20 November 2016].

²⁴⁷ ‘No Place Like Home?’, p. 143.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

helped him escape from the limitations on his life in Hamburg. He has regained control over his life and the direction it is going in, even if arriving in his spiritual *Heimat* is ultimately impossible.

This phenomenon of engagement with one's background enabling characters to find new projects and gain more control is one trend in recent German cinema that deals with Germans with migration backgrounds. In *Almanya — Willkommen in Deutschland* Muhamed, who is unemployed in Germany, goes on a family trip to Turkey to see the house his father has bought there but when his father dies and the family discover the house is a ruin he decides to stay in Turkey to rebuild it. In *Jerichow*, too, the viewer learns that Ali has gone back to Turkey to bury his father and then decided to buy some land there and have a house built to retire to. The dialogue between Ali and Thomas, the main protagonist, stresses that this is Ali's project and that he is in control: 'ich muss da ein paar Tage hin, mit dem Architekten reden' (*Jerichow*, 38.21)²⁴⁹ Ali tells Thomas. His illness and death at the end of the film makes the execution of this project impossible, however, and this also problematizes the idea of returning to one's 'homeland' being a solution to problems in one's country of residence.

In *Auf der anderen Seite*, there is another character who ends up in Turkey — non-Turkish Susanne — which also disrupts an interpretation of the film as characters needing to return to their ancestral roots. Yet Susanne does need to engage with her past to become an agent, specifically her trip to Istanbul thirty years earlier. Like Nejat's, Susanne's life in Hamburg at the beginning of the film is comfortable, as is emphasised in the scene in which the viewer first meets her. After having met Ayten at the university, Lotte brings her home and Susanne is introduced as an, albeit retired,

²⁴⁹ *Jerichow*, dir. by Christian Petzold (good movies!, 2008).

woman who reads a newspaper on a sofa in the middle of the day. As Lotte brings Ayten into the living room, the camera tilts down — emphasising the fact that Susanne is passively reclining — to provide a close-up of her face, somewhat apprehensive about who the new guest is. If we return to the aforementioned definition of agency, the capacity for individuals to make free choices and act on them, Susanne does indeed have this capacity at the beginning of the film, but it is clear that things start happening *to* her: her comfortable life is disrupted, firstly, by Lotte and Ayten's chance meeting and then, like Nejat's, by an accidental death, this time of her daughter, to which she must find a way to respond. Throughout the course of the film, however, Susanne changes into someone who acts, and has a large effect on other people's lives, by engaging with her past.

Susanne's previous visit to Istanbul is emphasised by the dialogue and the camera in a scene set soon after her arrival in the city. As Susanne and Nejat get a taxi to Nejat's flat the camera follows the taxi, but from a distance, so the viewer can see the city around it whilst hearing the dialogue between the characters. The first question Nejat asks Susanne about herself is 'sind Sie das erste Mal in Istanbul?' (A, 1,29.17) and they have a brief conversation about her hitchhiking to India via the city in the 1970s, as the camera follows the taxi along an Istanbul street until we can no longer see it, and then tilts up to fill the screen with a shot of a busy square, emphasising the place Susanne needs to engage with in order to effect change.

In *Auf der anderen Seite* the past is of increasing significance for Susanne: as well as needing to travel to and stay in Turkey to reconnect with her visit to Istanbul thirty years earlier, she needs to remember that she was part of Germany's '68 generation. The casting is important here: if the viewer has encountered Hanna Schygulla, the actress who plays Susanne, before, this is likely to have been in

Fassbinder's films from the late 1960s to the early 1980s, and the association with this period has the potential to further link Susanne to her past in the viewer's mind. Susanne needs to reflect on how she has changed since the 1970s, and to appreciate the similarities between her younger self and her now deceased daughter in order to decide to take up Lotte's mission of helping Ayten and getting her freed from prison, in the context of Susanne's helplessness with regard to Lotte's death. Parallels between Lotte and Susanne are underlined by Akin's use of different spaces in Istanbul: in order to understand Lotte, and her former self, Susanne stays in the hotel Lotte stayed in; sleeps in the room Lotte was living in, in Lotte's bed; and when she walks down the street outside the apartment building she greets the same men playing the same game on the pavement. In the two street scenes there is the same music playing and even the camera movement is exactly the same: the camera pans almost 180 degrees, filming how the characters come close to the camera then walk into the distance.

Susanne's role is partly to demonstrate that engaging with the past is not just necessary for people from migration backgrounds. She illustrates that 'background' is about more than just ethnicity and one's cultural roots: it is not just where one comes from that is important, but also where else one has been.

Berghahn makes links to other, earlier German films, in the shape of Wim Wenders's road movies, to illustrate other non-ethnic minority characters rediscovering their pasts:

The quest for *Heimat* is also at the centre of Wim Wenders' road movies in which uprooted males return to their place of origin, hoping to attain a sense of selfhood and identity. For example, Travis in *Paris, Texas* (1984) returns to the place where he was conceived, only to find out that it is a bare patch of land in the Texan desert, called Paris. Likewise, Bruno in *Im Lauf der Zeit/ Kings of the Road* (1976) visits

his childhood hideaway where he has stowed away some old comic books.²⁵⁰

The engagement with background in Akin's work is more productive than in Wenders's films, in which dislocation is more like an existential condition, but in post-Wende German films, too, protagonists return to significant places from their personal histories, and not all these places can simply be seen as the characters' *Heimat*. Petzold's films in particular are rife with characters returning to places significant to them, although the films from earlier in his career than *Barbara* and *Phoenix* portray a more pessimistic view of humans' ability to make free choices and act on them. *Jerichow* engages most explicitly with the concept of *Heimat*, as Thomas returns to his childhood home after the death of his mother, but *Jerichow* is most relevant here as it is in this town that Thomas can make a fresh start after various failed ventures. *Die innere Sicherheit* also sees the fugitive couple return to Germany and meet former fellow terrorists and one of the protagonists in *Gespenster* (2005) is Françoise, a French woman who returns to Berlin to look for the daughter who was kidnapped as a child.

There is also a parallel in this regard between *Auf der anderen Seite* and *Heaven*. Filippo tells Philippa 'I'd like you to take me to the place where you grew up' (*H*, 1,01.46), indicating that this would give him an invaluable insight into her identity. They return not to Bristol, her place of birth, however — an ability to get to the United Kingdom whilst on the run would require more suspension of belief than the film currently requires — but to Montepulciano, a place which is evidently also important in Philippa's past. 'It's as if nothing ever happened' (*H*, 1,03.54) she says on seeing the town, indicating that this sight has made her, like Susanne, reflect on

²⁵⁰ 'No Place Like Home?', p. 148.

how she has changed since she was last there. It is here that Philippa reflects on her life and confesses her sins to Filippo, indicating that in Montepulciano a greater sense of self is possible.

Akın uses the need to engage with one's background, cultural or otherwise, as a way of interrogating the limits of human agency and in this way he is part of a trend in contemporary German films which deal with characters with a migration background, and recent German films more widely. With regard to cultural background, Akın demonstrates in his films the need for those with 'hyphenated' identities to address their mixed heritage and illustrates that in Turkey, the Turkish-German protagonists can both learn something new and learn something about themselves and a somewhat familiar culture. What existing scholarship has failed to address, however, is the distinction in Akın's films between Turkish culture, particularly that of cosmopolitan Istanbul, to which his Turkish-German characters have been exposed and which forms part of their past experiences and identity, and the culture of earlier generations, to which they do not feel a connection. I have also shown that this engagement with one's background is part of a process rather than a solution to all problems, although it does enable characters to find new projects and gain more control. Akın thus comments on the situation of second-generation immigrants in Germany, whilst making a much wider and more universal point about limitations on agency. He demonstrates that it is only by recognising these limits, rather than pursuing the illusion of complete control, that one can become an agent.

The role of the state

It is noteworthy that, in contrast to the Tykwer films examined above, something which is not portrayed as a major limitation on agency in *Gegen die Wand* and *Auf der anderen Seite* is the state, or the institutions which we see in *The International* and *Heaven*. The ‘waning of the paradigm of political modernism’ to which Czyzydlo refers seems even clearer in Akın’s cinema than in Tykwer’s.

Genre is important here: this emphasis on the personal fits in with Sabine Hake’s characterisation of Turkish-German cinema as a cinema that addresses ‘the consequences of migration, displacement, diaspora and exile from the perspective of private lives and personal relationships and through the key categories of gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity and race’²⁵¹ but this description, published in 2008, does not account for *Auf der anderen Seite*. The state is almost entirely absent from *Gegen die Wand*, as is the case with the other Turkish-German films mentioned above. In this film, the screen time given to representatives of the state — the registrar who marries Cahit and Sibel, a prison guard, a bus driver — is brief. The emphasis is very much on the lives of the two protagonists and their relationship with each other. The first act of *Auf der anderen Seite* also concentrates on personal relationships but the second and third acts provide several examples of state institutions, and the characters’ interactions with them, perhaps indicating a shift in the genre.

In *Auf der anderen Seite* both Ayten and the state she is rebelling against are presented in a largely sympathetic way, however. At the beginning of the film’s second act, when we meet Ayten, it seems as though the film is going to be critical of the police force in Istanbul, which in this scene is clearly used as a stand-in for the state, or is ‘the small representation of the state’, as Tykwer describes the Carabinieri in *Heaven*. The police dominate this scene: the first close-up we see is of a group of

²⁵¹ Hake, p. 216.

three policemen and there are three more shots of different groups of policemen, all labelled in some way with the word ‘polis’ to make their presence clear to the viewer. In the second of these three shots (fig. 18) the policemen form a wall which



Figure 18. Police with body armour and riot shields at Istanbul’s 1st May demonstrations (A, 38.18)

stretches from one side of the frame to the other and in their identical blue uniform and caps they seem to lose any individuality, instead representing the supra-individual force of the state. The body armour and riot shields in this shot also hint at fraught relations between the police and parts of the Turkish population, and that the police might have the upper hand here. In the third shot (fig. 19), police officers again stretch from one side of the frame to the other and have their backs to the camera, and are thus even more anonymous than the previous group.

The police are not just presented as an immobile anonymous force, however: in this first scene in which they appear they also intervene in the demonstrations and Demirkoparan comments that ‘the violence of police intervention in Istanbul stands in

sharp contrast to the peaceful assembly we had seen in Bremen',²⁵² which serves to



Figure 19. Police with their backs to the camera at Istanbul's 1st May demonstrations (A, 38.24)

underline this violence. A group of protesters, of which Ayten is a part, are chanting 'the rights of the people cannot be stopped' (A, 38.40) but their words, and their exercising their right to protest, are somewhat ironically interrupted by a policeman shooting in the air in the middle of the group, which causes the protesters to attack him in retaliation and the demonstration to be disrupted. Before we see this policeman, someone in the crowd shouts 'a cop!', hammering home the police's presence and disruptive, violent behaviour. Yet this presentation of state institutions wanes during the course of the film. This introduction is likely to succeed in eliciting the viewer's sympathy for Ayten, but it makes way for a more nuanced portrayal of the role of the state.

The police and prison officers feature several times in *Auf der anderen Seite*, in sections of the film set both in Germany and in Turkey, but in the rest of the film they are not faceless clones, emblematic of a system, and the prisons are not

²⁵² Demirkoparan, p. 202.

emblematic of a wider disciplinary society, in the way they are in *Discipline and Punish*. Nor are the police and prison officers villains pitted against the protagonists, as we see in *Heaven*, nor even particularly powerful individuals. Their role does not even seem to be to discipline people and punish them, as Foucault argues in his 1975 work. Instead, they are just a network of normal people doing their jobs, and although the viewer does not get to know any of them intimately, they are shown interacting with the protagonists in a way that seems fair and proportionate to how they have behaved. The reason for the German police stopping Lotte's car before Ayten gets arrested is that Ayten does not have her seatbelt on: the aim here is to protect, not solely to discipline. We are shown one prison in Germany and one in Turkey, in which Ali and Ayten respectively are incarcerated, and the guards in both are polite and friendly. The buildings of these prisons and how they are used also go against an idea that they are mainly used for punishment, or to limit the freedom of those incarcerated there. One scene in the German jail reveals it to be a bright, clean, white space, with private cells, and when Ayten is in prison, it is one with communal rooms and pastel coloured walls, in which we see inmates playing volleyball and chess. Akin has discussed his decision to portray the prison in this way, stating that this portrayal reflects the friendlier atmosphere created in prisons where young children live with their incarcerated mothers, and also in prisons for those awaiting trial.²⁵³ Although the German and the Turkish jails are different from each other, they are both at a remove from Foucault's discussion of prisons, or how power operates. Ayten is also released from prison after repenting, demonstrating that there is no desire for the state to watch and punish her behaviour if she is rehabilitated. Indeed, the character who is portrayed

²⁵³ 'Audiokommentar mit Fatih Akin', *Auf der anderen Seite*, dir. by Fatih Akin (The Match Factory, 2007).

in a negative way as Ayten leaves the prison is her fellow activist who spits on her face, and it is a prison guard who leads Ayten away from this situation.

The portrayal of the police in *Auf der anderen Seite* is not as positive as in earlier cinema which deals with Turkish-Germans, the so-called ‘cinema of the affected’,²⁵⁴ or more recent cinema which uses the same tropes. In Hark Bohm’s *Yasemin* (1988), the teacher of the eponymous protagonist, a Turkish-German teenager in Hamburg, threatens to report Yasemin’s tyrannical father to the police, and in Feo Aladag’s *Die Fremde* (2010), it is this film’s young female Turkish-German protagonist who calls the police as a response to this film’s patriarch, who has locked her in her flat. Here, the police force, and the school in the first example, are characterised as state institutions which can protect individuals from the (conservative, Turkish) family. *Auf der anderen Seite* exhibits a more complex portrayal of law enforcement than this, but stops short of representing the state as a major limitation on what characters can do.

A. O. Scott in the New York Times review of *Auf der anderen Seite* claims that Akin ‘is acutely aware of viciousness, injustice and hypocrisy in both Turkey (where his parents were born) and his native Germany’²⁵⁵ but also concedes that ‘[the film’s] tone is curiously gentle’.²⁵⁶ While there is injustice in the film — the irony of Ayten being sent back to Turkey because it is soon to join the European Union and therefore supposedly will not mistreat her is even greater a decade later, when Turkey still has not joined — ‘viciousness’ seems an exaggeration. Instead, there is incompetence in the state institutions in both Germany and Turkey: the border guard

²⁵⁴ See Rob Burns, ‘Turkish-German Cinema: From Cultural Resistance to Transnational Cinema?’, in *German Cinema: Since Unification*, ed. by David Clarke (London: Continuum, 2008), pp. 127-50 (p. 133).

²⁵⁵ A. O. Scott, ‘Tying Knots That Bind Lives Despite the Divisions of Generation and Nationality’, *New York Times*, 21 May 2008 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/21/movies/21heav.html>> [accessed 20 October 2016] (para. 4 of 8).

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, para. 2 of 8.

at Hamburg Airport is fooled into thinking that Ayten is another young Turkish woman by Ayten copying her hairstyle; and the guards in Ayten's prison supposedly watching the prisoners and their visitors miss Ayten giving Lotte a piece of paper, which contains instructions to find a gun, and also talking to her about this note. These oversights do not curb the ability Ayten and Lotte have to make choices and follow through on them, however; they rather enhance this ability.

Injustice and incompetence also, however, seem to be reasons behind the explanation Lotte receives for why she cannot visit Ayten in prison without having the same surname as her, namely 'Das ist die Türkei' (A, 1,08.29). One understanding of 'Turkey' is the aggregate of the people who live in Turkey, some of whom would have the power to change this law. Yet this is not how Akın portrays the country here. Here, macro-social forces, or a system, that is a collection of individuals and an added ingredient, are evident. This explanation illustrates 'tactics' which 'find [...] their base of support and their condition elsewhere' and, as Foucault describes, 'no one is there to have invented them'. The lawyer at the bar association who tells Lotte about this law clearly did not invent it, and also does not support it, as is evident in his lack of attempt to defend it. Yet this system is not all powerful, like the system we see in *The International*: Lotte does eventually get a permit to visit Ayten. Turkey, or more specifically Istanbul, is not portrayed as an inherently oppressive place, which discriminates against same-sex unmarried couples who do not have the same surname. Istanbul is portrayed in the way that Akın characterises it in an interview with Feridun Zaimoğlu, as 'a city full of contradictions'.²⁵⁷

Akın's solution to the issue of how to represent and explain the characters' relationships to supra-individual as well as individual forces is also evident in a

²⁵⁷ Fatih Akın, interviewed by Feridun Zaimoğlu, 'Interview with Golden Bear Director Fatih Akın', 26 February 2004 <http://www.filmfestivals.com/blog/editor/interview_with_golden_bear_director_fatih_akin?page=8> [accessed 10 October 2016].

central scene in which Ayten and Susanne discuss the former woman's political activity. Akin faces similar challenges to Tykwer here, in terms of how to explore issues of power outside of the film's plot through dialogue. In this scene, Ayten voices concerns about the Turkish state, but Akin chooses to keep them vague: Ayten tells Susanne 'if a country kills the people, the folk, just because they think different, or look different, or because they protest to have work, and energy, and schools, you have to fight back' (A, 58.48). The word 'country' here is obviously metonymic but it, firstly, sets up a contrast between how Ayten describes Turkey and how Turkey is presented throughout the rest of the film, both in terms of the people and the places we see, as I go on to explore. The use of the word 'country' to describe who the perpetrators are, secondly, makes it clear that Ayten is discussing a system, but the country of Turkey is blamed again, this time for more than the discriminatory law discussed above, and from this statement it is not clear who exactly invented or supports or carries out these policies, which would be essential information for 'fighting back'. Ayten's vagueness is also evident in the reasons for the persecution that she describes. 'Think[ing] different[ly]' presumably refers to the issue of political and religious freedom in secular Turkey, and 'look[ing] different' to the persecution of different ethnic groups in the country, particularly the Kurds, the largest ethnic minority, but as this is not made clear, some of the power of an argument about state oppression is lost.

Ayten's demand for '100% human rights and 100% freedom of speech and 100% social education' (A, 58.02) in response to Susanne's question 'what exactly are you fighting for?' (A, 57.59) also leaves open exactly what Turkey's record is on these issues so far, and ignores the complexities and debates around these terms, particularly the first two, and how they can fit with other ideals such as protecting

minorities and national security. Ayten's aims, and understanding of the issues, then sound somewhat simplistic, which again undermines an argument about the state being largely responsible for limitations on agency. This line also calls to mind Czyzydło's argument about *Heaven*, that 'engagement is rendered [...] universalist'. Ayten has not said what *exactly* she is fighting for at all, or what 'fighting back' involves. The reason behind this vagueness could be Akin not wanting to be too critical of Turkey, whose population is part of the target audience of *Auf der anderen Seite*: in Turkey, *Gegen die Wand* was claimed as a Turkish film.²⁵⁸

Ayten makes reference to globalisation, later problematised in Tykwer's *The International*, in her discussion of the European Union in this scene: 'Who is leading the European Union? England, France, and Germany, and Italy, and Spain. These countries are all colonial countries. It's globalisation and we are fighting against that' (A, 58.37). Demirkoparan argues that 'what becomes clearer in this scene is that neither the nation-state nor the transnational union is interested in the freedom of their citizens, whose individual lives get subsumed as expendable sources of labor within a global economic network of profit',²⁵⁹ but I question whether the purpose of the scene is for Ayten to simply educate the viewer about her freedom, or agency. A comment that seems to be more resonant here is one in the *Spiegel* review of *Gegen die Wand*: 'Akin verurteilt, verteidigt nichts. Er zieht keine Lebensart vor, sondern lässt sie aufeinander prallen.'²⁶⁰

Susanne's view of Ayten's situation — 'maybe things will get better once you get into the European Union' (A, 58.14) — is also put forward in this scene and this is the view of someone who believes Ayten about her plight but puts her faith in another institution rather than the resistance group, seeing the role of this institution as one of

²⁵⁸ *Im Clinch*, p. 141.

²⁵⁹ Demirkoparan, p. 205.

²⁶⁰ 'Fatih Akins "Gegen die Wand"', para. 7 of 10.

protection rather than oppression. As is reflected in the scene in which the viewer is introduced to Susanne, discussed above, here again she represents a more passive, cautious attitude towards effecting change. It is clear that the two women's views are in opposition here and, unlike in *The International*, neither of these characters seems like a vessel for Akın's own opinions on the Turkish state or the European Union. He is not employing ideological discourse in the direct way that Tykwer does; the scene is rather one of two people with different perspectives discussing them.

In this scene the camerawork, the blocking and the mise-en-scène reinforce the idea that there are two opposing viewpoints and personalities here. Whilst Ayten makes her argument for why she does not trust the European Union, the shot switches from a two shot, in which she and Susanne amicably share the frame, to a close-up of Ayten's face, which is followed by a series of shots and reverse shots of her and Susanne's faces, which allows the viewer to see their emotions and also separates the characters visually, as they are separated by their world views. With regard to blocking, Susanne sits for the length of the conversation, visually representing the passivity which she advocates, whereas Ayten is mobile: she walks around the kitchen, sits next to Susanne then springs up to deliver her 'if the country kills the people' line, underlining her argument for action. Ayten has also just got out of bed at noon, as is emphasised at the beginning of the conversation with Susanne's snide remark 'schon mittag' (A, 57.30), and she is smoking, whereas Susanne is rather wholesomely making a cake, the domestic act underlined by the specific tool she has to pit her cherries. This woman's problems are, at this stage of the film, a great deal smaller than Ayten's, but in this scene Akın does not privilege either of their views, or lifestyles.

For neither *Gegen die Wand* nor *Auf der anderen Seite* does Akin receive the accusations of didacticism which are levelled at Tykwer. Although the finesse with which Akin introduces one issue into *Auf der anderen Seite* is called into question by Catherine Wheatley, who describes Akin's emphasis on the fact that Turkey has not yet joined the European Union as clumsy,²⁶¹ most critics did not criticise this scene for its exploration of a model of power through dialogue. Akin's approach in this scene is also relevant to the previous discussion of spectatorial agency: here, he gives the viewer freedom to make up their own mind about whose point of view they share, informed by the rest of the film. The rest of *Auf der anderen Seite* functions as a comment on the points of view expressed in this scene.

In this scene Akin also slightly undermines his characters' arguments, yet because he does this with both of them his approach seems more balanced and less didactic. Susanne's view — 'maybe things will get better once you get into the European Union' — does not come across as convincing. She prefaces her statement with 'maybe' both times that she makes it, she simply repeats it rather than making arguments such as those we hear from Ayten, and with the power of hindsight we know, as mentioned above, that Turkey was not soon to enter the European Union in 2007. With regard to Ayten, the ways in which her aims seem simplistic have already been discussed, and it is possible that the vagueness in Ayten's arguments is to make her seem somewhat naïve and idealistic.

Beyond this scene, Ayten's presentation of the Turkish state contrasts with the individuals we see, discussed above. Her criticism is also offset by the portrayal of her resistance group: the woman who seems to be her superior in Istanbul threatens to kill Ayten, revealing that she poses a larger threat than any representative of the state, and

²⁶¹ Catherine Wheatley, 'The Edge of Heaven', *Sight and Sound* <<http://old.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/review/4221>> [accessed 21 November 2016] (para. 6 of 7).

spits in Ayten's face when she repents. The branch of the group in Hamburg also throws Ayten out after she fails to repay some money. Naiboğlu comments on this representation of the state and the resistance group, arguing that

Akin makes a political statement by depoliticizing his discourse by choosing to portray the government officers more agreeable [sic] than the Kurdish militants. He thus repeats nationalism's imperative of homogeneity and relocates the liminal subjects to essentialized identities.²⁶²

This is indeed a political statement yet I disagree that this is an example of Akin 'depoliticizing his discourse' in the way that Naiboğlu describes: a filmmaker portraying Kurdish militants as unpleasant would indicate he was firmly on one side of the fence with regard to Kurdish nationalism. Yet Akin is not simply against the PKK, and what he is doing here is precisely the opposite of pushing an agenda of homogeneity and essentialism. By portraying individual government officials as normal people and Ayten's fellow members of the resistance group as hostile and threatening, whilst Ayten herself is portrayed largely positively, he is disrupting her simplistic narrative about Turkey, and indeed any simplistic narrative about state oppression in any country. Akin does not deny that what Ayten has described has happened, but this is another way in which Istanbul is portrayed as a city full of — and Turkey as a country full of — contradictions or, more accurately, what seem to be contradictions. Akin shows that it is possible for individuals representing a state to be wholly unthreatening, whilst the state kills people. What is more, as well as disrupting simplistic narratives about how states limit human agency, Akin complicates a narrative found in many other films. If we look at this presentation of the macro-social

²⁶² Naiboğlu, p. 94.

force of the state, state officials, Ayten and the rest of her resistance group in the context of the films in this study, there is a marked difference here from Tykwer's cinema, particularly *The International*, in which there is a clear line between the behaviour of the protagonists and antagonists.

Later on in *Auf der anderen Seite*, Ayten gives up, or at least pauses, her activism, and Akin thus casts doubt on whether this is the solution to state oppression, but Susanne also leaves her baking far behind, making things happen rather than waiting for the world to change. The open ending of the film, which I will return to in a discussion of ambiguity in the two films in question, once again gives the viewer freedom to make up their own mind about the extent to which one should, or can, act in response to a state limiting its citizens' agency.

Hake's pronouncement that Turkish-German cinema is 'from the perspective of private lives and personal relationships' does not account for the role of the state in *Auf der anderen Seite*, yet this film stays true to the traditions of Turkish-German cinema in that, unlike Tykwer's films, it is largely uncritical of the state and state institutions, and mainly uses a different set of tropes for understanding the wider concatenations that humans are part of. Limitations on agency are not represented by characters, as we see in Tykwer's work, or the buildings in which these state institutions operate. Yet the role of state officials is also not to protect either of the films' young female Turkish protagonists, as we see in earlier, or more traditional, Turkish-German cinema.

Akin includes some apparent contradictions in the state and those who fight against it in *Auf der anderen Seite*, leading to a nuanced portrayal of limitations on agency, and he has his characters discuss some systemic oppression, but leaves it to the viewer to make up their own mind about the best approach to this. The discussion

is somewhat vague and universalist, however, which lessens the power of its arguments, and begs the question of the extent to which Akin, like Tykwer, is trying to comment on a globalised world with his cinema: a question which I turn to now.

Universality

Akin does not try to portray the whole world in his films, like Tykwer does in *The International*. Akin rather keeps the travels in *Gegen die Wand* and *Auf der anderen Seite* limited to between two countries. Yet there is an effort to make the issues he deals with seem like universal issues and his portrayal of agency seem relevant outside a specific milieu. Regarding the limitations on agency which can be seen in his films, I have already noted that the tropes of chance and coincidence are universal limitations on human control and, although individual past experiences are specific to an individual, the fact that Akin's characters need to engage with their pasts regardless of whether they have backgrounds of migration gestures towards this being a universal need in Akin's filmic world.

This universality is also evident in the films' narratives more widely. *Gegen die Wand* includes some very specific aspects of German and Turkish culture, such as an untranslatable pun in Turkish exchanged within a group of Turkish-German men, and the rivalry between Bavaria and the rest of Germany, clear in a conversation in Istanbul between Cahit, from Hamburg, and a Turkish-German taxi driver from Munich. Yet the narrative in the film, inspired by the clash between a young, female second-generation immigrant and her patriarchal family, would also be at home in, for example British-Asian or Mexican-American cinema.

Auf der anderen Seite also engages with some issues and figures from the world outside the film, and here the striving for ‘political immediacy’ which Naiboğlu identifies is clear. Öcalan, for example, introduced into the film by the group of women chanting ‘Öcalan, we are with you!’ (A, 38.21) at the demonstrations on the 1st of May in Istanbul, is one of the founding members of the PKK, who has been in prison since 1999. It is even implied, by Ayten’s participation in the demonstrations, that Ayten is a member of the PKK, but neither this organisation nor the Kurds are ever named, meaning that Ayten becomes a more universalised left-wing activist.

The choice of characters in *Auf der anderen Seite* seems to be partly to create links across cultures and minimise differences between them. The mirroring techniques which I will discuss in an analysis of places in the film can also be seen in the constellation of the protagonists: there are three same-sex pairs, each consisting of a single parent and their adult child, one pair German (Susanne and Lotte), one Turkish (Yeter and Ayten) and one Turkish-German (Ali and Nejat). The film makes clear that who occupies which positions in these pairs is fluid, to a certain extent, regardless of nationality: at the end of the film Susanne, who has lost a child, becomes a surrogate mother to Ayten, who has lost her mother. Akin also creates links between the Abrahamic religions in *Auf der anderen Seite*, and by extension between German and Turkish cultures. Although the scene that Susanne sees through her window on the first day of Bayram is deeply rooted in Turkish culture, she responds to Nejat telling the story of the festival, a part of his hybrid culture which has particular significance for him, with ‘diese Geschichte gibt es bei uns auch’ (A, 1,40.07).

This universality is also highlighted in the reception of the films, but the version of this phenomenon that we see in *Gegen die Wand* is seen to function more successfully than that in *Auf der anderen Seite*. Manohla Dargis in the New York

Times review of *Gegen die Wand* has a relatively positive take, commenting on the characters that ‘their tribulations are at once specific and universal’,²⁶³ which reflects the fact that the details of the film are rooted in specific cultures but the plot could take place elsewhere. This is a combination which would be likely to draw the viewer in through a narrative which is not too ambitious in terms of its scope, whilst making the wider implications clear. Hüttmann in the *Spiegel* similarly argues that the film ‘ist zwar ein türkisches Drama in Deutschland, aber ein grenzenloses Werk. Nicht einzigartig im Stil und Thema, das ähnlich auch in Asien oder Lateinamerika spielen könnte’.²⁶⁴ Hüttmann is correct that the topic, i.e. the clash between a young, female second-generation immigrant and her patriarchal family, is not unique, but the specific narrative, i.e. a woman proposing a sham marriage to a man to escape this family, is. Yet this specific narrative could be transported to other places where the topic would be relevant: in countries, or communities, where there is a significant difference in outlook between a younger, more liberal, and older, more conservative generation.

Wheatley’s *Sight and Sound* review portrays the universality in *Auf der anderen Seite* in a more negative light, commenting that, apart from the issue, discussed above, of the entrance into the European Union, ‘sexual, religious and economic imperatives are otherwise ignored in a film that seems decidedly sunny in its political outlook’.²⁶⁵ The choice to ignore these imperatives not only affects what is emphasised in terms of limitations on agency but also minimises differences between countries. The universality in *Auf der anderen Seite* is a main concern in Naiboğlu’s article too. She comments, as I have, on the constellation of the characters in the film, arguing that it ‘overtly strives to [...] make a collective statement with the

²⁶³ Manohla Dargis, ‘Two Misplaced Souls Decide They Might as Well Live’, *New York Times*, 21 January 2005 <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/01/21/movies/two-misplaced-souls-decide-they-might-as-well-live.html?_r=0> [accessed 20 October 2016] (para. 11 of 11).

²⁶⁴ ‘Fatih Akins “Gegen die Wand”’, para. 9 of 10.

²⁶⁵ Wheatley, ‘The Edge of Heaven’, para. 6 of 7.

universality of the bonds (mother-daughter and father-son relationship) that tie its characters'²⁶⁶ but she also criticises this universality, arguing that in *Auf der anderen Seite*

Akin, through values and norms such as maternal love and familial bonds which he claims to be universal, tries to bond the two cultures. He thus omits the multiplicities inside the fixed binary categories and portrays a complementary and reductionist framework in [sic] the expense of differences.²⁶⁷

The second sentence here does not necessarily follow from the first, however. Akin is obviously trying to get away from an essentialist portrayal of German and Turkish or Turkish-German identities, and of the options Germans and Turks have, and does indeed try to bond the two cultures in the film (although the idea that he explicitly claims values to be universal is an overstatement). Yet he also makes the 'multiplicities' in binary categories clear. The number and range of characters in *Auf der anderen Seite* in fact affords Akin the opportunity to portray the differences between Ali, Yeter and Ayten, i.e. Turks who come to Germany, and between the Germans Nejat, Lotte and Susanne, as well as creating links between these two categories. Differences between the characters are not simply erased, but the dividing line between the Turks and the Germans is one axis of many on which differences can exist, which affords it less importance.

Distinct from the level of the characters, the complex way in which these differences and similarities between cultures are portrayed is clearest in Akin's presentation of place in both *Gegen die Wand* and *Auf der anderen Seite*. Akin manages to avoid making too universal statements with his images, as is evident in

²⁶⁶ Naiboğlu, p. 87.

²⁶⁷ Naiboğlu, p. 95.

Tykwer's use of glass and steel architecture, and disrupts what could be too universalist an approach in the films by using the visuality of the filmic medium. Akın makes it clear that his films are case studies rooted in specific places, but the issues he deals with and the limitations on agency which he depicts are not specific to Germany and Turkey. In order to examine this in more detail, however, an analysis of place in Akın's films is necessary.

Cities, countries, and public and domestic spaces

An analysis of place in the globalised world in the films in question, and how places are shot, shines a light on how representative of the world as a whole these places are supposed to be, and how they are used to portray agency. In *Gegen die Wand* heterogeneity is clear from the first scene change: there is a stark contrast between Istanbul and Hamburg, as the light, open-air scene of a group of musicians on the bank of the Bosphorus cuts to the dark interior of a Hamburg club. After the scene change the camera is first focused on the balcony around the edge of the club then slowly tilts downwards to the ground floor, as if to show the viewer the extent of the contrast with the opening scene. We see Cahit smoking and drinking the dregs of pints of beer from plastic cups and he is wearing dark-coloured, casual clothes, which contrast both with the red dress worn by İdil Üner, the singer in the musical interludes, and the formal suits on the men on either side of her. The sounds are different in the Hamburg club too: the upbeat music, albeit with sobering lyrics about unrequited love, in Istanbul has been replaced not by the music which we later see played in the club, but just by muted voices and the sounds of glass bottles knocking against each other, complementing the decadent behaviour we see on the screen.

It becomes clear throughout the film, however, that the dichotomy evident in these two scenes is too simple, and that Akin is conscious of this. In this scene change, he is playing with ‘the chronotopes Hamid Naficy identified as symptomatic of the exilic or diasporic experience’,²⁶⁸ referenced by Berghahn in her article on *Gegen die Wand*: she states that ‘according to Naficy (2001: 152-221), the host country is typically presented as a dark, claustrophobic prison-like environment that sharply contrasts with memories of happier places back home’.²⁶⁹ This sharp contrast is evident between the first two scenes but it becomes clear during the course of the film that this stereotypical portrayal of Istanbul is just a stereotype, rather than Cahit’s, or anyone else’s, memory of a happier reality. Hamburg is also not solely presented as dark and claustrophobic throughout *Gegen die Wand*. Indeed another meaning of the title, or meaning reflected in the title, *Auf der anderen Seite* could be ‘on the other hand’, demonstrating the fact that all places and situations in Akin’s films have advantages and disadvantages, but different advantages and disadvantages: Akin does not respond to this dichotomy by ironing out differences that do exist.

The reviews of the two films in the *New York Times* focus on the differences between Hamburg, Bremen and Istanbul that we can see in Akin’s cinema, and also stress the beauty of these places. The *Gegen die Wand* review includes the comments:

Set principally against the grubby environs of working-class Hamburg, in dives and derelict apartments, the film has a terrific sense of place. The city’s grubbiness works a vivid contrast to the visions of Turkey that flicker throughout the film. Istanbul looks beautiful, but then so, too, does Cahit’s wreck of an apartment, where anarchy and the freedom it promises linger as stubbornly as the smell of stale beer and cigarettes.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁸ ‘No Place Like Home?’, p. 154.

²⁶⁹ Ibid. See Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 152-221.

²⁷⁰ Dargis, para. 11 of 11.

Whether Cahit's apartment promises freedom can be disputed, as I will go on to show below, and 'the visions of Turkey that flicker throughout the film' is presumably a reference to the stereotypical images in the recurring musical interludes rather than the more nuanced presentation of Turkey that we see in the latter 40% of the film. Dargis is correct, however, that Akın brings out the appeal of both Hamburg and Istanbul in *Gegen die Wand*, and depicts neither as wholly limiting or conducive to humans having control over their lives.

This does not mean, however, that Akın does not engage with the less appealing sides to these cities, or the countries in which they are situated. As mentioned above, the *Auf der anderen Seite* review in the *New York Times* flags up some less savoury aspects of contemporary Turkey, and Germany, reflecting the fact that they are presented more explicitly in Akın's later film:

while he is acutely aware of viciousness, injustice and hypocrisy in both Turkey (where his parents were born) and his native Germany, his camera absorbs the authentic beauty in both countries, from tidy Bremen to pulsing Istanbul to the tea-covered hillsides and fishing villages of the Black Sea coast.²⁷¹

As explored above, Akın could go further and be more explicit in his discussion of issues such as Turkey's persecution of the Kurds in *Auf der anderen Seite*, as this discussion is rather vague. It is clear, however, that in this film Akın has got away from presenting Turkey, albeit knowingly, in a stereotypical, one-dimensional way, which does not engage with contemporary issues in the country, as can be seen in the musical interludes in *Gegen die Wand*.

²⁷¹ 'Tying Knots That Bind Lives', para. 4 of 8.

As already mentioned, however, elsewhere in *Gegen die Wand* the presentation of Turkey is much more nuanced. More specifically, as Berghahn argues, drawing on Naficy's findings as outlined above, Akin reverses the typical presentation of a migrant's new country in *Gegen die Wand*. Berghahn writes that 'it is, perhaps, significant that Sibel's perception of her Turkish *Heimat* seems to invert the chronotopes Hamid Naficy identified as symptomatic of the exilic or diasporic experience'.²⁷² Akin achieves this by portraying Istanbul, as Sibel first experiences it, as a prison.

After Sibel arrives in Istanbul, it is mainly depicted at night, as she leaves work late and then later goes in search of drugs and relief from her monotonous existence, and these dark scenes set at night contrast with earlier scenes of Sibel enjoying the nightlife in Hamburg. Even in a rare scene set during the day in Istanbul we see her stopping cleaning at the hotel she works in and gazing out of the window at the city below, as though she is imprisoned. This trope of a 'prison-like environment' is underlined by a letter she sends to Cahit, in which she writes 'Gefängnis ist das einzige was mir einfällt, wenn ich an mein Leben hier denke' (G, 1,21.52). It seems that Akin has not simply inverted chronotopes, however: in Sibel's case, Turkey is the host country, and Germany is 'back home', so the presentation of the two places fits with Naficy's observations.

There are also parallels between Sibel seeing her life in Istanbul as a prison, her confinement within her family before she meets Cahit, the fact that Cahit is in prison as Sibel writes to him and Cahit's limited existence at the beginning of the film. The word 'prison' is also used in conjunction with the latter by Leal and Rossade, who state that Cahit's 'previous life has also been lived in a series of prisons — the

²⁷² 'No Place Like Home?', p. 154.

club where he collects the empty glasses, the bar in which he drinks heavily, his own run down and filthy flat and the apartment of his sometime German girlfriend, Maren'.²⁷³ It is clear that Akin is using some tropes common in hyphenated cinema but he disrupts the patterns of how they are normally used, thereby creating links between Germany and Turkey and reinforcing the idea that not all problems can be solved by a change of scene.

The symmetry between Cahit's existence at the beginning of the film and Sibel's after she has moved to Istanbul is also reflected visually. Cahit is seen solely at night in the first scenes in Hamburg and these scenes end with Depeche Mode's 'I Feel You', as he drives his car into a wall. This song is repeated as Sibel is self-destructing through alcohol, as she dances in an Istanbul bar. Berghahn comments that

the architectonic symmetry of mirroring scenes in the Hamburg- and Istanbul-based parts of the film emphasises the interlocking cycles of self-destruction, symbolic death and rebirth, which both Cahit and Sibel experience at different moments of time in the narrative.²⁷⁴

Hamburg and Istanbul are not as similar as the cold, glass and steel buildings in Tykwer's films and Akin does not make an argument about them being the same. The presentation of the two cities is also different at different points in *Gegen die Wand*. The parallel here is between situations rather than cities: Akin illustrates that one can have similar experiences in both places, breaking down the dichotomy that Naficy observes.

There has also been a great deal of scholarship around the representation of places on a smaller scale than countries or cities, i.e. domestic or public spaces, in

²⁷³ Leal and Rossade, p. 72.

²⁷⁴ *Head-On*, p. 57.

Turkish-German cinema. The paradigm which *Gegen die Wand* draws on is taken from Turkish-German cinema from the 1970s and 1980s, and West German film from this period which deals with the lives of the *Gastarbeiter*. These films have been described as ‘centred around the problems of Turkish women who were oppressed by their patriarchal fathers, brothers or husbands, excluded from the public sphere and confined in enclosed spaces’.²⁷⁵ Deniz Göktürk, the author of this description, also refers to the ‘popular fantasy’ of a ‘liberation of poor Turkish women from enclosure, oppression, subordination or even prostitution’,²⁷⁶ usually carried out by German men. The centrality to this earlier cinema of the divide between enclosed and open spaces is clear.

Akın breaks away from this divide, however. Enclosed spaces in *Gegen die Wand* can be claustrophobic and prison-like, but they can also, for example, be places in which Sibel exercises her new-found freedom, such as the flat she shares with Cahit and the bars and clubs of Hamburg. In this film, agency and constraint are much more frequently conveyed with light and darkness than with enclosed and open spaces, as is exemplified by Akın’s numerous street scenes, and with specific details of how these enclosed spaces look, as I explore below. The streets of Hamburg represent freedom and danger at different points in the film: when Sibel’s marriage to Cahit has allowed her to escape her family home and she has been free to spend the night with a stranger they are connected with freedom, and she is filmed walking down the street with a smile on her face, bathed in light. Later on in the film, after her family have read of Cahit killing Niko in the local newspaper, the public realm in Hamburg is where Sibel’s brother can, and does, find her, chasing her down the street, and this danger is

²⁷⁵ Deniz Göktürk, ‘Turkish Women on German Streets: Closure and Exposure in Transnational Cinema’, in *Spaces in European Cinema*, ed. by Myrto Konstantarakos (Exeter-Portland: Intellect, 2000), pp. 64-76 (p. 67).

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

communicated visually through the scene's dim lighting. This use of light is taken even further when the threat is taken further and she is stabbed on the dark streets of Istanbul. Akin comments on this technique with reference to another film, *Kurz und schmerzlos*, in which the narrative takes the form of a downward spiral. He explains that 'Das Konzept war, dass der Film immer dunkler wird. Am Anfang gibt es Farben und Licht, die Hochzeit ist sehr bunt, die Szene am Elbstrand spielt am helllichten Tag. Dann wird er immer mehr Nacht — in der Geschichte wie im Bild'.²⁷⁷ In his later film Akin does not equate the night and danger — a significant part of Sibel's freedom is her freedom to enjoy Hamburg at night and the streets of Istanbul at night are not presented as inherently dangerous — yet light is still used as a visual metaphor for agency and constraint.

In *Auf der anderen Seite*, fitting with the trope in Akin's films that chance is a significant limitation on agency, there are often no clues in the environment that danger is looming. Wheatley comments on this use of domestic and public spaces in *Auf der anderen Seite* in her review of the film, which compares it to *Gegen die Wand*:

the ways in which Turkish prostitute Yeter and German student Lotte suddenly meet their maker bear an uncanny resemblance to two incidents in Akin's earlier feature, as they fall foul of the drunken brutality of a possessive lover and the casual violence of street thugs in an Istanbul alley respectively. Here, however, the alley is no longer dark and ominous, a place where no sane woman would walk at night, but rather it is sunlit and serene; and fists fly not in a seedy bar, but in a quiet suburban home.²⁷⁸

The sunlit and serene streets of Istanbul are also places which Lotte and Susanne obviously gain pleasure from discovering and in which they can be safe, which

²⁷⁷ *Im Clinch*, p. 62.

²⁷⁸ Wheatley, 'The Edge of Heaven', para. 5 of 7.

illustrates that there is not always correlation between how a character's surroundings are presented and their agency. Upbeat music accompanies Lotte and Susanne walking down the street outside Nejat's apartment building and the camera movement used to film them here, mentioned above, in which the camera pans almost 180 degrees, filming the characters as they come close to the camera then walk into the distance, communicates that they are safe walking the streets of Istanbul without the viewer watching over them, and they will come to no harm. In *Auf der anderen Seite*, Akin thus distances himself even further from the more straightforward symbols of limited agency in Tykwer's films, and in earlier Turkish-German cinema.

Another difference between the presentation of space in Tykwer's and Akin's films is that in the latter filmmaker's work, in both films in question, characters are explicitly shown to have control over how their environments look. Characters being portrayed in small, enclosed spaces is not necessarily a symbol of a debilitating lack of agency when what Fiske calls 'the creative use of the conditions of constraint' is evident. This phrase perfectly encapsulates the plan of Sibel in *Gegen die Wand*, namely a marriage of convenience to Cahit, a Turkish-German man, so she can escape her constraining family, but this concept can also be found in the presentation of space in Akin's films. As mentioned above, Fiske, drawing on Certeau, argues that

The construction, occupation, and ownership of one's own space/ setting within their place/ arena, the weaving of one's own richly textured life within the constraints of economic deprivation and oppression, are not just ways of controlling some of the conditions of social existence; they are also ways of constructing, and therefore exerting some control over, social identities and social relations.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁹ Fiske, p. 160.

Akın accords less importance than Fiske to what Fiske calls ‘their place/ area’ and economic restrictions on agency, but it is this construction of spaces and resulting exertion of control over social relations which we see in Akın’s films, and this is a large part of how his spaces are used to portray agency, rather than limitations on it. This construction of social identities can be seen in *Gegen die Wand* in Cahit’s small flat with punk posters on the walls, which the camera pans around in the first scene set there, and how — and also the fact that — Sibel decorates it when she moves in. Once again, the camera pans around the flat so all the furnishings are visible, Cahit comments that it looks like a ‘Tussenbombe’ (G, 36.11) has gone off, and the close-up of Sibel’s teddy bear on her bed makes it clear that Sibel now also occupies this space. It is also significant that a whole scene is dedicated to Cahit destroying and then repairing Sibel’s furnishings: the idea that this is a way of having control is underlined.

Both *Gegen die Wand* and *Auf der anderen Seite* demonstrate that the density in what Fiske refers to as ‘the material, densely lived culture of everyday life [which] is a contradictory mixture of creativity and constraint’²⁸⁰ can be expressed in the audio-visual medium of film. In *Auf der anderen Seite*, this creativity is clear in Yeter’s decoration of her room in the brothel. Here, she plays Turkish music (showing she has not turned her back on her background) and the room is densely packed with different objects, of which, in an echo of the panning and close-ups in *Gegen die Wand*, we are shown select items in close-up: a plant, Yeter’s tiger skin walls, pornographic magazines and so on. This has been commented on: the *Spiegel* review of the film refers to ‘die türkische Hure Yeter (Nursel Köse), die ihr düsteres Souterrain-Zimmer im Bremer Rotlichtbezirk in orientalischen Schick kleidet’.²⁸¹ The

²⁸⁰ Fiske, p. 157.

²⁸¹ Christian Buß, ‘Jedem Seine Eigene Heimat’, *Der Spiegel*, 25 September 2007 <<http://www.spiegel.de/kultur/kino/fatih-akins-neuer-film-jedem-seine-eigene-heimat-a-507815.html>> [accessed 4 December 2016] (para. 3 of 15).

other example from *Auf der anderen Seite* of this creativity and constraint, perhaps less obvious as it does not involve any ‘orientalistischen Schick’ is Ali’s garden, with his tomato plants, his pride and joy, bringing life to the small space with its plain walls. The viewer is shown Ali as he creates, watering the plants, and we are shown the (literal) fruits of his labour, when the tomatoes become ripe enough for Nejat and Yeter to eat. It is clear that the creativity that these places afford, small and potentially depressing though they are, is a significant part of the picture of the characters’ agency.

We are also shown the converse of this control: in *Gegen die Wand*, we see the Istanbul hotel in which Sibel works, where the rooms are devoid of personality, and her role here is to clean, not to construct, occupy or own. This portrayal of the hotel creates a further link between her early life in Istanbul and a prison, more specifically Cahit’s empty prison cell, as well as the German prisons depicted in *Auf der anderen Seite*. The other enclosed space in which she is portrayed in this part of the film is Selma’s apartment, where she sleeps, but which is also bare and is also not her own space, which adds to a picture of her lack of agency.

The way in which Akin uses places to represent agency is much more multifaceted than in Tykwer’s films, and demonstrates the possibilities available when portraying agency in the filmic medium. In contrast to Tykwer’s shots of glass and steel architecture in a range of countries, Akin does not present his globalised filmic world, in which his characters move between Germany and Turkey, as homogenous. This allows different places to offer different opportunities to the characters and means that Akin avoids making an overly-simplistic, universalising statement about the potential to act in the world. Yet Akin also undermines a simplistic East/ West, ‘home’ country/ host country divide and in *Gegen die Wand* he uses mirroring

techniques to create links between Germany and Turkey and reinforce the idea that not all problems can be solved by a change of scene. This complexity, found in both films, is reflected in Akin's comment on his use of Istanbul in *Gegen die Wand*: 'it's a city full of contradictions; a wild place, a dangerous and very exhausting city. It is the city for me — the ultimate setting for such a story'.²⁸²

As well as differing from Tykwer and his use of space, Akin also breaks away from imagery used in earlier Turkish-German cinema. In *Gegen die Wand*, agency and constraint are much more frequently conveyed with light and darkness than with enclosed and open spaces, and with specific details of how these enclosed spaces look. The importance of characters' creativity in their environments, and the possibility for agency this allows in Akin's oeuvre, is in line with arguments found in Fiske's work, and exemplify how his arguments can be illustrated in film. In *Auf der anderen Seite*, this creativity is also important but Akin distances himself even further from earlier Turkish-German cinema and their emphasis on the relationship between a character's identity and situation and their agency. Fitting with the trope in Akin's films that chance is a significant limitation on agency, in *Auf der anderen Seite* a character's agency is often not reflected by the mise-en-scène before their lack of control is suddenly made clear by an event in the plot.

Ambiguity in the narrative

One facet of the way agency works in Akin's films has not yet been discussed, namely the extent to which the spectator has control over a film's meaning. In the analysis which will follow of the ambiguity and room for spectatorial agency in the

²⁸² Akin, interviewed by Feridun Zaimoglu.

two films in question, I will draw on comments from Daniela Berghahn on *Gegen die Wand*, who throughout her book on the film makes reference to the ambiguous nature of different parts of it but without making a more general statement on the vital role ambiguity plays. I will look at these different ambiguities together and add my own comments on *Auf der anderen Seite*, as well as situating my comments in relation to those of Wheatley, from her study on Haneke.

I have already looked at how Akin sets up and then disrupts a dichotomy in *Gegen die Wand*, between the Orientalist idea of Istanbul and dark, grimy Hamburg, which could be seen as an attempt to avoid over-simplistic readings of the film, but Akin's films do not seem to try to preclude 'wrong' responses. Claiming, for example, that *Gegen die Wand* is set in Berlin would of course be incorrect, but there are areas over which the films allow interpretations to co-exist. As Berghahn explores, the films have layers of meanings, which allow simple or complex readings, based on knowledge the spectator brings to the cinema. Berghahn argues, with reference to *Gegen die Wand*, that

By drawing on the epistemes and cultural codes of more than one culture simultaneously, the diasporic optic probes existing representational practices and invites multiple decoding positions that invoke the culturally specific knowledge of the audience.²⁸³

Berghahn has also commented on the musical interludes in *Gegen die Wand* in relation to ambiguity. One of these scenes is the last of the film, which adds ambiguity to the ending, as in *Heaven*, and adds to the ambiguity in the rest of the film. The relevance of the musical interludes in *Gegen die Wand* is undetermined, again partly due to the 'culturally specific knowledge of the audience'. Berghahn argues that 'the

²⁸³ *Head-On*, pp. 80-81.

problems arising in the attempt to assign an unambiguous meaning to the musical intervals partly stem from the fact that they draw on an eclectic repertoire of cinematic references and cultural connotations'.²⁸⁴ These interludes are, however, particularly important in the picture of the possibility for spectatorial agency in *Gegen die Wand* as this Brechtian technique creates distance from the narrative and gives the viewer space to reflect, on the possible meanings of the lyrics, the action we have seen on screen and what the links between them could be. Yet there is no unique or simple answer to this question, and also no 'wrong' response.

The ending of the narrative in *Gegen die Wand*, before the final scene on the bank of the Bosphorous, is also particularly significant with regard to ambiguity, as the ambiguous ending here, as well as granting the viewer agency (in contrast again with the ending of *The International*), allows them to reflect on the question of how much agency the two protagonists, and humans more widely, have. Berghahn has picked up on this ambiguity too, commenting, in addition to her argument that '*Gegen die Wand* remains ambiguous about the redemptive promise of Cahit's return to his cultural roots', that 'the end leaves us in no doubt that Sibel and Cahit go their separate ways, although it is charged with a high degree of emotional and narrative ambiguity'.²⁸⁵ *Auf der anderen Seite* also has an ambiguous ending, which gives the viewer plenty of time to reflect on what this ending means as the credits roll over the final image. Akin leaves open whether Nejat finds Ali or Ayten and also how Susanne's and Ayten's lives will continue, which leaves unresolved the question of the extent to which one should act, or can, in response to a state limiting its citizens' agency. Ayten repenting and being released from prison could be seen as an abandonment of her political aims and a shift in focus to her personal freedom, i.e.

²⁸⁴ *Head-On*, pp. 77-78.

²⁸⁵ *Head-On*, pp. 63-64.

Ayten unknowingly following the advice from Cahit's psychiatrist in *Gegen die Wand*: 'if you can't change the world, change your world' (G, 08.06). This shift would also reflect the 'waning of the paradigm of political modernism' which Czyzydlo observes in recent cinema. Yet this is offset by Susanne, who goes from being a passive, retired member of the Hamburg middle class to campaigning on the behalf of Ayten, who was a stranger at the beginning of the film, and is a member of what is seen as a terrorist organisation.

The ambiguity in Akin's work affords the spectator more agency than Haneke's films, or Tykwer's. Both the endings of the films in question and the layers of meanings throughout them allow simple or complex readings. A more comprehensive look at reviews of the films helps to gauge what spectators do with this freedom to interpret the films in a range of ways, however.

Audience response

Gegen die Wand was seen by 762,642 people in German cinemas in 2004²⁸⁶ and Berghahn stresses that it was one of the top 50 films in Germany in that year, at number 49.²⁸⁷ The statistic that makes the film's success clearer is that it was the 9th most viewed German film in German cinemas in 2004, making it the most commercially successful of the six films in this study.²⁸⁸ Berghahn argues *Gegen die Wand*'s critical acclaim was more important than its box office success, however.²⁸⁹

Auf der anderen Seite was less successful at the box office: it was seen by 454,303 people in German cinemas in 2007, making it the 68th most-viewed film of

²⁸⁶ Filmförderungsanstalt, 'Jahreshitliste (National) 2004' <<http://www.ffa.de/filmhitlisten.html>> [accessed 7 December 2016].

²⁸⁷ *Head-On*, p. 30.

²⁸⁸ 'Jahreshitliste (National) 2004'.

²⁸⁹ *Head-On*, p. 32.

the year from any country and the 15th most-viewed German film.²⁹⁰ Yet it was also critically acclaimed, and also won the award for best screenplay at the Cannes Film Festival.

As already illustrated, reviewers of *Gegen die Wand* and *Auf der anderen Seite* have been interested, as I am, in the extent of Akin's characters' agency, their relationships with their backgrounds, how chance functions in the films, the extent to which Akin is didactic, the extent to which his narratives are universal, and the places in the films. Yet I have not yet addressed what the films do to the audience, or taken a more comprehensive look at the aspects of the films which were praised and criticised.

Firstly, it is important to note that the space the films leave for the spectator to reflect is also a theme in reviews. In addition to Hüttmann's comment, quoted above, that in *Gegen die Wand* 'Akin verurteilt, verteidigt nichts. Er zieht keine Lebensart vor, sondern lässt sie aufeinander prallen', Susan Vahabzadeh in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* argues in relation to the presentation of Ayten's and Susanne's differing viewpoints in *Auf der anderen Seite* that 'Man versteht nur, was man von allen Seiten gesehen hat'.²⁹¹ The *Time Out* review of *Gegen die Wand* also comments on the 'distance to ponder' in the film. The reviewer writes that 'Akin's punchy yet astute direction whirls us in [Cahit and Sibel's] substance-fuelled passions while somehow allowing us the distance to ponder the explosive interaction of socio-cultural circumstances and personal fallibilities'.²⁹² Although I do not see personal flaws as one of the main limitations on agency in Akin's films, I have argued that there is a complex interaction of factors to reflect on, and from these examples of reviews it is

²⁹⁰ Filmförderungsanstalt, 'Jahreshitliste (International) 2007' and 'Jahreshitliste (National) 2007' <<http://www.ffa.de/filmhitlisten.html>> [accessed 7 December 2016].

²⁹¹ Susan Vahabzadeh, 'Im Migrationskarussell', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 17 May 2010 <<http://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/im-kino-auf-der-anderen-seite-im-migrationskarussell-1.787663>> [accessed 24 December 2016] (para. 9 of 16).

²⁹² TJ, 'Head-On', *Time Out* <<http://www.timeout.com/london/film/head-on-2004>> [accessed 24 December 2016] (para. 3 of 3).

clear that the space for the spectator's reflection and the resulting deeper understanding are seen as strengths of the films.

The fact that the films are seen to be able to relate to the extrafilmic world by contributing to existing debates in contemporary Germany is also a strength, whether this debate is the 'Integrationsdebatte';²⁹³ the debate about the existence of a 'Leitkultur', or dominant culture, in Germany — the subtitle of Nicodemus's review of *Gegen die Wand* is 'Mit Fatih Akins "Gegen die Wand" siegt das deutsche Kino über die deutschen Träume von einer Leitkultur';²⁹⁴ or debates surrounding ideas about the East and West, which A. O. Scott argues *Auf der anderen Seite* 'quietly demolishes'.²⁹⁵ These debates, and Akin's place in them, are also inextricably tied up with agency: Nicodemus references the 'Integrationsdebatte' when she is discussing Nejat's need to stay in Istanbul and, on the other hand, Akin's ability to intervene in debates shows the power he has as a filmmaker.

Other particular strengths of the films are seen to be the performances of the actors,²⁹⁶ the urgency in both films²⁹⁷ and, related to these strengths, their ability to engage the viewer.²⁹⁸ The irrepressible nature of *Gegen die Wand* is often praised,²⁹⁹ as is the diversity of issues which *Auf der anderen Seite* deals with.³⁰⁰ Both films have, however, been criticised for sometimes being melodramatic: as well as the comments

²⁹³ Nicodemus, para. 10 of 12.

²⁹⁴ Katja Nicodemus, 'Ankunft in der Wirklichkeit', *Die Zeit*, 19 February 2004 <<http://www.zeit.de/2004/09/Berlinale-Abschluss>> [accessed 24 December 2016].

²⁹⁵ 'Tying Knots That Bind Lives', para. 5 of 8.

²⁹⁶ For praise of *Gegen die Wand*, see for example Dargis, para. 6 of 11 and Nick James, 'Head On', *Sight and Sound* <<http://old.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/review/2328>> [accessed 24 December 2016] (para. 5 of 5). For praise of *Auf der anderen Seite*, see for example Bradshaw, 'The Edge of Heaven', para. 6 of 6 and Sandhu, para. 14 of 16.

²⁹⁷ See, for example, Andrew Pulver, 'Head-On', *Guardian*, 18 February 2005 <https://www.theguardian.com/film/News_Story/Critic_Review/Guardian_review/0,,1416759,00.html> [accessed 24 December 2016] (para. 3 of 3) and Sandhu, para. 16 of 16.

²⁹⁸ See, for example, Sandhu, para. 16 of 16 and Roger Ebert, 'Head-On', 7 April 2005 <<http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/head-on-2005>> [accessed 24 December 2016] (para. 7 of 9).

²⁹⁹ See, for example, 'Fatih Akins "Gegen die Wand"', para. 9 of 10 and 'Ankunft in der Wirklichkeit', para. 1 of 11.

³⁰⁰ See, for example, Sandhu, para. 16 of 16 and French, 'The Edge of Heaven', para. 6 of 7.

about *Auf der anderen Seite* quoted above, *Gegen die Wand* has been described as a ‘manchmal in melodramatischen Wendungen sich verlierende Film.’³⁰¹ It is clearly not just Tykwer who can struggle with the tension between generic conventions and an ability to reflect the extrafilmic world.

The believability of both films has also been called into question: apart from the discussion of the contrivances of *Auf der anderen Seite* explored above, Andrew Pulver in the *Guardian* review describes *Gegen die Wand* as ‘dip[ping] into occasional absurdity [...] which tends to undermine the onscreen traumas’.³⁰² Yet Peter Bradshaw in the *Guardian* review of *Auf der anderen Seite* writes that Akın ‘creates believable human beings’³⁰³ and in addition to the title of *Die Zeit*’s review of *Gegen die Wand* — ‘Ankunft in der Wirklichkeit’ — Hüttmann in *Der Spiegel* refers to the film as ‘von ungeheurer Aufrichtigkeit’.³⁰⁴ It seems that Akın’s films, although they sometimes require a stretch of the imagination, do not suffer from the affliction which *Heaven* suffers from: not reflecting the viewer’s sense of agency.

One issue over which there has been considerable disagreement in reviews is the extent to which the films are political, and whether this is to be praised or criticised. Vahabzadeh, when discussing *Auf der anderen Seite*, writes ‘er wird immer wieder politisch, ohne ins platte Parabelhafte zu verfallen’³⁰⁵ yet Wheatley, as already discussed, points out in her review of the film that ‘sexual, religious and economic imperatives are otherwise ignored in a film that seems decidedly sunny in its political outlook’. A. O. Scott sums up this tension in *Auf der anderen Seite* in one sentence: ‘even as the movie bristles with violence — accidental and systematic, sexual and

³⁰¹ ‘Ankunft in der Wirklichkeit’, para. 1 of 11.

³⁰² Pulver, para. 3 of 3.

³⁰³ Bradshaw, ‘The Edge of Heaven’, para. 6 of 6.

³⁰⁴ ‘Fatih Akins “Gegen die Wand”’, para. 9 of 10.

³⁰⁵ Vahabzadeh, para. 8 of 16.

political — its tone is curiously gentle.³⁰⁶ Regarding *Gegen die Wand*, it seems more of a political film in light of the ability the reviews discuss to contribute to contemporary debates, yet no political aspect within the diegesis is emphasised by reviews. Although the reviews do not dispute that the level on which Akin's characters can make free choices and act on them, when this is possible, is a personal rather than political one, perceptions of the films' political or depoliticised nature also correspond to perceptions of what is emphasised in terms of limitations on agency.

As well as being interested in several of the same aspects of Akin's films as I am, reviewers stress the ability of *Gegen die Wand* and *Auf der anderen Seite* to engage the viewer, reflect the viewer's sense of agency and intervene in debates outside the films. Their weaknesses, in the eyes of some reviewers, are a tendency to slip into melodrama, some far-fetched storylines and a failure to adequately engage with a political context. A useful film for comparison here is one which is very much situated in a political context, which is unflinchingly portrayed, without the simplistic presentation of macro-social forces found, for example, in *The International*: Christian Petzold's *Barbara*. *Barbara* and *Phoenix* also exemplify a significant part of contemporary German cinema, particularly as seen from the outside: historical dramas which deal with twentieth-century German history. As this study has illustrated so far, there is much more to the landscape than this, yet Petzold's work is interesting as after a career making films set in contemporary Germany, in 2012 he turned to films which deal with the country's past, in order to say something about the present.

With *Gegen die Wand* and *Auf der anderen Seite*, Akin shows us one way in which it is possible to act in the world. He engages with and rejects the idea of

³⁰⁶ 'Tying Knots That Bind Lives', para. 2 of 8.

characters having complete control, thus avoiding a portrayal of agency which is seen as kitsch, such as in *Heaven*, and speaking to the viewer about their sense of agency. He uses, firstly, chance and coincidence and, secondly, the need to engage with one's background to interrogate the limits of human agency, and demonstrates that it is only by recognising these limits that one can become an agent.

Akın's films serve as examples of contemporary Turkish-German film using a mixture of limitations on agency, and exhibiting diverse influences, whilst the specific limitations on agency he represents can be found in other recent German films more widely. He is more successful than Tykwer, however, at avoiding didacticism, universalising discourse and simplistic narratives about macro-social forces. The way in which Akın uses places to represent agency is also much more multi-faceted than in Tykwer's films, and demonstrates the possibilities available when portraying agency in the filmic medium. Akın also breaks away from imagery used in earlier Turkish-German cinema.

As in *Heaven*, the level on which Akın's characters can make free choices and act on them is on that of what Fiske calls 'micro-histories and -experiences', and this seems to be a trend in contemporary German cinema, but reviews call into question whether Akın's films are political enough. The issue of how to address a political context whilst focusing on personal narratives and personal agency is, as we shall see, dealt with in a different way in *Barbara* and *Phoenix*.

Gegen die Wand and *Auf der anderen Seite* are important contributions to discussions of agency in contemporary multi-ethnic society, in Germany and elsewhere, and to a consideration of how contemporary German cinema deals with agency. Turning to Petzold's films which deal with Germany's twentieth-century past

helps us find the potential for human agency in periods of oppression, and also in contemporary Germany.

Chapter 3

Agency in Germany's twentieth-century past in Christian Petzold's cinema

In terms of viewing figures in Germany, the two films directed by Christian Petzold which will be the focus of this chapter were less successful than any of the other films in this study. *Barbara* was seen by 369,415 people in German cinemas in 2012, making it the 88th most-viewed film of the year from any country and the 23rd most-viewed German film.³⁰⁷ *Phoenix* was seen by even fewer people — 93,087 in German cinemas in 2014 — which made it the 51st most-viewed German film that year, and it did not even make it into the 100 most-viewed films from any country.³⁰⁸ Yet independent of domestic box office success, the two films were critically acclaimed and won awards at film festivals, reflecting the repeated successes of the Berlin School. Petzold is the only director to have won the prize for the best feature film at the German Film Critics Association Awards five times, and *Barbara* earned him the Silver Bear for Best Director at the 2012 Berlinale, where the film premiered.

With *Barbara*, Petzold moves from making films about contemporary Germany to dealing with the country's twentieth-century past, but he retains an interest in human agency that was a feature of his earlier work. The way Petzold portrays a lack of control in his earlier films demonstrates that he shares concerns with Tykwer, as evidenced in *The International*, despite the two filmmakers' differing styles. Petzold's films about contemporary Germany and the contemporary globalised world, such as *Wolfsburg* (2003), focus on the same impersonal glass and steel architecture as in Tykwer's work. Petzold then shifts his focus to the GDR and Berlin

³⁰⁷ 'Jahreshitliste (National) 2012' and Filmförderungsanstalt, 'Jahreshitliste (International) 2012' <<http://www.ffa.de/filmhitlisten.html>> [accessed 25 January 2017].

³⁰⁸ 'Jahreshitliste (National) 2014' and Filmförderungsanstalt, 'Jahreshitliste (International) 2014' <<http://www.ffa.de/filmhitlisten.html>> [accessed 25 January 2017].

in 1945, and the GDR in particular, described by Karen Leeder as a ‘case study in power’,³⁰⁹ is a fitting place to explore the potential for agency.

In *Barbara* the eponymous protagonist realises the agency she has, largely thanks to her job as a doctor, despite the constraints imposed both by her state and as a result of her gender. There is also a shift in power relations throughout the film, disrupting a powerless victim/ all-powerful state binary. In *Phoenix*, the protagonist Nelly’s profession — she is a former singer — is less central, although it does play an important role. She also, however, manages to resist a portrayal as a victim, in this case as a Holocaust survivor without an individual identity, and escape the confining gaze of her former husband. Petzold, in the ‘The Making of Phoenix’ featurette which can be found on the UK DVD of the film, comments that ‘Menschen, die etwas nicht einsehen, die dadurch Sand im Getriebe sind, sind die, finde ich, interessantesten’.³¹⁰ This is in reference to Nelly but could just as easily be a reference to Barbara in Petzold’s earlier film. Neither Barbara nor Nelly accept the roles which are handed to them.

The agency in *Barbara* and *Phoenix* is, as in all the other films considered in this study, more personal than political. It is not on a political level that characters can make a difference yet it is important to note that in *Barbara* it is also not simply on a personal level: the idea of work, a preoccupation in many of Petzold’s films, adds a dimension to the film that is beyond the personal. Through her work Barbara can intervene in the society in which she lives. The exploration of state repression in *Barbara* also prevents the film from being apolitical and just focusing on the personal. Yet the film remains a portrait of everyday life and an ordinary citizen, rather than that of someone effecting political change.

³⁰⁹ Karen Leeder, Rereading East Germany: Literature and Film in the GDR, The Oxford Research Centre in the Humanities, University of Oxford, 27 April 2016.

³¹⁰ ‘The Making of Phoenix’, *Phoenix*, dir. by Christian Petzold (Soda Pictures, 2014).

The theoretical framework which is most helpful for illuminating the conception and portrayal of agency in these films is made up of some thinkers and texts which have already been employed earlier in the study and some which I will introduce for this chapter. Firstly, theory around the gaze is useful here, for helping to answer the question of how limits on agency and agency itself can be conveyed in film, and showing that the gaze can be resisted. A cornerstone of my framework in this chapter is Mulvey's 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', which I use to discuss the gaze and the disparity in power between men and women in film, in combination with the concepts of the female and feminist gazes, as conceived by Visser. In addition, Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* continues to be put to diverse uses, namely to comment on, firstly, Petzold's use of surveillance in *Barbara*, and how this trope is used to make a point about human agency; secondly, individualization in a disciplinary regime; and thirdly, 'docile bodies' in *Barbara* and *Phoenix*. Foucault's 1977 interview 'Power and Sex' and Certeau's concept of 'the space of the other' in his *The Practice of Everyday Life* continue to be illuminating, as does Fiske's 'Cultural Studies and the Culture of Everyday Life', due to Fiske's comments on the importance of the practices of everyday life and his comments on the body.

The historical dramas I will look at in this chapter are perhaps more in line with the common understanding of what contemporary German cinema is than Tykwer's predominantly English-language films or Turkish-German Akin's work. Yet I argue that they do, in many ways, go against a common view of what German films which deal with the country's past can be. In his polemical article in the *New Yorker*, 'What's missing from the German cinema', Richard Brody not only ignores the more outward-looking work of directors such as Tykwer and Akin but also omits

Petzold's work from his characterisation of historical dramas. When describing a discussion of the current state of German cinema at the 2016 Berlinale's Critics Week, Brody writes

One thing we agreed on is the prevalence of bland, distinction-less historical dramas—mainly about the Holocaust, but also about the Cold War. (One such recent film is “Labyrinth of Lies.”) They're not so much re-examinations of history as the packaging of pre-programmed responses to it. They may, by the very nature of drama, be built from specific details, but their unquestioned naturalistic representation of history leads to a distancing of that history from the present day, and the standardized arc of these scrupulously professional dramas boils those details down to a familiar and empty ruefulness.³¹¹

Throughout this chapter, I will be illustrating that the two films in question — *Barbara*, with its ambiguous response to the GDR, and the noir-esque *Phoenix*, clearly influenced by Hitchcock's *Vertigo* — are far from distinction-less. I will also look at the relationship between these films and the present day. Although Petzold is a representative of a wider movement — the Berlin School — and uses a common genre in contemporary German cinema — the historical drama, he demonstrates the way in which these two trends can be combined to produce something quite different. As Fisher argues, ‘Petzold's films consistently negotiate between genre and art-house cinema, between globally circulating images and national particularity’,³¹² and this will be particularly clear in the case of *Phoenix*. My exploration of Petzold's new approach begins, however, with *Barbara* and an outline of the plot, which illustrates a departure from the ‘standardized arc’ to which Brody refers, yet also illustrates a

³¹¹ Richard Brody, ‘What's Missing from the German Cinema’, *New Yorker*, 16 February 2016 <<http://www.newyorker.com/culture/richard-brody/whats-missing-from-the-german-cinema>> [accessed 2 February 2017] (para. 6 of 16).

³¹² Jaimey Fisher, *Christian Petzold* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013), p. 12.

portrayal of agency which, as in other traditions in contemporary German cinema, is characterised by both scope for action and constraint.

Barbara

Barbara begins with Dr Barbara Wolff's first day at her new job at a hospital in the rural GDR, where she has been sent as a punishment for applying for a visa to the West. In the first scene, Schütz, the local Stasi officer responsible for observing her, and André, the head doctor, watch her out of the window as she arrives. Towards the beginning of the film we are also introduced to Stella, a girl who has run away from the Torgau Workhouse and has meningitis, with whom Barbara strikes up a rapport, but who is later sent back to the workhouse. When Barbara's neighbour, Frau Bungert, is showing her around her building, Barbara finds a bicycle in the cellar, which allows her to cycle around her new home, and to meet with her lover, Jörg, who visits her from West Germany. Barbara first receives a stash of money and a note from Jörg, although it is not clear that he sent it to her until she meets him in a wood, where they have sex and he gives her gifts from the West. They later meet in a hotel. Here, Jörg tells Barbara when and where on the coast to wait to be taken across the sea to Denmark, and also assures her that once she has fled the GDR she will not have to work as he can support her, but Barbara does not look pleased by this suggestion. Schütz often sits in his car watching her building and after she returns from her trips out of the town he has her flat searched, which also involves a body cavity search.

Mario, a teenage boy who has attempted to commit suicide by jumping out of a window, is admitted to the hospital and Barbara and André try to ascertain whether his behaviour is normal and he just has a cranial contusion or whether he needs to be

operated on. Barbara realises he is not reacting emotionally to what is going on around him and, on the day of her scheduled escape, she goes to find André to tell him that an operation is necessary. The café to which she is directed turns out to belong to Schütz's family and Barbara discovers Schütz sitting in the café. He directs her upstairs, where André is treating Schütz's wife, Friedl, who has cancer. Barbara agrees to help with Mario's operation that evening and André invites her to his house for dinner, where Barbara kisses him and then immediately leaves. Just before her departure, Barbara discovers Stella, who has escaped again, at her door. She takes her on her bicycle to the place where Jörg has told her to wait but on the way she is spotted by Frau Bungert. After Barbara has failed to show up for the operation, André goes to her flat, where he finds Schütz, and it is heavily implied that Frau Bungert has alerted him to Barbara's departure. Schütz tells André that Barbara will not be coming back. Yet when the raft arrives, Barbara puts Stella on it and returns to the hospital, joining an astonished André at Mario's bedside.

One might expect the setting of the GDR and the presence of the Stasi in *Barbara* to result in a portrayal of the protagonist as a victim of her society, like the 'ghosts' in Petzold's earlier films: as Silke Arnold-de Simine and Susannah Radstone identify,

Wherever one looks, GDR remembrance culture is framed in terms of neat polar opposites: *Alltag* versus *Unrechtsstaat*; consumer culture versus state oppression; *Ostalgie* versus political debate; *bunt* (colourful) versus *grau* (grey) [...]; perpetrator versus victim; memory versus history.³¹³

³¹³ Silke Arnold-de Simine and Susannah Radstone, 'The GDR and the Memory Debate', in *Remembering and Rethinking the GDR: Multiple Perspectives and Plural Authenticities*, ed. by Anna Saunders and Debbie Pinfold (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 19-33 (p. 28).

Absolute ideas about agency are evident in many of these opposites: ‘state oppression,’ ‘perpetrator,’ and ‘victim’ all involve a conception of power as squarely in the hands of one party, and the same could be said about ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’, in which Mulvey’s description of ‘Woman as Image, Man as Bearer of the Look’ (V, 11) reflects her argument about the disparity in power between men and women in film. A female-centred film set in the GDR therefore could very easily fall into the trap of a neat, simplistic portrayal of agency. Yet this is not what we find in *Barbara*.

As we might expect from a female-centred film set in the GDR, largely in a hospital, the gaze is of central importance in *Barbara*. In ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,’ Mulvey refers to ‘Hitchcock and Sternberg, both of whom take the look almost as the content or subject matter of many of their films’ (V, 14) and the same could be said for *Barbara*, as will be illustrated by the analysis of three scenes from the film: the first scene, the final scene and a pivotal scene in the middle. Yet, as can be deduced from the comment above about the protagonist gaining agency, the gaze in *Barbara* does not function in the same way as Mulvey describes in her essay, when analysing classical Hollywood cinema. I will rather use Mulvey’s essay, and Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*, to show that Petzold is doing something interesting in terms of gender and surveillance in film. *Barbara* demonstrates that agency for a woman within a surveillance film is possible, using the gaze.

The first scene of *Barbara* begins with the film’s title, which comes at the end of the opening credits and occupies the centre of the frame, being replaced by a close-up of the face of Nina Hoss, who plays the title role, on a bus. The centrality of Barbara to the film is clear right from the beginning and she goes on to be in almost every scene. Irene Visser’s ‘feminist gaze’ is relevant here: it is, according to Visser,

‘re-visionary, re-creative, ideologically committed to struggle, aligned with anger and resistance against the mechanism of the male gaze.’³¹⁴ The concept implies the presence of a female protagonist who focalises the film’s action, which was missing from Mulvey’s original analysis, but which we find in *Barbara*, and a sizeable number of Petzold’s films. Petzold’s explanation for his choice of female protagonists (‘women are foreign to me. Focusing on a female character prevents me from getting too biographical’³¹⁵) is slightly problematic, calling to mind Mulvey’s statement that ‘woman then stands in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other’ (V, 7). Yet seeing a female protagonist as a prerequisite for Visser’s ‘feminist gaze’ in practice, rather than simply as likely to be constricted and defined, is a more fruitful way to approach Petzold’s work. As I will show, *Barbara* begins with the eponymous character as the object of the gaze and the victim of power structures described by Foucault but this is presented self-reflexively, and allows Petzold to go some way to portraying the ‘feminist gaze’.

In the first scene, Barbara comes out of the bus, as is captured by a slight high-angle shot, and as she walks she is tracked by the camera. It then becomes clear, as the film cuts to an image of a man in a white coat looking out of a window, that this is a point of view shot: Barbara is being watched within the diegesis as well as by the spectator. She sits on a bench and we see another man join the first man at the window before the film cuts back to Barbara, now the object of both of their gazes.

Mulvey’s characterisation of gender dynamics in film ‘Woman as Image, Man as Bearer of the Look’ (V, 11) is thus exemplified in the very first scene. She describes the films *Only Angels Have Wings* and *To Have and Have Not* in ‘Visual

³¹⁴ Visser, p. 285.

³¹⁵ Marco Abel and Christian Petzold, ‘The Cinema of Identification Gets on my Nerves: An Interview with Christian Petzold’, *Cineaste*, 33 (2008) <<http://www.cineaste.com/articles/an-interview-with-christian-petzold.htm>> [accessed 2 February 2017].

Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,’ commenting that these films both open with ‘the woman as object of the combined gaze of spectator and all the male protagonists in the film’ (V, 13) and this is what we see in *Barbara*: the men we see in the first scene, Schütz and André, are, we later discover, the main male characters and Barbara is the object of their combined gaze. The high-angle shot also illustrates the disparity in power here.

It is also significant that Barbara is silent in this scene and it is the men who speak. This fits in with Mulvey’s description of the ‘silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning’ (V, 7), as does the fact that the two men discuss Barbara throughout their conversation. Foucault’s argument about the link between exercising power and individualization in a disciplinary regime is exemplified here, as Schütz and André’s conversation about Barbara involves them discussing in detail ‘wie sie ist’:

- S: Sie wird nicht eine Sekunde zu früh kommen. Sie ist eben so.
 A: Wie ist sie?
 S: Wenn sie sechs Jahre alt wäre, würde man das schmollen nennen. (*Barbara*, 1.20 - 1.34)³¹⁶

Schütz’s knowledge of Barbara’s character and behaviour, knowledge which he passes on to André, allows him to watch her and exercise power over her, and the last line of dialogue here is particularly important. Debbie Pinfold draws attention to the fact that Schütz compares Barbara to a sulky six year old ‘who, by implication, requires supervision and correction’,³¹⁷ and this comparison ‘individualizes’ Barbara: Foucault argues that ‘when one wishes to individualize the healthy, normal and law-

³¹⁶ *Barbara*, dir. by Christian Petzold (Soda Pictures, 2012) (hereafter *B*).

³¹⁷ Debbie Pinfold, ‘The End of the Fairy Tale? Christian Petzold’s *Barbara* and the Difficulties of Interpretation’, *German Life and Letters*, 67 (2014), 279-300 (p. 297).

abiding adult, it is always by asking him how much of the child he has in him'.³¹⁸ This individualization and the inherent power dynamics are also reflected by the mise-en-scène and framing in this scene. The fact that Barbara is viewed through the window makes her even more like an exhibit in a frame, which is to be studied. This is especially pronounced in shots such as the one in figure 20, where Barbara on the



Figure 20. Barbara is watched by André and Schütz (B, 1.26)

bench is the only person in the frame.

Barbara's close confinement in the frame whilst she is looked down on by André and Schütz, but is seemingly initially unaware of their presence, is also evocative of Foucault's description of the panopticon. The swiftness with which Barbara is under surveillance, i.e. immediately at the beginning of the film, and indeed even before she has stepped into her place of work to begin her new job, makes the audience question whether Barbara will be 'totally seen' throughout the film. We later discover that Schütz is in charge of watching Barbara outside her place of work, including when she is in her home, and André's role is to monitor her at

³¹⁸ *Discipline and Punish*, p. 193.

work and write reports for Schütz, and the spectator becomes suspicious of the camera in the film, questioning whether, as in this opening scene, when we see Barbara we are seeing her through the eyes of an observer. Foucault's description of the panopticon does not exactly describe the surveillance in *Barbara*, as she sees Schütz when he sits in his car watching her building and when her flat is searched, but this visibility is part of a wider strategy to bully and discipline Barbara.

Also relevant here is that the scene takes place in a hospital: the men are looking out of a window of one, as is indicated by André's white coat. This presentation of a hospital fits in with Foucault's idea of the hospital as a site of surveillance. A Foucauldian reading of this scene poses the question of whether the disciplinary regimes which Foucault discusses in *Discipline and Punish* are going to be evident throughout the film. Yet Petzold, unlike Foucault, is interested in the staff who are part of the disciplinary regime: the people behind the power.

Petzold does also reflect on the idea of the gaze in this scene. Mulvey comments that in Hitchcock's films 'liberal use of subjective camera from the point of view of the male protagonist draw[s] the spectators deeply into his position' (V, 15) but in *Barbara* Petzold complicates this use of the subjective camera. In the version of the film with English subtitles the establishing shot, filmed from the upstairs window of the hospital, includes the caption 'East Germany 1980' and creates the 'distancing awareness in the audience' (V, 17) which Mulvey argues that narrative film tries to prevent. This non-diegetic label encourages the viewer to bring their own knowledge to the scene and makes them reflect on the surveillance we are seeing rather than being drawn into André's position. The scene is a way of introducing very explicitly the context in which Barbara is confined and encouraging us to critique it. In contrast, in the non-subtitled version there is no such caption, indicating that a German-

speaking audience is likely to have more knowledge to bring to the film and that for a German-speaking viewer the context, if not the specific year in which the film is set, is clear enough for them to be able to analyse it.

The presentation of Barbara as the object of the gaze also differs from the presentation of women in classical Hollywood cinema, and indeed many contemporary films. Mulvey comments that in *Only Angels Have Wings* and *To Have and Have Not*, the woman is ‘isolated, glamorous, on display, sexualised’ (V, 13) and in Petzold’s film, in this scene, although Barbara is isolated as already discussed, her body is covered and her body language is closed (fig. 20). Her self-presentation here is also supported by what the viewer is shown throughout the film. Although there are two scenes in which Barbara meets up with her West German lover and has sex, and one in which André walks in on her getting dressed, there is no nudity in the film. Her body is always covered by, at the very least, comprehensive underwear. Petzold is avoiding the possibility of Barbara’s body being on display and sexualised, and therefore disrupts the ‘Woman as Image’ paradigm.

There is a certain glamour in Barbara’s appearance, however, and Petzold argues in an interview that this disrupts another paradigm that dictates how Barbara should look, that of the ideal woman in the GDR. He explains ‘im protestantischen und preußischen Osten wehrte man sich gegen Luxus und Verschwendung, und dagegen wehrt sich Barbara — mit Dunhill-Zigaretten und Seidenunterwäsche’,³¹⁹ making reference to the items she has clearly asked Jörg to bring her from West Germany. Petzold makes clear that her carefully constructed appearance is a way of rebelling against the state, commenting that ‘wenn sie auf ihre Frisur, auf ihr Make-up

³¹⁹ Cristina Nord and Christian Petzold, “‘Ich wollte, dass die DDR Farben hat’”, *Die Tageszeitung*, 11 February 2012 <<http://www.taz.de/!5100957/>> [accessed 26 March 2017] (para. 16 of 18).

und ihre langen Wimpern verzichtet hätte, wäre das für die Figur eine Niederlage angesichts des Systems gewesen'.³²⁰

Barbara's love of luxury allows her to be 'individualized', however: André picks up and examines, and later comments on, her West German cigarettes, and one way in which this comment can be read is as a threat to pass his discovery on to Schütz. As well as being a sign that Barbara has contact with the West, the cigarettes give André information about her. Yet this luxury is not something which Barbara gives up on during the film: although she knows her appearance makes her stand out, she continues to behave in the same way, and her penchant for luxurious items does not ultimately result in a loss of agency, whilst she is resisting another patriarchal idea of how women should look, and whilst these items bring her pleasure. Barbara's colourful clothes and make-up can also be seen as an example of what Fiske calls 'the creative use of the conditions of constraint', but in the context of her appearance rather than that of a space. Her social identity, much as it may be frowned upon by other citizens of the GDR, is also marked out by her creativity here.

On the bench in the first scene, Barbara is captured by Schütz's and André's gazes but her stubbornness is also clear in the fact that she sits as far away from the men watching her as possible. It is only in the moment captured in figure 20 that her eyes flicker up, perhaps indicating that she knows she is being watched but she is choosing to ignore this, refusing to confirm the gaze. This attitude, already dismissed as sulky, can be read another way, namely as the film's first act of Visser's 'resistance against the mechanism of the male gaze', but within limits. Barbara cannot control whether she is the object of the male protagonists' (and the spectator's) gaze, or what they say when they discuss her, but she can control how she dresses, how she sits and

³²⁰ Ibid., para. 14 of 18.

where she looks, and these small acts take on a greater significance in the context of a surveillance society, in which larger acts can be used to ‘individualize’ and exercise power over her.

Andrew J. Webber, in his article on *Barbara*, comments on how she sits in this scene, or her ‘Haltung’, arguing that

Her “Haltung” incorporates the logic of being under surveillance: a kind of “Souveränität”, or personal sovereignty, that is produced in response to the intrusion of the regime and its agents. It is the *habitus* of a long-term prisoner, who has developed this as a technique to counter the visual control of the prison yard, and maintains it as an anticipation of the projection of the panoptical technology of surveillance into the everyday world that surrounds her.³²¹

Barbara’s behaviour is both a result of this surveillance, reflecting her victimhood, and a sign of resistance against it, but this ‘personal sovereignty’ she retains in this period and place of oppression is an important part of her agency.

This simultaneous victimhood and agency is also apparent in the use of the body in the film. Fiske is helpful here: he draws on Foucault to stress the importance of the body in a discussion of agency but, as mentioned above, ‘proposes the mundane body as the synecdochal embodiment of the social order, and therefore of the social differences within that order’.³²² Barbara’s body is controlled by the social order when its movements are monitored and it is even invaded by the state in the two body cavity searches in the film. Here, the representative of the state is punishing Barbara for leaving the town, and reasserting authority. As Webber puts it, ‘when the Stasi operative puts her fingers into Barbara’s anatomy, it is an act concerned less with

³²¹ Andrew J. Webber, ““Good Work”: Speed, Slowness and Taking Care in Christian Petzold’s *Barbara*”, in *Time in German Literature and Culture, 1900-2015*, ed. by Anne Fuchs and J. J. Long (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 173-88 (p. 180).

³²² Fiske, pp. 162-63.

finding evidence than subjecting the dissident body to invasive and injurious control, seeking to impose docility upon it.³²³ Yet it is also Barbara's body that she uses to cycle around and occupy the space she has been put in, to carry out her work as a doctor and to gain pleasure in her sexual relationship, all of which contribute to her individual identity.

The fact that the space Barbara lives in is a place to which she has been sent is significant in the context of Certeau's description of the 'space of the other'. Certeau writes, 'the space of a tactic is the space of the other. Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power'.³²⁴ Not only does Barbara's town seem to be under the control of a Stasi officer, this place has also been imposed on her. Yet she has the ability to explore her new home, and not all of her movements are 'within the enemy's field of vision',³²⁵ as I go on to explore in my discussion of a scene in the middle of the film.

Shots of spaces, and the way in which Petzold's actors interact with these spaces, are also part of how the filmic medium is used in *Barbara* to explore the extent of, and limits on, human control. Christina Gerhardt, in her article on the film, observes that

Barbara is set not only in the provinces but often outdoors, which frequently forms a site of refuge: Barbara meets her lover Jörg in the forest for a tryst; the Baltic Sea's arctic and choppy waves form the proposed route of escape; and throughout the film, as the movie's poster highlights, Barbara bicycles through the landscape.³²⁶

³²³ Webber, p. 183.

³²⁴ Certeau, p. 37.

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ Christina Gerhardt, 'Looking East: Christian Petzold's *Barbara* (2012)', *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, 33 (2016), 550-66 (p. 556).

It is also significant that the shots of nature present it as untamed. A recurrent motif in the film is of wild trees rustled by the wind, and this wildness means that the natural landscape is an element of Barbara's environment which is not controlled by the state. This, and Barbara's ability to occupy and explore this landscape, reflects the fact there is some space for agency in this society.

Connected to this is the film's portrayal of one interior space in particular: that of André's home. Here, as in Akin's films, what Fiske calls 'the creative use of the conditions of constraint' is evident, although in this case the constraints that André experiences are less economic than those described by Fiske. André's full living room, of which we are shown the entirety in several shots in the scene set in his house, contrasts with Barbara's bare one, to which the film cuts after this scene to make the differences as clear as possible. Daniel Sander, in the *Spiegel* review of the film, comments 'Barbaras zugeteilte Wohnung ist wie eine Zelle, in deren Ecke ein verstimmtes Klavier ein Gefühl von Zuhause vortäuschen soll'³²⁷ yet André's house is full of this feeling of being home. The shots of the living room reveal several paintings on the walls and piles of books on bookshelves and tables and a piano, the latter making the juxtaposition with Barbara's flat and piano even starker. The construction of a social identity can also be seen in the decoration of André's house, and the fact that the viewer, in an over-the-shoulder shot, watches André watching Barbara looking at his belongings, draws attention to them, as well as the theme of looking in the film. Barbara also comments on his books in particular: 'sind das alles Arztgeschichten?' (B, 1,25.32), she asks, which emphasises André's role in society and also two of his passions, to which the viewer has already been exposed at this point in the film, namely those of medicine and art. Barbara also watches André

³²⁷ Daniel Sander, 'DDR-Liebesdrama "Barbara": Zärtlich in der Zone', *Der Spiegel*, 11 February 2012 <<http://www.spiegel.de/kultur/kino/ddr-liebesdrama-barbara-zaertlich-in-der-zone-a-814597.html>> [accessed 30 March 2017] (para. 8 of 11).

fetching herbs from his garden for their meal, and her fascination raises the question of whether seeing how he deals with living in the GDR partly inspires her decision to leave.

André's home has been criticised as an unrealistic space, however. Wenke Husmann, in the review of *Barbara* in *Die Zeit*, comments that it looks 'als hätte sie ein Inneneinrichter vom Prenzlauer Berg ausgestattet', and Husmann sees the set as part of Petzold's attempt to add some 'Sinnlichkeit' to films set in the GDR.³²⁸ The attempt to make the GDR look habitable, which deliberately contrasts with Barbara's earlier statement to Jörg 'hier kann man nicht glücklich werden' (*B*, 57.44), perhaps goes too far here. Although the comparison with a home in the trendy Berlin district of Prenzlauer Berg seems overblown, the wide shots of André's living room, full to the brim with culture, and the cut to Barbara's empty one can be seen as too contrived. Yet this is a rare false step in Petzold's usually subtle and nuanced portrayal of agency in the GDR.

Returning to the first scene of *Barbara*, in summary, we see a bleak portrayal of agency here but presented in a self-reflexive manner, and with some space for resistance. As well as exemplifying Foucault's concepts of individualization and the panopticon, this scene exemplifies his later, more optimistic view, expressed in 'Power and Sex', that 'as soon as there is a power relation, there is a possibility of resistance. We can never be ensnared by power: we can always modify its grip in determinate conditions and according to a precise strategy'. This scene also sets up a power structure which is broken down later on, and the pivotal scene in terms of agency and the gaze in the middle of the film is the one in which Barbara goes to Schütz's flat to find André, who is treating Schütz's sick wife. Barbara stumbles

³²⁸ Wenke Husmann, 'Liebe in Zeiten des Misstrauens', *Die Zeit*, 13 February 2012 <<http://www.zeit.de/kultur/film/2012-02/berlinale-barbara-petzold>> [accessed 10 April 2017] (para. 7 of 9).

across Schütz, sitting in his family's café, and for the first time she sees him without him seeing her. Their roles are reversed somewhat: it is Barbara who is watching Schütz in his private space, and gaining an insight into his private life. Barbara and Schütz have a brief conversation and then he turns away and she looks at him again, also turning around for another look as she climbs the stairs.

Figure 21, a point of view shot, this time from Barbara's perspective, is taken



Figure 21. Schütz is watched by Barbara (B, 1,21.23)

from the second time Barbara watches Schütz in this scene, when she is waiting for André to finish treating Friedl and come downstairs. It illustrates what she can see when she glances to the right as she waits in the corridor: here she is evidently trying to keep looking straight ahead and not pry into someone else's business but her curiosity gets the better of her. What she sees this time is even more private than at the beginning of the scene. The display of emotion; the fact that she is looking into a room, past the closed door on the left of the shot; and the fact that the boy on the right of the shot is bowing his head makes it clear that this is not something that Barbara is supposed to be seeing. Barbara sneaking looks at Schütz whilst waiting in the hallway

is not as brazen as him confidently sitting on a chair in her living room as her flat is searched, but she is a voyeur here.

Foucault's description of the panopticon helps illuminate why this scene is so pivotal. In this scene Barbara becomes the seeing one and Schütz becomes seen, and the idea of Barbara being 'totally seen' is disrupted: alerted to Schütz's presence, the viewer realises that the shots in the preceding scene, as Barbara searches for André, cannot have been point of view shots from Schütz's perspective. Barbara has broken out of the panopticon. Yet there is a rejection of this reversal of positions: Barbara refuses to continue to watch Schütz in his pain and vulnerability and stare at him like he stares at her when her flat is searched. As André comes to talk to Schütz about his wife's cancer, Barbara and the camera leave the building. Visser's female gaze is relevant here, more specifically to the alternative to the male gaze which can be found in this scene. Visser argues that Lena Grove in William Faulkner's *Light in August* 'eminently exemplifies the parameters of the female gaze'³²⁹ because she is 'utterly on the side of non-mastery; she resists the urge to dominate, to control the other'.³³⁰ What is more, Visser claims that 'in resisting the desire for mastery, Lena at the same time keeps her individuality and integrity'.³³¹ These statements are just as true for Barbara.

It is in the final scene that perhaps a more sustainable model of the gaze and of the possibility of agency in the GDR are presented. The scene is very powerful but it does not include any speech: it is only accompanied by the sound of Barbara's breathing. The power of the scene comes entirely from how the characters look at each other, demonstrating that a character can be both silent and a 'maker of meaning,' as Mulvey puts it. It is important to point out, however, that this meaning

³²⁹ Visser, p. 285.

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ Ibid., p. 286.

will be different for different viewers. My reading, informed by my interest in agency in the film, is one of many possible reactions to the scene, and these different viewer responses are enabled by the lack of dialogue, as I go on to explore in my discussion of ambiguity in *Barbara*.

A comparison of the first and final scenes of *Barbara* demonstrates that whilst the film starts and ends with André looking at (a silent) Barbara this similarity between the scenes makes their differences all the more pronounced. With regard to agency at the end of the film, the control that Barbara has gained is evident as she and André exchange gazes as equals. Another aspect common to the first and final scenes is the presence of three characters, but they are mainly structured around Barbara and André. The last scene begins with André sitting at Mario's bedside, and then Barbara walks into the room and sits on the other side of the bed. We see, from André's point of view, Barbara look at Mario. This look, and the fact that the scene takes place in Barbara's place of work, can be seen to reflect the film's portrayal of work as a way to have agency. Barbara's job means that her life is not reduced to her existence in a surveillance society, and it is in her work that she can be 'committed to struggle,' as Visser demands of the feminist gaze. Then, after looking at Mario, Barbara turns and looks right at André, and into the camera (see figure 22), and the contrast with the opening scene is striking. Facing forward, her commitment to struggle is also clear on her face. Petzold's intention in this regard is clear in his statement that

Closed societies die very slow deaths. But Barbara and André will experiment with something; they'll try. It's not a happy end. They're not necessarily a couple. Instead their look says, If we stay, it might happen sooner. If we leave, it could be an eternity.³³²

³³² Megan Ratner, 'Building on the Ruins: Christian Petzold Discusses *Barbara*', *Film Quarterly*, 66:2 (2012), 16-24 (p. 24).



Figure 22. Barbara looks at André (*B*, 1,39.27)

The fact that Barbara and André are now on an equal footing, evident in this comment from Petzold, is emphasised throughout the sequence. After Barbara looks at André/ the camera, the film cuts to a shot of André looking at Barbara/ the camera, and this shot reverse shot technique, showing both characters' point of view, combined with their symmetrical positions on either side of André's bed, underlines how the power structures have flattened since the beginning of the narrative. André then also looks at Mario, 'as though to point out to Barbara what they have achieved,'³³³ as Pinfold argues in her article on the film, and perhaps signalling that he shares Barbara's commitment to his profession and the change he can bring about.

Pinfold's reading of the ending is more sceptical about Barbara's degree of freedom, however. She argues that:

The timing of that ending is unusually artificial, for the silence between these characters can only last so long. The audience knows that Schütz has already visited Barbara's empty flat and is convinced

³³³ Pinfold, p. 290.

that she has escaped never to return; and even her own return will surely not spare her questions and consequences arising from Stella's escape. [...] 1989 is still a long way off if Barbara is to spend the intervening period facing the consequences of helping Stella flee the GDR.³³⁴

Yet Petzold's decision to end the film with openness and Barbara's defiant gaze, rather than showing the viewer anything that happens afterwards, foregrounds her and André's ability to 'try' and 'experiment', as Petzold puts it in his comment, and the possibility of change, as well as letting the viewer imagine what is to come.

This ending, and Petzold's reading 'they're not necessarily a couple', is not what the viewer expects. We expect a romantic ending to this love story (first between Barbara and her West German lover and then, after we see her decide to stay in the GDR, between Barbara and André) or, as Mulvey less romantically puts it, the man 'gaining control and possession of the woman within the diegesis.' We are not given this ending, however, and equally importantly, we are not given its reverse, i.e. the woman gaining control. In 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', Mulvey describes the male protagonist as the 'main controlling figure with whom the spectator can identify' but here the power dynamics are not simply reversed. Barbara is not simply controlling, as illustrated by the Petzold comment above, and we do not simply identify with her throughout the film. The fact that Barbara's plans are not shared with the viewer before we see her put only Stella on the raft prevents us from understanding her thoughts and identifying with her at this point. Petzold instead wants his viewers to grasp the significance of the moment as it unfolds and we are given the work of actively understanding why Barbara makes the decision she does. Here too there is a certain 'distancing awareness in the audience' which makes us

³³⁴ Pinfold, p. 290.

reflect on Barbara's choice of the GDR, where her freedom is restricted but she has autonomy through her work, over the FRG, where there would not be the same limits on her freedom but she would be supported by her West German lover, or, in Mulvey's words, the man would 'gain [...] control and possession of the woman.'

Throughout *Barbara*, there has been another narrative developing alongside the one focused on the Stasi. One which makes staying in the GDR seem possible for Barbara. Outside surveillance, there are ways in which Barbara's life is working, and she manages to not be the victim or perpetrator of a confining gaze, but be committed to struggle, as has been shown. Petzold makes it clear that this period of Germany's history is bleak, but there are stories to be told in which the characters have agency.

Petzold has commented on the role of work in *Barbara*: he stated in an interview that in the film he wanted to portray work as 'something that is more important than seduction between man and woman'.³³⁵ It is also important what Barbara's work is, however: her job as a doctor demonstrates a 'technical capacity for care of both the self and the other',³³⁶ as Webber puts it with reference to what her *Haltung* illustrates, and this capacity for care allows Barbara to make a difference to her life and to the lives of those around her. It is of added importance that she is a paediatrician: her care of children in the film has the potential to prolong their lives by decades or drastically improve them, as is made especially clear in the case of Stella. The scenes in which Barbara reads to Stella, embraces her and sacrifices her own possibility of escape for her illustrate Barbara's role not just as a doctor but also as a surrogate mother for the young woman.

³³⁵ Stephen Saito, 'Interview: Christian Petzold on the Skillful Seduction of "Barbara"', *The Moveable Fest*, 20 December 2012 <http://moveablefest.com/moveable_fest/2012/12/christian-petzold-barbara-interview.html> [accessed 6 February 2017] (para. 20 of 23).

³³⁶ Webber, p. 182.

This emphasis on work fits in with an emphasis on the practices of everyday life in Fiske's arguments. He argues that 'the practices of everyday life within and against the determinate conditions of the social order construct the identities of difference of the social actors amongst the various formations of the subaltern'.³³⁷ This importance of everyday life can be seen clearly in *Barbara*, in which her job allows her to have autonomy and make a difference within the constraints in the GDR. It also affords her an 'identity of difference': she is not just a citizen of the GDR but one that plays a specific role. She would lose some of this individuality were she to escape to Western Europe and stop working, which, we can extrapolate, is a potential additional reason behind her displeasure at this being proposed.

Husmann, in her review of the film, also sees the idea that Barbara would work in the GDR and not work in the FRG as part of Petzold's pro-GDR attitude. Husmann writes:

Christian Petzold hat natürlich Recht: Die DDR war nicht nur grau und miefig. Es gab auch Licht, und es wehte — zumal am Meer — ein kräftiger frischer Wind. Berufstätige Frauen waren eine Selbstverständlichkeit, Liebe am Arbeitsplatz auch.³³⁸

Petzold does not go as far as to argue that work is more important than society's constrictions, but it is true that the emphasis on work, and having women in the workplace, were important aspects of the GDR. It is not just Barbara's work which is of significance, but work as it intersects, once again, with Barbara's gender.

The focus on three scenes from the beginning, middle and end of *Barbara* has illustrated how she breaks out of power structures. She begins as the silent object of

³³⁷ Fiske, p. 160.

³³⁸ 'Liebe in Zeiten des Mistrauens', para. 1 of 9.

the male protagonists' gaze and the topic of their conversation, and the fact the film starts in this way makes the viewer question whether this level of surveillance will be kept up throughout the narrative. Yet even at the beginning of the film it is shown that there is space for resistance. With her glamorous but not sexual appearance Barbara disrupts two models of how women should look, firstly the sexualised woman of classical Hollywood cinema and secondly the plain, practical female citizen of the GDR. How she sits and where she looks are also significant, as this use of her body allows her to resist the gaze. The presentation of the body in *Barbara* is as a site of victimhood and agency, but the 'creative use of the conditions of constraint' is portrayed as a way to have agency, both with regard to Barbara's appearance and to André's home. Spaces more widely, along with Barbara's ability to explore them, are used to reflect the fact that there is room for agency in the GDR, and Barbara's work is perhaps most important in terms of her ability to act in this repressive period of Germany's history.

The gaze continues to structure the film after the first scene: the idea of Barbara being 'totally seen' is disrupted in a pivotal scene in the middle, and the equality between Barbara and André is communicated by their gazes at the film's end. The possibility of change is also conveyed by Barbara's defiant gaze, which is the final shot of the film. Petzold paints a different picture of agency from Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* and Mulvey's essay, which is particularly interesting as he is dealing with the GDR and gender roles. *Barbara* reflects a conception of the agent similar to that which is evident in Fiske's work: using the conditions of constraint creatively and constructing identities of difference through the practices of everyday life. Yet Foucault's and Mulvey's theories are useful for answering the question of how both limits on agency and agency itself can be conveyed in film. Knowledge of

their work encourages the viewer to consider glances, point of view shots, the positions of characters, silence and costumes in light of Foucault's and Mulvey's ideas about agency. A film can reflect the bleak views of agency which can be found in their writing but, as *Barbara* demonstrates, characters can also break out of power structures, the gaze can be resisted and the camera can enable as well as restrict, in order to construct a complex picture of human agency within constraints.

Phoenix

Petzold's *Phoenix* begins with the protagonist, Nelly, being driven back to Berlin by her friend Lene, after Nelly has been in Auschwitz. Her face is in bandages, due to a bullet wound, and in Berlin she has reconstructive surgery, which makes her look very similar but not exactly the same as before. She moves into an apartment with Lene, who is also Jewish and wants to move to Palestine with Nelly, and at night goes looking for her husband, Johnny. She succeeds in finding him but he does not recognise her. Johnny does, however, notice that Nelly looks very similar to his wife, or rather how she looked, and convinces Nelly to pose as herself so they can collect and share the fortune that she has inherited as a result of all her relatives being killed in the Holocaust. Nelly moves into Johnny's apartment, telling him that her name is Esther, and he gets her clothes so she can dress up as her former self and teaches her what to do when she gets off the train to meet their friends, supposedly coming from the concentration camp. Just before Nelly 'returns', she goes back to the apartment she shared with Lene to discover that she has shot herself, and has left Nelly a note which tells her that Johnny divorced her just before she was arrested and taken to Auschwitz. Nelly continues with Johnny's plan but on the day she 'returns', she

requests that she and Johnny perform Kurt Weill's 'Speak Low' (1943) for their friends. As she sings, Johnny starts to suspect Nelly's true identity, which is confirmed when he sees a number tattooed on her arm, proving that she has indeed been in Auschwitz. At the end of the song, Nelly simply leaves.

In the 'The Making of Phoenix' featurette, Petzold poses the question

ist es möglich, den tiefen nihilistischen Riss, den die Nationalsozialisten und die Deutschen verzogen haben, über diesen Riss zurückzuspringen und etwas zu rekonstruieren, sei es die Gefühle, die Liebe, die Barmherzigkeit, das Mitleid, überhaupt das Leben.³³⁹

It is this question that *Phoenix* is trying to answer. Yet despite the emphasis on National Socialism in this comment, there are clear links between *Phoenix* and Petzold's earlier work, and also between *Phoenix* and the Tykwer films discussed above. In an interview, Petzold comments on the possibility of being an agent in film noir, a tradition to which *Phoenix* can be seen to belong, and which began in the period in which the film is set, arguing that 'film noir is also a genre. There the question is how can one, as an individual, live in a shitty and corrupt world, how can the individual go on?'³⁴⁰ This is also the question that *The International* and *Heaven* pose, although they provide different answers, presented in very different styles.

With regard to links between *Phoenix* and Petzold's earlier work, the idea of the protagonist as a ghost is also evident in this film, as is exemplified by the scene in which Nelly explores the rubble of a bombed-out building that was important to her in her pre-war life — we later discover it was where she lived with Johnny — and sees her reflection, post-surgery, in some pieces of a mirror. Petzold comments in an

³³⁹ 'The Making of Phoenix'.

³⁴⁰ Fisher, p. 155.

interview ‘pour Nelly, il n’était pas question qu’elle ait cet aspect fantomatique. [When it comes to Nelly, there was no question that she would have this ghostly appearance. (My translation)]’³⁴¹ and this appearance is evident in this scene. It is the first scene after Nelly has left the hospital, so the first in which the viewer sees her without bandages covering her face, and the signature blonde hair of Nina Hoss, who also plays Nelly, is dyed a greyish mousy brown, she is wearing no make-up and a grey mackintosh covers her body, reaching to below the knee. This combination creates a picture of Nelly as a grey, washed-out, shadow of a person, which contrasts with the fully made-up woman with dyed chestnut brown hair, wearing a red dress, who we see at the end of the film. The colour is gone from Nelly, as is the vigour which we have seen in the pre-war photos of her. Her facial expression and the way in which she moves are also important: Cath Clarke, in the *Time Out* review of the film, makes a link between these aspects of Hoss’s performance and the idea of Nelly as a ghost, commenting that Hoss plays Nelly ‘with the shuffling gait and haunted expression of a dead woman walking’.³⁴² This gait has also been criticised as being too awkward, almost ridiculous: Tobias Kniebe comments that ‘in manchen Momenten stakst sie so demonstrativ ungelenk mit ihrer grauen Perücke durch die Trümmernacht, dass der Zauber der Bilder zerbricht — der Film droht ins Lächerliche zu kippen’.³⁴³ Yet Kniebe is the only reviewer in my corpus who has criticised Hoss’s performance in *Phoenix*.

The haunting of significant places from her past, and her obsession with the past more widely, rather than having a role to play in the new society, adds to Nelly’s

³⁴¹ Pierre Eisenreich, ‘Entretien avec Nina Hoss et Christian Petzold’, *Positif*, 648 (2015), 25-28 (p. 26).

³⁴² Cath Clarke, ‘Phoenix’, *Time Out*, 5 May 2015 <<https://www.timeout.com/london/film/phoenix>> [accessed 3 April 2017] (para. 4 of 4).

³⁴³ Tobias Kniebe, ‘Aus der Asche einer Liebe’, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 24 September 2014 <<http://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/phoenix-im-kino-aus-der-asche-einer-liebe-1.2142640>> [accessed 13 April 2017] (para. 10 of 18).

ghostliness. Her reflection is a reminder of her present for her, however. In this scene, as Nelly walks past the pieces of mirror, the camera rests on them, staying static for a full ten seconds as we see Nelly catch sight of herself (see figure 23) and look at her



Figure 23. Nelly catches sight of her reflection (*Phoenix*, 13.23)³⁴⁴

reflection, ultimately deciding to return to Lene, giving up her exploration of this place, and the part of her past which is tied up with it. As Nelly catches sight of herself, the extradiegetic music, which could also be described as ‘haunting’, stops, just leaving the viewer with the shot from Nelly’s point of view and underlining the significance of this moment. What the viewer sees in this shot are pieces of a person amongst the pieces of the former building and the parallel between Nelly and the rubble is also underlined by two lines of dialogue. Directly before this scene, when Nelly expresses interest in visiting this building, Lene replies ‘es ist alles ausgebombt. Das gibt’s nicht mehr’ (*P*, 12.28) and the next line of dialogue we hear is uttered by Nelly after she has seen her reflection and returned to Lene: ‘mich gibt’s gar nicht mehr’ (*P*, 13.42) she says. She is described in a review as ‘a shattered woman in a city

³⁴⁴ *Phoenix*, dir. by Christian Petzold (Soda Pictures, 2014) (hereafter *P*).

of rubble'.³⁴⁵ The portrayal of Nelly as destroyed, and dead, is emphasised by her appearance, the mise-en-scène and the dialogue in and around this scene.

As illustrated by this scene, the act of looking is highlighted in the film. Nelly looks at herself in photos and in the mirror and we also frequently see Johnny looking at Nelly carefully. The fact that the viewer is shown this, with the camera on Johnny rather than Nelly, disrupts the conventional gaze, however, and the power relations exemplified and reinforced by it. In Mulvey's terms, taken from the section of her article entitled 'Woman as Image, Man as Bearer of the Look' (V, 11), the man is still the bearer of the look here, but not the bearer of the look of the spectator, and the woman is not the image. The viewer being shown that Johnny is looking emphasises that Nelly is looking too, as she watches him observing her.

Petzold avoids the use of the subjective camera in *Phoenix*, and thus avoids a subjective view of the female and male protagonists, although it is largely Nelly who focalises the narrative. In the many scenes in which Nelly and Johnny are looking at each other, there is a combination of shots and reverse shots, with the camera slightly to the side of the characters; over the shoulder shots; and two shots with the two characters in profile. In this way Petzold avoids showing us how Johnny views Nelly, but also exactly how she views him. A notable exception to this lack of subjective camera is in a scene before Nelly has found Johnny, in which she mistakes another man for him and follows him. The viewer is just shown what Nelly sees, rather than the man's face, in order to retain the suspense about his identity.

Mulvey's argument that 'the determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly' (V, 11) is, however, to a certain extent, an accurate description of how the gaze functions in *Phoenix*, and indeed what the

³⁴⁵ Brian Tallerico, 'Phoenix', 24 July 2015 <<http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/phoenix-2015>> [accessed 3 April 2017] (para. 4 of 8).

film is about. Throughout *Phoenix* Nelly is styled more and more according to Johnny's idea of what Nelly looks like and behaves, rather than how her experience in Auschwitz has left her. As Cristina Nord puts it in the *Tageszeitung* review of the film, Nelly 'spielt eine Version ihrer selbst, ganz wie es das Script Johnnys vorsieht'.³⁴⁶ Yet this 'determining male gaze' is undermined in another way because Johnny's fantasy, that this woman he has found is his wife, is reality. Nelly's, and the audience's, knowledge of this fact gives them power that Johnny does not have.

The presentation of Nelly's motivation for allowing Johnny to dictate her appearance and behaviour also weakens Mulvey's argument in this case. Although Nelly is initially presented as going along with Johnny's plan to win him back, the ending of the film makes clear that what is important to her, also in the face of the discovery that Johnny divorced her, is regaining something of her former self. In Petzold's words, she is trying 'über diesen [tiefen nihilistischen] Riss zurückzuspringen und etwas zu rekonstruieren'.

Petzold also stated in an interview with *Sight and Sound* 'the thing that I'm interested in is *Pygmalion*: a man is creating a woman',³⁴⁷ yet it is clear from the viewer's, and Nelly's, point of view, that Johnny is not making Nelly into a different woman, as he believes he is, but dealing with a woman who she used to be and now is struggling to be. Some reviewers also put the control behind Nelly's transformation squarely in the hands of Johnny: Tallerico describes how 'Johnny begins to turn this woman he believes is a stranger into the wife he betrayed, and, in doing so, brings Nelly back to life'.³⁴⁸ Yet there is a contrast between the aspects of Nelly that Johnny dictates — Nelly's appearance, her walk, how she behaves when she sees her friends

³⁴⁶ Cristina Nord, 'Aus dem Reich der Toten', *Die Tageszeitung*, 24 September 2014 <<http://www.taz.de/!5032830/>> [accessed 9 April 2017] (para. 9 of 19).

³⁴⁷ Neil Young, 'The Past is not Myself', *Sight and Sound*, 25.6 (2015), 38-41 (p. 41).

³⁴⁸ Tallerico, para. 4 of 8.

again — and what Nelly sees as significant. It is evident that Nelly requesting to sing at the end of the film is symbolic of *her* understanding of what is important to retain, or regain, about her pre-war self. The red dress, make-up and dyed hair, also in the final scene, are the superficial aspects of Nelly which Johnny has fixated on but her former profession, and the self-expression that is tied up with her singing, is more important to Nelly.

Mulvey describes woman's place in 'patriarchal culture' as 'bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his phantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning rather than maker of meaning' (V, 2), yet this role is rejected at the end of the film. When Nelly sings, she ceases to be a silent image and redefines what it means to be Nelly. It is also significant that it is as a result of her singing that Johnny realises her true identity. Reviewers have, rightly, questioned the plausibility of Johnny not recognising his former wife's body, voice, or smell,³⁴⁹ but as in *Barbara*, it is Nelly's job, and her skill, of being a singer which is a sign of an 'identity of difference'. She manages to resist a portrayal as a victim without an individual identity, or one which is imposed on her by a confining male gaze. The fact that the film ends with an out-of-focus image is also important with regard to the gaze: the use of this technique reflects that even before she leaves the building and the frame Nelly has escaped the gaze, and Johnny's grip on her has lessened.

The stylised nature of Nelly's look is also emphasised by the inclusion of a magazine cover with a pin-up style photograph of a woman on it, which was the supposed inspiration for Nelly's image. Throughout the film, Johnny persuades her to perform as herself, but this self has always been a type of performance. Performance

³⁴⁹ See, for example, Kniebe, para. 9 of 18 and Julia Dettke, 'Stunde Null eines Ich', *Die Zeit*, 4 September 2014 <<http://www.zeit.de/kultur/film/2014-09/phoenix-film-christian-petzold-nina-hoss/komplettansicht>> [accessed 11 April 2017] (para. 7 of 10).

is also part of Nelly's identity: she is a performer by trade, as we are reminded by Johnny's comment on the photograph 'Nelly hat das Bild sehr gemocht. Ihre Stil, ihre Art und Weise sich zu schminken. Die Haare. Nur das nachgemacht. Besonders bei Auftritten. Eigentlich immer, wenn sie aufgetreten ist' (P, 56.51 - 57.03). As pointed out by Catherine Wheatley in her review of *Phoenix*, the woman in the photo is Hedy Lamarr,³⁵⁰ another performer, specifically an actress, which further emphasises this performance. Lamarr's biography is also relevant here: a Jew like Nelly, Lamarr escaped to Paris from Austria in 1937, and in 1938 she arrived in Hollywood, where she featured in many popular films. Nelly copying Lamarr's image can be seen as a performance of a safer, more successful life. Yet it is by performing being herself, and finally performing as a singer, that Nelly manages to regain her sense of self. As Nord puts it, 'dadurch, dass [Johnny] sie dazu bringt, in ihre frühere Identität hineinzuschlüpfen wie in eine Rolle, kann sie die gespenstische Existenz der Entkommenen hinter sich lassen und sich selbst rekonstruieren'.³⁵¹

In line with Mulvey's comments, on *Only Angels Have Wings* and *To Have and Have Not*, that the woman in these films is 'isolated, glamorous, on display, sexualised', at the end of *Phoenix* Nelly does not share her shots with anyone else, and her dyed hair, make-up and low-cut dress add glamour to the scene. The extent to which she is on display is emphasised by an exchange earlier on in the film, in which Johnny asks Nelly if she can take in the dress to shorten it, as all of his wife's dresses reached to just below the knee. Her image is not as sexualised as that of the performers in the club 'Phoenix', however, who serve as a foil to Nelly.

³⁵⁰ Catherine Wheatley, 'Review: Phoenix', *Sight and Sound*, 15 January 2016 <<http://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/reviews-recommendations/review-phoenix>> [accessed 7 April 2017] (para. 6 of 8).

³⁵¹ 'Aus dem Reich der Toten', para. 14 of 19.

Nelly's glamorous look is also in contrast with her appearance at the beginning of the film, and a type which is referred to but not seen in *Phoenix*, apart from as embodied by Nelly. This type is of the 'zerstörte Lagerinsasse' (P, 57.39), as Johnny puts it, people 'mit Verbrennungen und geschossenen Gesichtern' (P, 54.06) who have returned from concentration camps and can be seen around Berlin. These are people who have not found it possible 'über diesen [tiefen nihilistischen] Riss zurückzuspringen und etwas zu rekonstruieren'. As in *Barbara*, Nelly's look can be seen as a rebellion against an expectation of how she would look and behave, in this case in post-war Germany, and after having been in a concentration camp. The lavishness which Petzold points out was frowned upon in the GDR is also not possible in Berlin in 1945, as is made clear in the scene in which Nelly and Lene's housekeeper complains about the ingredients she does not have, yet Nelly gains pleasure from being reunited with her shoes from Paris, as is emphasised by the number of times that their origin is mentioned, and these shoes are clearly a symbol of Nelly's penchant for luxury.

Nelly's appearance at the end of *Phoenix* is also a statement that she refuses to be completely defined by her experience of Auschwitz. At the beginning of the film she covers her face, wearing a hat with a veil, and covers her body with a long coat, and this is presented as a result of shame about her reconstructed face and uneasiness with her body, perhaps related to the sole story we hear about her time in Auschwitz, in which she sits naked on a beam. These actions contrast with her behaviour later on in the film, in which she is able to show her face and wear a shorter dress without pain or discomfort. It is in this context that Nelly's body is 'on display', and her portrayal at the end of the film says more about the character's development throughout the narrative than the male gaze. The presentation of Nelly is also in contrast with the

presentation of women in the Josef von Sternberg films which Mulvey discusses. Mulvey argues that the woman here is ‘a perfect product, whose body, stylised and fragmented by close-ups, is the content of the film, and the direct recipient of the spectator’s look’ (V, 14), whereas there is not the same focus on Nelly’s body in *Phoenix*. Close-ups are used frequently in the film, but largely of Nelly’s face, and the result is an emphasis on her facial expression and her emotions rather than a stylised body.

There is one close-up of Nelly’s body which is perhaps the most important shot of the film, however: the point-of-view shot which shows the viewer what Johnny sees to make him realise Nelly’s identity (figure 24). The shot encompasses



Figure 24. Nelly’s tattoo from Auschwitz is visible to Johnny (P, 1,29.29)

the middle third of Nelly’s body, with one sleeve of her dress rolled up slightly, revealing the number which was tattooed onto her arm in Auschwitz. At the beginning of this scene, as she prepares to sing, she takes off the jacket she is wearing, exposing the dress underneath and, as can be seen in figure 24, under the dress, with its ambiguous motif — some look like flirtatious lips, some more sombre leaves — the

viewer can make out the curve of Nelly's hips. What the viewer sees here is the male gaze: at this moment Nelly is the object of the gaze of Johnny, the camera (or the person behind the camera), and the viewer. Yet this is not a shot of a curvaceous, stylised body, nor is Johnny or the viewer looking at its form. It is rather at this moment, whilst looking at the number on Nelly's arm, that Johnny realises the power that she has had over him throughout the narrative, and how blind he has been up until this point. The male gaze as described by Mulvey is, once again, subverted.

It is significant that this shot encompasses both the number and the red dress. Nelly's slightly different face and the number tattooed on her arm are symbols of how she has been changed by her experiences in Auschwitz, and the tattoo changes her from the 'perfect product' that Mulvey discusses into a person with a back story and life of their own. Yet Nelly's new identity is a combination of her experiences in Auschwitz and the glamorous performer she was before her arrest, as is reflected in this shot.

Wheatley comments on this glamour in the context of her analysis of *Phoenix's* engagement with post-Holocaust art, writing

Phoenix shows us how time and again Adorno has been proven wrong: poetry after Auschwitz is not barbaric; it can be gorgeous, Technicolor, star-studded. Petzold's genius lies in at once aping that glamorous model and offering a haunting, and very welcome, corrective.³⁵²

I argue, however, that Petzold does not simply ape the glamorous model, but shows how this gorgeousness and glamour in post-war art, and post-war life, can be both problematic and important, in terms of those left regaining agency.

³⁵² 'Review: Phoenix', para. 8 of 8.

Other reviews and discussions of *Phoenix* frequently compare it to other films, and the one which is referred to most is Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958).³⁵³ Yet before I address the similarity and differences between the two films, and compare their presentation of (female) bodies in particular, it is necessary to discuss the relationship that others have to Nelly's body in *Phoenix*, independent of the gaze. As well as dictating how she looks throughout the film, Johnny is often shown to have control over her body. He treats her like a mannequin, draping a dress over her immobile body and looking at it, and he makes her practise entering the apartment they share, to change how she walks. The relationship that others have to Nelly's body demonstrates the limits to her bodily agency, and in one scene in particular the viewer is shown that her body is also seen as sexually available. After she has followed the man she thinks is Johnny, he puts his hands in her pockets to mug her. The way this is staged is very sexual: he stands behind her and reaches around her body to slide his hands into the pockets, reaching towards her genitalia, and this violation gestures towards sexual violence. This is of extra significance in conjunction with Foucault's argument that bodies are 'legible and docile'³⁵⁴ in disciplinary regimes. In *Phoenix* Nelly's body is docile, in the ways discussed, but Petzold complicates the idea of her body being legible: for the majority of the film it is not, as Johnny does not realise who Nelly is until he hears her sing and reads the number on her arm, but this pivotal moment is a moment in which the legibility of Nelly's body is rendered literal and the different ways of reading in *Phoenix* are underlined. Nelly's body is also legible to the viewer throughout the film, which emphasises the

³⁵³ See, for example, Young, p. 38 and Christian Buß, 'Auf High Heels aus dem KZ', *Der Spiegel*, 5 September 2014 <<http://www.spiegel.de/kultur/kino/phoenix-nina-hoss-in-holocaust-film-von-christian-petzold-a-989377.html>> [accessed 7 March 2017] (para. 7-9 of 11).

³⁵⁴ *Discipline and Punish*, p. 188.

privileged position of the viewer in comparison with Johnny, and further complicates the presentation of legibility.

The most logical comparison here is with *Vertigo*, which, as well as being referred to in many of the reviews and discussions of *Phoenix*, is also analysed in Mulvey's 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'. In her article, Mulvey makes reference to the gaze in several Hitchcock films, commenting that 'in *Vertigo* in particular, but also in *Marnie* and *Rear Window*, the look is central to the plot' (V, 15) and Buß, in the *Spiegel* review of the film, observes that 'in der zentralen Szene von "Phoenix" modelliert denn auch Johnny seine Nelly so detailversessen und mit wahnhaftem Blick wie einst James Stewart seine Filmpartnerin Kim Novak in "Vertigo" zurecht'.³⁵⁵ Differences in this regard between *Vertigo* and *Phoenix* are clear, however. Mulvey comments on the former film that 'subjective camera predominates. Apart from one flash-back from Judy's point of view, the narrative is woven around what Scottie sees or fails to see' (V, 16) and in *Phoenix* not only is the subjective camera used less frequently, it is also the woman's knowledge and perspective that the audience shares. More relevant to a discussion of the presentation of (female) bodies in the two films is the difference between the legibility of Judy's and Nelly's bodies. When Scottie makes Judy look like 'Madeleine', he works out that Judy and the woman he thought of as Madeleine are the same person, i.e. Judy's body is legible, and he also contributes to her untimely end. In *Phoenix*, in contrast, Johnny does not realise that Nelly, or 'Esther' as she tells him her name is, is his former wife until the very end of the film, at which point she is able to walk away. The knowledge that the woman in the contemporary version of the *Pygmalion*

³⁵⁵ 'Auf High Heels aus dem KZ', para. 8 of 11.

narrative has enabled her to escape the confining male gaze more successfully than her 1958 counterpart, which throws the female agency in *Phoenix* into relief.

Neil Young, in an interview with Petzold, paints a very positive picture of female agency in *Phoenix*, commenting that

women are the agents of change in the film. It's Lene driving the car; the film traces Nelly's journeys, her movements. Men are to a certain degree "passengers". Her husband Johnny has one idea and follows it. Lene and Nelly are capable of looking around, but he has restricted vision. He can't even recognise his own wife.³⁵⁶

This argument simplifies the presentation of agency in *Phoenix* somewhat, neglecting to mention Nelly's ghost-like status, and that she needs Johnny to help her out of it. It also neglects to mention the extent to which Johnny dictates how Nelly changes during the course of the film, in line with the 'one idea' that he has. Yet Young is correct that Nelly focalises the film to a large extent, as explored above in contrast to *Vertigo*. With *Phoenix*, Petzold also demonstrates one way in which it is possible to reconstruct something after the 'tiefen nihilistischen Riss, den die Nationalsozialisten und die Deutschen verzogen haben'. As is foreshadowed by Nelly's surgery at the beginning of the film, the trajectory of this character illustrates that it is possible to reconstruct *something* after unimaginable suffering, even if the reconstruction will never be quite the same as the original. Nelly manages to regain her voice in a most challenging time.

Here too, Petzold paints a different picture of agency from Foucault and Mulvey. These theorists help us know which questions to ask of films when considering agency and what to look at in them, but cannot predict what will be found.

³⁵⁶ Young, p. 40.

With regard to the body in *Phoenix* and Foucault's ideas about the body, although Nelly's body is docile, as she accepts control by Johnny, it is not always legible, due to the knowledge that she has, which is not available to the male protagonist here. Both this knowledge, which is shared with the audience, and the way the film is shot disrupt Mulvey's description of the male gaze, and the end of *Phoenix* serves as an example of a woman breaking away from her role as a silent image. The patriarchal culture to which Mulvey refers is shown to be far more prevalent in *Vertigo* than in *Phoenix*. Yet the conception of the agent, and of agency, here is a complex one, which involves both resistance and constraints, in this case both as a result of Nelly's gender and the time in which she is alive.

Universality

Barbara and *Phoenix* raise the question of what relevance the portrayal of agency in the two films has to contemporary Germany, as explored by Petzold in his earlier work, and to what extent the representation of agency can be seen to be universal. In many ways, the details of the films are highly specific. The environment of the hospital in *Barbara* is a very particular setting, and Nelly's work, or vocation, is also of importance in *Phoenix*. Yet Petzold often concentrates on the details of jobs in his films, such as of venture capitalists in *Yella* (2007) and of a snack-bar chain owner in *Jerichow*. As already explored, it is not just the specific job which is important but also the practices of everyday life which can be found in this work, and the 'identities of difference' which are created by these practices. Petzold demonstrates that the way to make a statement about the subaltern, or agency more

widely, is not to erase differences between people but to investigate the complexities of individuals' lives. In these complexities trends will also be evident.

In both films it is also clear where the characters are and what the specific situation is, and the date of 1945 and the setting of the GDR have a deeper significance than the different occupations Petzold has chosen to centre his films around. *Phoenix* is historically situated from the first scene, specifically due to the checkpoint manned by American soldiers, the viewer's discovery that Lene 'survived in Switzerland' (*P*, 1.48) and her line (about Nelly) 'she's not Eva Braun [...] she's from the camps' (*P*, 2.12). In the case of *Phoenix*, the gulf between the setting of the film and the period in which it was made seems wide, and *Phoenix* can also be seen as solely a comment on the Holocaust. Mark Kermode, in the *Observer* review of the film, describes it as 'an investigation of guilty memory and wishful forgetfulness in the wake of unspeakable national horror'.³⁵⁷ Yet I will show that *Phoenix* is relevant to present-day Germany, and Petzold's attempts to make it so are clear in the film.

In *Barbara* the 'East Germany 1980' caption in the first scene, mentioned above, makes it clear to an international audience where and when the film is set. For the viewers watching a non-subtitled version of the film, the specific year in which it takes place is clear from a radio broadcast of the 1980 Moscow Olympics, as Webber points out in his article on *Barbara*.³⁵⁸ Yet the relationship between when *Barbara* is set and when the film was made is clearer than in the case of *Phoenix*. Wheatley even comments in her review of *Barbara* that 'it takes some 40 minutes before we begin to

³⁵⁷ Mark Kermode, 'Phoenix review — noirish game of cat and mouse', *Observer*, 10 May 2015 <<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2015/may/10/phoenix-review-noirish-game-cat-mouse>> [accessed 3 April 2017] (para. 2 of 2).

³⁵⁸ Webber, p. 174.

understand where we are’³⁵⁹ and Husmann, in her review, comments on the universalising impulse behind the film, writing that

Weil Petzold sein Augenmerk ganz auf diese Liebe [between Barbara and André] und schließlich auf die Entscheidung zu gehen oder zu bleiben gelegt hat, tilgte er in einem zweiten Schritt wieder alles allzu DDR-Augenfällige aus seinem Film. So gibt es keine Honeckerporträts an den Wänden des Krankenhauses, die dort sicher einmal hingegen [sic]. Nirgends sind ein Hammer und Zirkel oder ein Ährenkranz zu sehen.³⁶⁰

It is true that Petzold keeps the GDR’s iconography out of his images, yet Barbara’s decision to go or to stay is very much tied up with the specific setting of the film, as is the situation she finds herself in. The narrative is bound up with Germany’s history. Petzold also does not make an effort to hide his clues about where and when *Barbara* is set: only five minutes into the film there is a conversation between Barbara and André in André’s Trabant-style car about the fact that she has come from Berlin, the capital, and rudimentary knowledge of Germany’s recent history will enable the viewer to realise that these characters are in the GDR. With *Barbara*, Petzold made a film about the GDR but his decision to not include the country’s iconography indicates a desire to universalise the film’s narrative, and the representation of agency, and make a comment about contemporary Germany.

The desire to comment on the present can also be seen behind cultural products which deal with the recent past more widely. Webber argues that

settings in the near past, as in the near future, provide the possibility for a particular perspective upon the conditions of the present, one that

³⁵⁹ Catherine Wheatley, ‘Film of the Week: Barbara’, *Sight and Sound*, 14 April 2014 <<http://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/reviews-recommendations/film-week-barbara>> [accessed 14 April 2017] (para. 3 of 12).

³⁶⁰ ‘Liebe in Zeiten des Mistrauens’, para. 6 of 9.

is rather subtly distanced from those conditions and yet also still participating in them. And, as such, *Barbara* does indeed participate from a near past point of view in the broader engagement with the conditions of the present that characterises Petzold's *oeuvre* more generally.³⁶¹

The very recent, yet in many ways different, model of a society that we see in *Barbara* inspires reflection on contemporary German society, particularly if the viewer is familiar with Petzold's work and knows that this is his usual focus. The narrative of the reunification of Germany is not as simple as the *Unrechtsstaat* of the GDR being replaced by a perfect, free society, as is shown by those of Petzold's films which deal with East Germany post-Wende, and by *Barbara*.

Petzold in fact comments in an interview on this desire to portray the past and the present, relaying that

There is a nice anecdote about François Truffaut and Jean Renoir having a conversation about Renoir's *The Golden Coach* [1952]. Truffaut was of the opinion that you could only do history in the studio, you couldn't show any sky, because the sky is always the sky of today. Renoir disagreed. In his view, you had to use both the studio and the sky, as in the historical and the present. If you pretend that the film was only about the past with no relation to our present time, then the film itself would be a lie. And I thought I actually agree with Renoir, which is why in *Barbara*, you see lots of sky, lots of wind, and lots of colour.³⁶²

It is clear that from *Barbara* that the shots of the sky, and landscapes more generally, are not dated like some of the shots of interiors, and create a link to the present. The number of scenes set outside fits with the lack of symbols of the GDR: one also cannot tell from these landscapes that they are landscapes in 1980. Yet it is the colour

³⁶¹ Webber, p. 175.

³⁶² Pamela Jahn and Christian Petzold, 'Barbara: Interview with Christian Petzold', *Electric Sheep*, 28 September 2012 <<http://www.electricsheepmagazine.co.uk/features/2012/09/28/barbara-interview-with-christian-petzold/>> [accessed 12 March 2017] (para. 12 of 22).

scheme in both *Barbara* and *Phoenix* which is a particularly noticeable technique which Petzold uses to make the films more immediate and relate the past to today.

In *Barbara*, the colours differ from the cliché in terms of how the GDR is presented. Although Barbara's flat is mostly made up of the dull browns and greys which one would expect from a filmic portrayal of the GDR, its bathroom, which features in many scenes, is a striking blue. This is also the colour most strongly associated with Barbara: she mostly dresses in blue, a notable exception being her white doctor's coat, and she wears her signature blue eye shadow. The hospital, in contrast with Barbara's flat, is mostly light-coloured and brightly lit, as is shown in frequent shots of the entire corridor, and this unfiltered light creates a link to the hospitals of today, and to the present more widely. There are frequent shots of green trees and the blue sky, which look timeless compared to the browns found in some of the film's interiors. Petzold commented 'ich wollte, dass die DDR Farben hat. Ich war jedes Jahr in der DDR, ich habe Erinnerungen an ein farbiges Land' and he also discusses his decision to use 35 millimetre film, commenting 'die Farbpalette ist so menschlich'.³⁶³ It is the humanity of the characters and the immediacy of the film's locations, brought out by the vibrant colours 35 millimetre film can achieve, which renders what we see in *Barbara* more universal.

If we return to Arnold-de Simine and Radstone's characterisation of 'GDR remembrance culture', however, colourful versus grey is one of the 'neat polar opposites' that they highlight. Petzold's emphasis on colour is part of a wider trend in post-Wende films, as Gerhardt identifies. She writes that avoiding greys

is a stylistic decision common to recent post-reunification films about East Germany: director Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck stated he

³⁶³ Nord and Petzold, para. 12 of 18.

sought to avoid grey tones in his Oscar winner *Das Leben der Anderen* (The Lives of Others, 2006) and director Volker Schlöndorff said “I didn’t want again this Cold War lighting where everything is grey” in his *Die Stille nach dem Schuss* (*The Legend of Rita*, 2000).³⁶⁴

This is a way in which Petzold’s films are representative of, rather than differ from, contemporary German films which deal with the country’s past. This colour scheme has even become another cliché, as illustrated by Georg Seesslen’s comment in the *Tageszeitung* review of the film ‘natürlich beginnt das alles mit einem koloristischen Einspruch gegen das Klischee einer grauen, düsteren DDR, gegen das Phantasma des Ermatteten und Er kalteten; nur so konnte man sie sich zugleich einverleiben und von sich weisen, in finstere Vergangenheit.’³⁶⁵ Yet Petzold’s portrayal of the GDR in *Barbara* has been widely praised, with Göttler in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* commenting that the film is ‘authentisch, in ihm sind persönliche Erfahrungen gespeichert’.³⁶⁶ It seems to come across that Petzold makes this stylistic choice not just to create the perfect distance between the viewer and the events, and portrayal of agency, in the film, but also because this colour is what he knows of the GDR.

This refusal to rid the past of its colour is also evident in *Phoenix*. If Petzold had wanted to create the impression that it was shot in the same period in which it is set he would have shot it in black and white, like other *Trümmerfilme*, but he rejects grey tones here too. Nelly’s washed-out appearance at the beginning of the film contrasts with the colour in this film’s hospital, with its blue walls; in Nelly and Lene’s apartment; and in the two women’s costumes, which brings the images alive.

³⁶⁴ Gerhardt, p. 558.

³⁶⁵ Georg Seesslen, ‘Ein besonderes Experimentierfeld’, *Die Tageszeitung*, 7 March 2012 <<http://www.taz.de/!5098989/>> [accessed 14 April 2017] (para. 18 of 20).

³⁶⁶ Fritz Göttler, ‘Mitten ins Herz’, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 7 March 2012 <<http://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/barbara-im-kino-blonde-gesellschaftskritik-1.1302021>> [accessed 12 April 2017] (para. 3 of 11).

This use of colour can be linked back to the original question of agency in these films: the colour reminds the viewer that there is hope in these narratives.

There are also links between Petzold's earlier work and his historical films in terms of the presentation of agency, and in this way Petzold suggests that the gulf between contemporary Germany and the country in 1945 or 1980 is not as wide as the viewer might expect. Pierre Eisenreich comments, whilst interviewing Petzold, 'Yella, Laura, Barbara et Nelly sont des personnages qui vivent une forme d'exil vis-à-vis de leur époque. [*Yella, Laura, Barbara and Nelly are characters who live in a kind of exile with regard to their time. (My translation)*]'³⁶⁷ and here, the fact that Eisenreich mentions a mixture of Petzold's contemporary and historical characters demonstrates that Barbara and Nelly are relevant to a contemporary audience. The almost literal exile of Barbara — although she is not barred from her native country she is sent to a different part of it for punitive reasons — is not so different from Laura in *Jerichow* being stuck in contemporary East Germany for financial reasons. Eisenreich identifies a link between *Phoenix* and Petzold's 2005 film *Gespenster* in particular, commenting 'vous retrouvez le thème de *Gespenster*. Les deux films présentent un décor de Berlin aseptisé, dans le premier, et presque désincarné dans *Phoenix*, comme pour mieux faire évoluer les personnages dans un *no man's land* [*You have returned to the subject of Gespenster. The two films are set in Berlin, which is sterilised in the first film, and almost discarnate in Phoenix. It's as though this is so you can develop the characters better in a no man's land. (My translation)*]'³⁶⁸ This idea of evolution is also interesting with regard to *Barbara*: *Jerichow* is set in an area similar to in *Barbara*, as is made clear by scenes by the Baltic Sea, and we are given an insight into what this area was like prior to reunification. This region could also be described

³⁶⁷ Eisenreich, p. 28.

³⁶⁸ Eisenreich, p. 26.

as a ‘no man’s land’, but with *Barbara* Petzold demonstrates a way to be an agent in this landscape.

Nina Hoss, who plays all the women Eisenreich mentions, reflects, in the same interview, on the characters she plays, stating ‘elles subissent des déceptions, sont ébranlées par ce qu’il leur arrive, mais travaillent en retour sur elles-mêmes pour réaliser leurs plus grands espoirs et croyances dans la vie. [*they suffer disappointments, are shaken by what happens to them, but in return they work on themselves, in order to make their biggest hopes and convictions in life a reality. (My translation)*].’³⁶⁹ I argue that Barbara and Nelly are more successful than Yella, for whom the realisation of hopes is no more than a dream, or Laura, who learns that what she thinks she wants is not what she wants at all. Yet part of the role of the historical characters is to show that even in times of oppression, there is potential for humans to act. Nelly in particular is in a very extreme situation: she has been living in a concentration camp, has been shot in the face, has been forced to acquire a different face and has discovered that it was her husband who betrayed her to the Nazis, yet she still manages to regain agency.

Despite the highly specific settings of an East German hospital in 1980 and bombed-out Berlin in 1945, and the amount of change Germany has undergone since both of these dates, the portrayal of agency in the two films is relevant to a discussion of contemporary Germany. This specificity, and the detail Petzold incorporates into his films, allows the viewer to understand the complexities of his protagonists’ lives — they are not stock historical characters — and one of Petzold’s aims for the two films is indeed to comment on the past and the present. In the case of *Barbara* this is partly achieved by setting the film in the very recent past and in the case of both films

³⁶⁹ Eisenreich, p. 28.

it is partly achieved through his use of vibrant colours, which have the effect of making the films more immediate, and reminding the viewer that there is hope in these narratives. The presentation of agency in *Barbara* and *Phoenix* is in many ways similar to in Petzold's films set in contemporary Germany, but the historical films ultimately show the viewer the potential for agency, which can also be seen as a comment on the present.

Ambiguity

Despite Petzold's professed efforts to portray the historical and the present in his films, it is important to note this is often with a degree of ambiguity built in. Fisher observes that the ghostlike figures in Petzold's oeuvre help him add this to his films, commenting 'ghosts are not given to easy observation or facile explanation [...] they prefer shadows and the conceptually ambiguous',³⁷⁰ yet this ambiguity is particularly significant in the context of contemporary German historical dramas, dismissed, as mentioned above, by Richard Brody as 'not so much re-examinations of history as the packaging of pre-programmed responses to it.' Post-Wende films focused on the GDR largely fall into one of two groups: films about the Stasi, such as *Das Leben der Anderen* and *Die Stille nach dem Schuss*, and the 'ostalgic' takes on the period, such as Wolfgang Becker's *Goodbye, Lenin!* (2003) and Leander Haußmann's *Sonnenallee* (1999). With regard to films about the *Nazizeit* and the Holocaust, German films are often either based on memoirs and other historical sources, such as Oliver Hirschbiegel's *Der Untergang* (2004) and Marc Rothemund's *Sophie Scholl — Die letzten Tage* (2005), or based on true events, with Giulio

³⁷⁰ Fisher, p. 17.

Ricciarelli's *Im Labyrinth des Schweigens* (2014) in particular a victim of Brody's wrath. Yet these pre-programmed responses cannot be found in *Barbara* and *Phoenix*. As Fritz Göttler in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* review of *Barbara* puts it,

“Barbara” ist das Gegenstück zu den DDR-Filmen von Leander Haußmann und Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, die allesamt — wenn auch auf sehr unterschiedliche Arten — monomanisch waren. Petzolds Film ist offen, er vermeidet den singulären, den obsessiven, zwingenden Blick.³⁷¹

In the case of *Barbara*, Petzold presents positive and negative aspects of the society in which Barbara lives, working against nostalgia and any particular ideological or moral judgement. The portrayal of repression is also wider-reaching than in the films set in the GDR which are mentioned above. As Gerhardt points out, ‘by focusing on topics such as the travel ban and on disciplinary homes, *Barbara* thematically contributes new takes on East Germany’s repressive tendencies, beyond the stereotypical spying of the Ministry of State Security’.³⁷² Yet these topics are combined with Barbara’s decision to stay in the GDR, and Petzold leaves the reasons behind this decision open to the viewer’s interpretation.

As part of Gerhardt’s discussion of the ambiguity of the ending, she identifies many possible reasons behind Barbara’s choice, namely

her realized commitment to her work, which she might not have been able to carry out as easily in West Germany; her growing estrangement from Jörg and growing fondness for André; relatedly, the growing alienation from West Germany, illustrated by Jörg’s offer to provide her with the life of a housewife and by the goods offered in a 1980 *Quelle* catalog; and the growing commitment to doing what she can to

³⁷¹ Göttler, para. 6 of 11.

³⁷² Gerhardt, p. 560.

right wrongs in East Germany and enjoying her rights rather than fleeing.³⁷³

To this I add Barbara's sensation of being needed and valued by the hospital in a way that Jörg does not need and value her; the realisation of a way in which it is possible to live in the GDR, inspired by Barbara's visit to André's house; and also selflessness: only she or Stella can fit on the raft, she perhaps judges Stella's need as greater than hers, and Stella has told her 'geh nicht weg' (*B*, 1,31.00). It is also important to note that the fact that the film offers different potential reasons allows a collection of motivations to be seen as behind Barbara's decision. There are myriad combinations of reasons which different viewers can choose. The openness here also helps Petzold avoid a simple response to the GDR: some of the reasons here are directly related to the GDR and the nature of the society and some are more personal, reflecting the fact that one's life is never completely dictated by the political situation in one's country. The fact that the film does not make clear why Barbara stays encourages the viewer to reflect on the rest of the film but allows them to interpret it how they wish, and choose a multitude of reasons for Barbara's decision.

This openness is achieved by a lack of dialogue. Gerhardt writes of *Barbara*:

A tendency of what some have called the Berlin School cinema's tendency of negation, this film leads the viewer to consider a new cinematic language, and by dint of it, what is not stated and not visualized. That is, it leads the viewers to consider what lurks in the lacking dialogue. Rather than provide viewers with a representation of the German past as heritage cinema did, Petzold invites viewers to consider anew.³⁷⁴

³⁷³ Gerhardt, p. 558.

³⁷⁴ Gerhardt, p. 555.

The most striking example of this lack of dialogue is in the final scene of the film, as we have seen. Here, viewers must decide for themselves what the looks that Barbara and André exchange mean ('what is not stated') and how the narrative would continue after the credits roll, which is neither stated nor visualised. Webber describes 'the reading of looks' as one of the 'constant themes of the film'³⁷⁵ but this is also a significant part of the role of the viewer.

Nina Hoss comments on the space left for the viewer, and the decision to leave out what was intended to be the final line of *Barbara*, in an interview, stating:

Ich finde, am Ende muss sich ein Raum öffnen. Das war immer mein Gefühl, und jeder Satz hätte diesen Raum wieder zugemacht. [...] ich will gar nicht sagen, was man am Schluss denken sollte. Ich finde, es muss offen sein, wie man den Schluss für sich interpretiert.³⁷⁶

This idea of a space opening up at the end of a film, enabled by a lack of dialogue in the final scene of *Barbara*, is rendered visually in *Phoenix*. Nelly leaves the building in which she has been performing and is in a new, open space, symbolising the new possibilities open to her, with the light from outside contrasting with the shadows the viewer has seen throughout the film in the semi-subterranean apartment that Nelly shares with Johnny. As she leaves, the camera, and the viewer, is left in the building, however, and the viewer must therefore decide for themselves what is awaiting Nelly in the outside world. It is left open where she is going, and what she will do in her new life. The film has made clear that she can collect her inheritance, which would guarantee her financial independence, but after Lene's suicide and the murder of her

³⁷⁵ Webber, p. 186.

³⁷⁶ Christian Petzold, Nina Hoss and Ronald Zehrfeld, 'Christian Petzold, Nina Hoss und Ronald Zehrfeld über die Arbeit an Barbara', <<http://barbara-der-film.de/making-of-Petzold-Hoss-Zehrfeld.php>> [accessed 20 March 2017].

family members and many of her friends, the only people she knows, as far as the viewer knows, are in the room with her in this final scene.

In this scene, the space for the viewer is also created by the music, and lack thereof, and how the characters look at each other. As Tobias Kniebe comments in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* review of the film, ‘Speak Low’ ‘endet nicht wie üblich auf dem Grundton, sondern auf der großen Sexte. In der Musik ist das der schwebendste, geheimnisvollste Schluss überhaupt’.³⁷⁷ This note is then followed by silence, and the point-of-view shot from Nelly’s perspective of her assembled friends before she leaves the building not only serves to show the viewer their perplexed faces but is also one of her last looks at what remains of her circle of friends. She looks at the group again, at Johnny and then once more at the group and then leaves, this film therefore also ending with a series of ambiguous looks.

The lack of dialogue at the end of *Phoenix* leaves Nelly’s motivation for leaving unclear, as well as what will happen to her after the credits roll. As the viewer expects Barbara to leave the GDR, and then must work out for themselves why she does not, the viewer expects Nelly to stay with Johnny, or at least to attempt to, and is then given the work of understanding her motivation for leaving. Her departure could be a result of her discovery that Johnny divorced her before her arrest, or simply because she has achieved her aims of regaining her sense of self, and of performing with her former husband once more, in Berlin. Julia Dettke, in the *Zeit* review of *Phoenix*, also raises the question of the extent to which Nelly has regained her sense of self. Dettke praises this ambiguity, however, writing ‘wird Nelly am Schluss wirklich wieder ganz sie selbst? Wahres oder falsches Ich? Darauf gibt es zum Glück

³⁷⁷ Kniebe, para. 18 of 18.

keine eindeutige Antwort'.³⁷⁸ As in *Barbara*, Nelly's thoughts are rarely shared with the audience, which means that the film requires the viewer's reflection and interpretation. As well as having control over the films' meanings to a certain extent, the viewer makes their own judgement about the characters' agency in both films, and the potential for human agency in the GDR, post-war Germany and in the world more widely.

There is a stark contrast between Petzold's approach here and that of Tykwer, as explored in my discussion of *The International*. Whereas Tykwer relies on dialogue in this film to communicate a clear model of agency, Petzold often uses a lack of dialogue to make the presentation of agency in his films less clear, and more complicated. Ideological discourse is not absent from *Barbara*, or *Phoenix*, but the situations Barbara and Nelly find themselves in are presented visually, and the frequent lack of dialogue leaves room for the viewer's interpretation too.

The dialogue which can be found in the films is also of significance, however, in terms of how it portrays agency and constraint, and also with regard to ambiguity. Husmann, in her review of *Barbara*, comments on the ambiguous nature of the little dialogue which can be found in the film:

Das wenige, was Barbara und André miteinander sprechen, wirkt wie ein Code, bei dem hinter dem Gesagten immer noch eine zweite Botschaft steckt: "Ich habe ein ungutes Gefühl. Ich muss noch weitere Tests machen", sagt André zu Barbara über einen jungen Patienten. "Antrag stellen" wirft sie ihm hin, als er von Den Haag und Rembrandt schwärmt.³⁷⁹

³⁷⁸ Dettke, para. 10 of 10.

³⁷⁹ 'Liebe in Zeiten des Misstrauens', para. 4 of 9.

„It is up to the viewer to interpret this dialogue, to decide whether they think there is something the characters are not saying, and to judge the extent to which they are free, or feel free, to say what they are thinking. The example of Barbara's two words 'Antrag stellen' is a good one: the film implies that it was her application for a departure permit which landed her in the provinces yet she utters these words very casually. Is she attempting to cover up exactly what brought her to the hospital, or test how loyal a GDR citizen André is, or is this just her way of wrapping up the conversation so she can leave? André goes on to analyse the Rembrandt painting, as I discuss below, and the meaning behind Barbara's words remains hidden.

One review criticises Petzold for falling into the exact same trap in *Phoenix* as Tykwer does in *The International*, however. Nord, writing in the *Tageszeitung*, comments not on Nelly's lines, or lack thereof, but those given to Lene:

Manches wird an den Dialog delegiert, als wäre man in einer didaktisch konzipierten TV-Sendung. Besonders der Nebenfigur Lene fällt die undankbare Aufgabe zu, auszusprechen, was man längst begriffen hat, etwa, wie unmöglich es für Juden ist, sich in Deutschland niederzulassen.³⁸⁰

Lene is another foil to Nelly: a Jew who has survived the Holocaust but who cannot look to the future, who has no hope. Although Lene's suicide comes as a shock to the viewer, her suicide note explains her motivation for killing herself and makes it clear to the viewer what the norm is in terms of Jews struggling to live in post-war Germany. A suicide note is perhaps too obvious a device here, but the explicit explanation which is found in it is the exception rather than the rule when it comes to how Petzold portrays agency in post-war Germany.

³⁸⁰ 'Aus dem Reich der Toten', para. 19 of 19.

This reference to a supporting character leads us on to a discussion of other supporting characters in *Barbara* and *Phoenix*, who are portrayed in much more ambiguous ways. I have already explored how the conventional portrayal of a Stasi officer is disrupted by the pivotal scene in the middle of *Barbara*, and throughout the film the portrayal of André is also unconventional, as the viewer is unsure to what extent he is working with, or even for, the regime and the extent to which he is ready to rebel against it. This is a question which is left unanswered at the end of the film.

Arnold-de Simine and Radstone, in their work on how the GDR is remembered, have noted the prevalence of simplistic narratives which revolve around perpetrators and victims. They argue that narratives about the Holocaust have often lacked complexity and ambiguity, and have led to a lack of nuance in other parts of ‘memory culture’. They write

the centrality of the Holocaust within memory discourses *and* memory studies has meant that the dominant modes of memory are, or have been perceived as being, remembering that which has been “done to”, and remembering in order to come to terms with that “doing”. This bifurcation and binarism can stand in the way of thinking through the complexities and ambiguities of politics and can limit our capacity to grasp the grey areas between the “done to” and the “doing”. The fact that German as well as global memory culture is focused on perpetrator-victim narratives means that stories which conform to this narrative pattern are more likely to be heard.³⁸¹

With the character of André, Petzold bucks this trend. It is left open whether André is trying to convince Barbara to stay in the GDR, or whether he simply likes her and gets closer to her. It is also left open whether he tells the truth, and to what extent he is attempting to manipulate Barbara to get closer to him: Barbara’s response to his story about why he was sent to the provinces (‘stimmt die Geschichte?’ (*B*, 43.34)) is

³⁸¹ Arnold-de Simine and Radstone, p. 29, quoted in Pinfold, p. 284.

met with silence. Barbara also flags up the ambiguity about André's motivations, and this act affects our understanding of the extent to which she is being manipulated: after André encourages Barbara to get some sleep on a night shift, she asks him 'schreiben Sie das in Ihrem Bericht? Die W. beginnt langsam Vertrauen zu schöpfen' (B, 40.16). Frau Bungert, Barbara's neighbour, is an implausible caricature of an 'informal collaborator' but her character throws André's more complicated portrayal into relief. He is largely presented as an ordinary, good person rather than as a negative character, but it is also clear that he is compromised, which allows different viewers to read his behaviour differently. André's portrayal also has a wider significance: the fact that an informal collaborator is also portrayed as a doctor who cares deeply about his patients disrupts the portrayal of surveillance found in this film and others.

The character which the same actor, Ronald Zehrfeld, plays in *Phoenix* is similarly ambiguous at the beginning of the film. Firstly, it is left open to the viewer's interpretation why he does not recognise Nelly. Wheatley, in her review of *Phoenix*, comments that 'with no prostheses or masks, the inimitable Hoss looks just like Hoss',³⁸² yet the viewer is never shown what pre-war Nelly looked like: in photos, her long hair is always obscuring her face, and this allows the viewer to make up their own mind about how believable it is that her ex-husband does not recognise her. One interpretation is that Nelly is, in fact, recognisable — it is, after all, only Johnny who does not realise her true identity — and Johnny does not recognise her out of guilt. In a review, Brian Tallerico describes the scene in which Johnny first sees Nelly after she has returned to Berlin. He writes 'he looks past her. Or maybe he looks at her and doesn't see her. She can't be there. His brain can't even recognize the possibility that

³⁸² 'Review: Phoenix', para. 5 of 8.

she would be'.³⁸³ Webber's statement about *Barbara*, that 'the reading of looks' is one of the 'constant themes of the film', is also true here, and this ambiguity inspires the viewer to think about characters' inner lives.

Petzold also leaves open whether Johnny betrayed Nelly to the Nazis. There are similar silences in *Phoenix* to in *Barbara*, for example in the scene in which Nelly asks Johnny whether he betrayed her, and as the film goes on, it is heavily implied that this is the case, although the viewer has to do the work of understanding what this silence means, and also reconciling this with a broader picture of Johnny's character. We are presented with Nelly's view — 'ich weiß, dass er sie [Nelly] liebt' (*P*, 1,07.31) — which contrasts sharply with Lene's dismissal of Johnny, and often we see a fondness on his face as he talks about his wife, yet this is constantly offset by his failure to recognise her. He is not portrayed as a wholly unsympathetic character but as someone who, as Young puts it, has 'restricted vision'. The idea that someone who betrayed their own wife to the Nazis and believes themselves responsible for her death could still be in love with her marks *Phoenix* out as different from the films set in the Nazi era based on historical sources, with clear heroes and villains. It also says something about the complexity of human nature and the blindness the viewer can observe in Johnny's relationship with post-war Nelly. The viewer is left unsure where the complicated protagonists that Ronald Zehrfeld plays fall on a moral spectrum and must make their own judgements in this regard.

Another noticeable technique which Petzold uses in *Phoenix* to complicate the narrative found in films set in the Nazi era is the inclusion of photographs of Nelly and Johnny's former group of friends. In these photographs, some people have crosses above them, symbolising that they have been murdered, and some have

³⁸³ Tallerico, para. 6 of 8.

circles around their heads, indicating that they are Nazis and therefore partially responsible for these murders. Petzold does not tell us their stories — the viewer must fill in for his or herself what has happened to these people since they were captured by the camera — but the photographs convey visually Petzold's attempt to paint a more complex picture of perpetrators and victims in *Phoenix*.

With respect to the narrative throughout *Barbara*, too, the viewer must make their own judgements and attempt to fill in gaps. Manohla Dargis, in the *New York Times* review of the film, comments

Early scenes, some nominally observational, others more overtly dramatic, unfold with no obvious narrative connection. In one sequence Barbara receives a stash of money from a stranger; in other scenes she reads “Adventures of Huckleberry Finn” aloud to the bedridden Stella. [...] In time, though, particularly after Jörg discusses an escape plan with Barbara, and after Andre speaks of the individual's responsibility to the collective, these outwardly disconnected pieces fit together.³⁸⁴

Before these pieces fit together, however, the viewer is given the work of hypothesising what the significance of the different scenes is and what the links between them are, and some mysteries are also left unsolved, which means that the viewer's interpretation is the only explanation here. The viewer's suspicion of the camera has already been mentioned, and although the idea of Barbara being ‘totally seen’ is disrupted, it is often left open whether when we are looking at Barbara it is through an observer's eyes. Long shots are frequently used, suggesting someone observing from a distance, which increases this suspicion. Other examples of events which are left unexplained and unexplored are Barbara's tire getting punctured whilst

³⁸⁴ Manohla Dargis, ‘Pushed and Pulled, a Doctor Wants a Way Out’, *New York Times*, 20 December 2012 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/21/movies/barbara-directed-by-christian-petzold.html>> [accessed 30 March 2017] (para. 6 of 7).

she meets Jörg in the forest — this could be an accident or an act of malice — and her reading the letter from him. When Barbara realises her bicycle has been knocked over she looks around but the camera resolutely stays on her, giving the viewer no clue to what has happened. Earlier in the film, at the moment at which Barbara opens the letter, pausing the film at just the right time reveals instructions for where and when to meet Jörg but when watching the film at a normal speed the viewer has to guess what is in the note. These events make the viewer make up their own mind about the extent to which Barbara has control over her situation.

Another aspect of *Barbara* which introduces ambiguity into the narrative is the cultural products which we find throughout the film. *Barbara* is very intertextual, like Petzold's other works, and the cultural products in the film have no set significance.³⁸⁵ Instead, they invoke the specific knowledge of different viewers, as I will go on to show. They will mean different things to different people, and be of more and less significance for different viewers. In *Phoenix*, too, songs in particular can be found throughout the film, with 'Speak Low', which ends the film as well as being included at various points throughout it, being given particular significance. There is much to take from Nelly's performance of this song, but also the song itself. The melancholy lyrics, including the line 'the curtain descends/ everything ends/ too soon/ too soon' (*P*, 1,30.00), are a fitting ending to the film, and the song comments on both the end of Nelly and Johnny's romance (real and pretend) and the historical context of *Phoenix*: Kurt Weill, the composer, was, like Nelly, a German Jew, who unlike Nelly fled Germany in 1933. The viewer can also question the extent to which the song does fit with this moment in the narrative: the romantic lyrics can be seen to contrast with the pretend romance, and the melancholia about its end to contrast with

³⁸⁵ For a detailed discussion of the cultural products in *Barbara* see Pinfold.

the end of the pretence, and Nelly's new beginning away from Johnny. Yet the song is simply sung and then the film ends, leaving the viewer to come to their own conclusion about the meaning of the ending and the content of the song.

In *Barbara*, Petzold goes further and emphasises the importance of the interpretation of art, particularly in André's reading of the Rembrandt painting *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp* in the scene in which Barbara visits his laboratory. What André focuses on here is different from what Petzold focuses on when he discussed the painting in his interview with *The Moveable Feast*, however. André argues that Rembrandt having painted Aris Kindt's dissected hand incorrectly has the effect of drawing attention to the victim and making the viewer sympathise with him, whereas Petzold goes further, making an explicit link to the GDR. He explains:

these guys [in] this Rembrandt picture are scientists and like Dr. Frankenstein, they want to rebuild their Gods. This is also a symbol for communism and for capitalism. But in this part, it's communism. They want to build up a society and when you build up societies, the victims are everywhere. The blood is flowing because for them, society is a laboratorium. So they kill this man who's a thief, they open his body — he stole three potatoes — because they need fresh flesh. They lost their empathy.³⁸⁶

This is a powerful indictment of the GDR, but Petzold chooses not to deploy this ideological discourse so forcefully in his film. Instead, he includes André's reading and lets the viewer read what they will into it. There is also space for the viewer's interpretation of the painting: Petzold seems to have chosen a painting which is relevant to some of the themes he deals with in his film — themes of victimhood, new societies and empathy — but also one which is particularly ripe for interpretation. As

³⁸⁶ Saito, para. 23 of 23.

he mentions in the same interview, he was inspired by W. G. Sebald's discussion of the painting,³⁸⁷ which can be found in his novel *Die Ringe des Saturn. Eine englische Wallfahrt* (1995) and Sebald's and Petzold's detailed readings demonstrate the potential for the viewer to decide on the painting's meaning, and the extent to which it is a comment on Barbara and André's situation. What is most important here, however, is not the details of the different interpretations but that the act of analysing art is flagged up within the film, and that *Barbara*, as well as *Phoenix*, are not didactic, but rather leave space for this act.

The ambiguity in the two films takes many forms: they are ideologically ambiguous; characters' morals and motivations are left unclear; there are often ambiguous looks between characters instead of dialogue; and the dialogue that there is in the films also requires the viewer's interpretation. As has been illustrated through an exploration of the way Petzold uses cultural products in his films, they also have layers of meanings, which allow more simple or complex readings and invoke the specific knowledge of different viewers. Petzold's complex work does, however, as Wheatley argues Haneke's films do, preclude over-simplistic responses, and this is in opposition to the majority of contemporary German historical dramas. This is, in contrast with Haneke's films, achieved not through becoming more controlling of the spectator, rather through leaving them to fill in the gaps in the narrative, which requires detailed engagement with the films. From watching Petzold's films, one does not get the impression that certain responses would be 'wrong', and a significant degree of control over the meanings of the films is left in the hands of the viewer. The viewer also makes their own judgement about the

³⁸⁷ Saito, para. 22 of 23.

characters' agency in the films in question, and the potential for human agency in the world more widely.

Audience response

If space is left for the viewer's own analysis of *Barbara* and *Phoenix*, it is interesting to look at how they were received by critics, and what trends there are in the responses, in the face of this ambiguity. The first comment to make about the reviews of the two films is that there are several aspects of my analysis which also interest critics. There is, firstly, a trend of reviews discussing agency in the films, and the most obvious example of this is the review of *Barbara* in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, which begins 'zwischen Anpassung und Aufsässigkeit: Nina Hoss als "Barbara" will sehen, wie weit sie Kontrolle behalten kann in einer strikt kontrollierten Gesellschaft'.³⁸⁸ The *New York Times* review, similarly, describes *Barbara* as a 'resistance movie', which 'concerns a dissident who, with modest, obstinate anger, pushes back against totalitarianism'.³⁸⁹ With regard to *Phoenix*, there are many comments in reviews about Nelly's lack of agency at the beginning of the film: Nord, for example, comments 'sie geistert durch den Film wie ein Gespenst. Darin ähnelt sie der ebenfalls von Nina Hoss gespielten Protagonistin in Petzolds Film "Yella"'.³⁹⁰

The first scene of *Barbara* is recognised as highly significant and effective in reviews,³⁹¹ with Sheila O'Malley commenting that 'it sets up the tension and atmosphere with precision and a taut elegance'³⁹², and this threatening atmosphere is

³⁸⁸ Göttler, para. 2 of 11.

³⁸⁹ 'Pushed and Pulled, a Doctor Wants a Way Out', para. 2 of 7.

³⁹⁰ 'Aus dem Reich der Toten', para. 7 of 19.

³⁹¹ See, for example, Sheila O'Malley, 'Barbara', 6 March 2013 <<http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/barbara-2013>> [accessed 13 April 2017] and Göttler.

³⁹² O'Malley, para. 2 of 9.

also frequently mentioned in criticism of the film.³⁹³ The colours in *Barbara* often feature in reviews too, and are used to discuss Petzold's attempt to infuse some warmth into his portrayal of the GDR. The words 'warm' and 'warmth/ Wärme' can be found in both English and German language reviews of the film.³⁹⁴ Seesslen, in the *Tageszeitung* review of the film, addresses the issue of the universality of Petzold's films, as mentioned above with regard to the use of colour in *Barbara*, and finds the same significance in the use of colour as I do. His interest in universality is also illustrated by the review's title 'Ein besonderes Experimentierfeld'. He defends the setting of GDR in the 1980s as a place in which Petzold can explore wider questions, including those concerning agency, arguing 'die Frage nach der Freiheit ist seitdem ja nicht weiter beantwortet worden. Nur perfekter verdrängt'.³⁹⁵

The ambiguity in *Barbara* and *Phoenix* is commented on in reviews too. Aspects of Petzold's films which are labelled 'ambiguous' include 'states of feeling'³⁹⁶ and 'morals'³⁹⁷ and the significance of characters' looks rather than words is recognised by reviews of *Barbara*. Reviews also highlight some of the same unanswered questions as I do, but some reviewers are quicker to answer them, eager to make use of their spectatorial autonomy. There is a wealth of interpretations offered for why Barbara decides to stay in the GDR — Seesslen, for example, puts it down to her 'ärztliche Pflicht/Passion',³⁹⁸ whereas Wheatley refers to Barbara's 'quasi-maternal sacrifice'³⁹⁹ — and André's motives are also called into question, although reviewers are less quick to make a judgement about his behaviour. Seesslen

³⁹³ See also, for example, Sander, para. 6 of 11 and 'Pushed and Pulled, a Doctor Wants a Way Out', para. 2 of 7.

³⁹⁴ See, for example, 'Film of the Week: Barbara', para. 8 of 12 and Seesslen, para. 18 of 20.

³⁹⁵ Seesslen, para. 10 of 20.

³⁹⁶ A. O. Scott, 'Review: "Phoenix" Shows Rebirth and a Ruse in Postwar Germany', *New York Times*, 23 July 2015 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/24/movies/review-phoenix-shows-rebirth-and-a-ruse-in-postwar-germany.html>> [accessed 18 April 2017] (para. 2 of 6).

³⁹⁷ 'Review: Phoenix', para. 6 of 8.

³⁹⁸ Seesslen, para. 13 of 20.

³⁹⁹ 'Film of the Week: Barbara', para. 12 of 12.

asks ‘Ist Andre ein Mentor, ein Komplize, ein Kontrolleur oder Denunziant?’⁴⁰⁰ and Peter Bradshaw in the *Guardian* asks ‘Is he falling in love with her? Is he another Stasi spy? Or both?’⁴⁰¹ The reviews also identify the importance of the pieces of art in the two films, with, for example, Kniebe in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* writing that ‘Speak Low’ in *Phoenix* ‘das letzte Wort behalten darf’⁴⁰² and Seesslen analysing links between the narrative in *Barbara* and the pieces of art in the film, which add another ambiguous layer.

An aspect of the films in question which I have not discussed in depth but can be analysed by looking at reviews is the emotional effect which *Barbara* and *Phoenix* have on the audience. Many reviews illustrate that watching the films can be an uncomfortable experience: Göttler in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* writes that *Barbara* is ‘bewegend und trifft einen ins Herz’⁴⁰³ but Sander in the *Spiegel* gives the film’s ability to move the viewer a slightly unpleasant edge, in his description ‘das ist so anrührend erzählt, dass es einen fast zerreißt’.⁴⁰⁴ The reviews of *Phoenix* go further, describing the film as provoking ‘ein gewisses Unbehagen’,⁴⁰⁵ and as ‘haunting’.⁴⁰⁶ Kniebe even comments in his description of the first scene ‘eine Traurigkeit aus vergangener Zeit klingt hier an, in der man versinken kann. Aber man muss auch dazu bereit sein — sonst wird es schwierig’.⁴⁰⁷ A few reviewers also judge, however, that Petzold has not achieved his aim in this regard and leaves the viewer emotionally cold. Later in Kniebe’s review he writes, referring to the use of ‘Speak Low’ at the

⁴⁰⁰ Seesslen, para. 13 of 20.

⁴⁰¹ Peter Bradshaw, ‘Barbara — Review’, *Guardian*, 27 September 2012 <<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2012/sep/27/barbara-review>> [accessed 18 April 2017] (para. 1 of 1).

⁴⁰² Kniebe, para. 1 of 18.

⁴⁰³ Göttler, para. 3 of 11.

⁴⁰⁴ Sander, para. 7 of 11.

⁴⁰⁵ ‘Aus dem Reich der Toten’, para. 17 of 19.

⁴⁰⁶ ‘Review: “Phoenix” Shows Rebirth and a Ruse in Postwar Germany’, para. 1 of 6 and ‘Review: Phoenix’, para. 8 of 8.

⁴⁰⁷ Kniebe, para. 2 of 18.

end of *Phoenix*, ‘der Film aber verlangt vor allem nach einer persönlichen Reaktion: Spürt man die Traurigkeit in diesem kleinen Song, den Kurt Weill für ein Musical geschrieben hat, “One Touch of Venus”?’⁴⁰⁸ Husmann, similarly, writes in her review of *Barbara* that ‘wirklich berühren kann uns ihre Geschichte nicht’.⁴⁰⁹

The criticism of *Barbara* and *Phoenix* is largely full of wide-ranging praise of different aspects of the two films, however, despite these two more negative reviews, and the discomfort that watching the films can involve. This discomfort is also not necessarily a drawback for viewers. Some aspects of *Barbara* and *Phoenix* which have appealed to reviewers have already been mentioned, but it remains to be explored what the primary appeal of these films to their audience is and the way in which they are effective.

What is most obvious when one looks at praise in reviews of both *Barbara* and *Phoenix* is the comments about Nina Hoss. There is the one comment, quoted above, in which her acting in *Phoenix* is described as bordering on ridiculous but this is very much an exception. Her performances are described as ‘incredible’,⁴¹⁰ ‘simply amazing’⁴¹¹ and ‘typically terrific’,⁴¹² with O’Malley commenting ‘Nina Hoss can do anything’.⁴¹³ The fact that her performances are judged to be so believable raises the question of whether the viewer identifies with Hoss’s characters and their struggles to be agents, yet this is not stated explicitly in reviews. What is certain, however, is that Hoss’s performances are central to Petzold’s attempt to engage with the viewer. The films’ ability to absorb the viewer more generally is also a common theme in reviews:

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., para. 18 of 18.

⁴⁰⁹ ‘Liebe in Zeiten des Misstrauens’, para. 9 of 9.

⁴¹⁰ Clarke, para. 4 of 4.

⁴¹¹ Tallerico, para. 6 of 8.

⁴¹² Kermode, para. 2 of 2.

⁴¹³ O’Malley, para. 5 of 9.

Barbara has been described as ‘hochspannend’⁴¹⁴ and *Phoenix* as ‘fesselnd’⁴¹⁵ and ‘riveting’,⁴¹⁶ with both films being commended for their use of suspense.⁴¹⁷ The final scene of *Phoenix* has frequently been praised, with one reviewer describing it as a ‘perfect ending’.⁴¹⁸ Both of the films in question are also praised for Petzold’s precise approach⁴¹⁹ and for his use of images. The *Spiegel* review of *Barbara* refers to ‘perfekt komponierte Bilder’⁴²⁰ and Tallerico emphasises Petzold’s ‘deeply confident visual language’⁴²¹ in *Phoenix*.

The ways in which Petzold deals with the films’ historical settings are also generally praised in reviews. As mentioned above, his portrayal of the GDR has been viewed favourably: it has been judged ‘authentisch’⁴²² and ‘stimmig’,⁴²³ and Bradshaw in the *Guardian* praises the accurate portrayal of human agency in the GDR in *Barbara*, commenting that ‘the weird oppression and seediness of the times is elegantly captured’,⁴²⁴ although Husmann, as discussed above, criticises Petzold’s decision to not include any obvious symbols of the GDR in the film. *Phoenix*, and Petzold’s approach to the film, is described as ‘gewagt’ by both *Der Spiegel* and the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*⁴²⁵ — albeit in a less positive sense in the latter publication — and the film is seen to be doing something different in terms of films set post-war. Wheatley describes the film, as already mentioned, as ‘a welcome corrective’ to post-war cinema and Buß in the *Spiegel* writes that Petzold and his fellow screenwriter

⁴¹⁴ Sander, para. 6 of 11.

⁴¹⁵ Dettke, para. 10 of 10.

⁴¹⁶ Tallerico, para. 1 of 8.

⁴¹⁷ See, for example, O’Malley, para. 7 of 9 and ‘Review: Phoenix’, para. 5 of 8.

⁴¹⁸ Tallerico, para. 1 of 8.

⁴¹⁹ See, for example, ‘Auf High Heels aus dem KZ’, para. 11 of 11 and O’Malley, para. 2 of 9.

⁴²⁰ Sander, para. 6 of 11.

⁴²¹ Tallerico, para. 1 of 8.

⁴²² Göttler, para. 3 of 11.

⁴²³ Sander, para. 8 of 11.

⁴²⁴ ‘Barbara — Review’, para. 1 of 1.

⁴²⁵ ‘Auf High Heels aus dem KZ’, para. 10 of 11 and Kniebe, para. 7 of 18.

Harun Farocki ‘beleuchten [...] die Stunde Null auf eine im Kino so noch nicht gesehene Weise’.⁴²⁶

Also due to the setting of *Barbara*, however, comparisons with *Das Leben der Anderen* abound in reviews, with Petzold’s film coming off worse than Henkel von Donnersmarck’s. *Barbara* is described as ‘a slighter work’⁴²⁷ and ‘neither as well shaped nor as persuasive’⁴²⁸ as *Das Leben der Anderen*. The main criticism of *Phoenix* in reviews is the implausibility of the plot, mentioned above, but some critics downplay the importance of this: Dettke writes ‘wie wahrscheinlich ist es, dass ein Mann seine eigene Frau nicht erkennt, an ihrer Stimme, ihrem Geruch? Letztlich kommt es darauf aber gar nicht an’⁴²⁹ and Clarke ends her summary of the plot with ‘all of which sounds mighty far-fetched. But it works’.⁴³⁰ What reviewers do not seem to be able to turn a blind eye to, however, is Petzold’s perceived failure to really engage with the Holocaust. Kniebe writes ‘der Holocaust, das Verhältnis von Tätern und Opfern, von Deutschen und Juden, das öffnet viel größere Fragen, die sich aufdrängen und nicht wieder verstummen. Und Petzold folgt ihnen auch, aber nur halbherzig und eher folgenlos’.⁴³¹ Scott comments, in line with this, that ‘neither the full horror nor the absurdity of Nelly’s situation registers, partly because the self-conscious genre touches keep her story at a distance’.⁴³² Yet it is these same genre touches which are praised by Buß in the *Spiegel* as ‘gewagt’, with him even commenting ‘wird das klassische Genrekino zur Möglichkeit, die Grenzen des starren

⁴²⁶ ‘Auf High Heels aus dem KZ’, para. 10 of 11.

⁴²⁷ Robbie Collin, ‘Barbara, review’, *Telegraph*, 27 September 2012 <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/filmreviews/9571526/Barbara-review.html>> [accessed 20 April 2017] (para. 2 of 4).

⁴²⁸ Philip French, ‘Barbara — review’, *Observer*, 30 September 2012 <<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2012/sep/30/barbara-review-petzold-nina-hoss>> [accessed 20 April 2017] (para. 2 of 2).

⁴²⁹ Dettke, para. 10 of 10.

⁴³⁰ Clarke, para. 4 of 4.

⁴³¹ Kniebe, para. 13 of 18.

⁴³² ‘Review: “Phoenix” Shows Rebirth and a Ruse in Postwar Germany’, para. 6 of 6.

deutschen Geschichtskinos zu weiten. Endlich'.⁴³³ It is clear that neither *Barbara* nor *Phoenix* can please everyone, but they are mostly praised as well-acted, well-constructed and effective German historical dramas, which also comment on contemporary Germany and leave space for the viewer's interpretation.

After a career making films which present a bleak picture of contemporary Germany, Petzold attempts to find a way for his characters to be agents by returning to Germany's twentieth-century past. He aims to find the potential for humans to act in periods of oppression, and also in contemporary Germany.

The change in both of Petzold's female protagonists during the course of *Barbara* and *Phoenix* is evident. In *Barbara* the eponymous protagonist realises the agency she has, largely thanks to her job as a doctor, and in both *Barbara* and *Phoenix* there is a shift in power relations, demonstrating that the picture of agency in oppressive regimes is not straightforward. Petzold also, without erasing the reality of everyday life in 1945 in Berlin and in 1980 in the GDR, makes it clear that these narratives are relevant to present-day Germany.

Petzold uses the gaze, human bodies and spaces to convey agency in the filmic medium but with both films he subverts the male gaze as described by Mulvey and Foucault's conception of bodies as docile and legible. Petzold is also careful to allow the viewer space to make their own judgement about the characters' agency in both films, and the potential for human agency in the GDR, post-war Germany and in the world more widely. *Barbara* and *Phoenix*, as historical dramas, represent a prominent trend in contemporary German cinema, but their complex portrayals of

⁴³³ 'Auf High Heels aus dem KZ', para. 11 of 11.

human agency, and the spectatorial agency they afford, mark them out as different from their precursors, as is noted in reviews. The combination of scope for action and constraint which can be found in these two films rather creates a link to Akin's films and Tykwer's *Heaven*.

Conclusion

Tom Tykwer, Fatih Akin and Christian Petzold are ‘Brüder im Geiste’ as they all investigate filmically how individuals can be agents, although the solutions they find and present in their films differ. The juxtaposition of these filmmakers and references to others have made it clear that this interest in agency spans filmmaking traditions and is a significant trend in contemporary German film. Tykwer, Akin and Petzold share a sense, also articulated in post-structuralist theory and theory which followed it, of the considerable limitations on human agency, which the three filmmakers work into their films for their characters to grapple with. There is a trend of a mixture of scope for action and constraint characterising portrayals of agency in contemporary German film, but the example of *The International* shows this is not always the case. A focus on personal rather than political agency has been evident too, but the films in this thesis are situated in political contexts, albeit more fictitious ones in Tykwer’s works, which complicates the idea of contemporary cinema turning towards the personal, and the narrative that contemporary German film has been repoliticised.

My focus on agency has allowed the six films at the centre of my thesis to be seen in a new light. Looking at *The International* and *Heaven* in conjunction has revealed a trend in Tykwer’s oeuvre of an engagement with corrupt, late capitalist systems which limit individuals’ scope for action. The theme of globalisation and its effects in *The International* creates links to Fatih Akin’s cinema, as well as many other post-millennial films. There is a link between Tykwer’s and Petzold’s cinema too, as is clear in Petzold’s description of the question which film noir, and by extension *Phoenix*, poses: ‘there the question is how can one, as an individual, live in

a shitty and corrupt world'. Here, Petzold proclaims his search for a way for individuals to be agents against a background of corruption and this is exactly what we see in Tykwer's films. The connections I have described between directors working in diverse styles create a map of what is important to contemporary German directors in terms of agency, although the map could of course be extended, as I explore below.

The presentation of agency in *The International* meets various obstacles, and in many ways the film, in its failures, illuminates the difficulties filmmakers dealing with agency can face and the ways in which the other films in this thesis have been successful. In *The International*, Tykwer uses the conventions of the conspiracy thriller and sets up a filmic world in which agency is not possible, but in the other films in this thesis there are different solutions to the problem of how to live in a world in which human control is limited. In the other films the limitations on agency are also different: in *Heaven*, as in *The International*, the protagonist is pitted against a corrupt network but in Akin's films the characters must instead grapple with chance and coincidence structuring their lives and a need to engage with their backgrounds. In Petzold's films his female characters' gender limits their scope for action, and they find themselves in the confining gaze of men, and the state also plays a large role in restricting the amount of control they have. The state is thematised more obviously in the GDR-set *Barbara* but in *Phoenix* too Nelly's internment in a concentration camp and her resulting struggles, particularly related to her loss of identity, are due to her country's government. In both Akin's and Petzold's films the presentation of the state and state institutions is more complex than in Tykwer's, however: Barbara and Nelly are not simply the powerless victims of all-powerful states, and although the state is

almost absent from *Gegen die Wand*, in *Auf der anderen Seite* Ayten's simplistic narrative about Turkey is disrupted.

With regard to solutions to these problems, in *Heaven* the characters are able to make personal choices, outside the struggle against a corrupt system, and in Akin's films one is able to become an agent by recognising the role of chance and coincidence in human lives, and by recognising the need for individuals to engage with their backgrounds. In Petzold's films the ability to act often comes from one's work, and we are shown how power relations can shift, by characters not accepting the roles that are handed to them. These ways of being an agent are applicable, indeed easier to implement, in the contemporary world, rather than in the contexts of the rural GDR in 1980 and Berlin in 1945, and in this way Petzold is exploring both how to act in some of the most challenging periods of Germany's history as well as in the present day.

A question this thesis has addressed is how agency is portrayed in the filmic medium, and there is much overlap between the techniques which the three filmmakers at the centre of this thesis use. The presentation of space and place is central to how the filmmakers communicate their models of human control, but the different ways in which the directors use space reflect their different concerns. The gaze, the human body and characters' appearances more widely are highly significant in Petzold's approach to conveying agency, with the latter also important in *Heaven*.

Tykwer uses shots of architecture in cities around the world to communicate the globalised, standardised space in which his characters operate, and cityscapes and individual buildings to convey restrictions on characters' agency. The open landscapes of the countryside, in contrast, are used in *Heaven* to symbolise and also enable the characters' freedom, and we see a similar technique in Petzold's *Barbara*,

in which the wildness of the countryside which Barbara explores indicates that it is not controlled by the state. In *Heaven* there is some space for resistance against the surveillance and control which is possible in a city, but there is still a dichotomy between the city and the countryside. Some of this symbolism is used in Akin's films — the city of Istanbul in *Gegen die Wand*, like Turin in *Heaven*, is initially portrayed as a prison — yet Akin's presentation of space is more nuanced than Tykwer's dichotomy. Akin has moved on from the trope, found in earlier Turkish-German cinema, of enclosed spaces being claustrophobic and signifying a lack of agency: some of his enclosed spaces fit this model, but some are places where characters can exercise their freedom, and the same is true for open spaces. In *Auf der anderen Seite*, the emphasis on chance is also reflected in the presentation of space: there are often no visual clues that a tragedy is about to befall a character. Yet the increased agency in Akin's and Petzold's films, compared with *The International*, is communicated by the characters' control over how their environments look.

In Petzold's films this control can also be seen in the protagonists' appearances: both Barbara and Nelly rebel against how they are supposed to look, with Barbara disrupting the paradigm which Mulvey describes, of the woman as an image in Hollywood cinema, and the paradigm of the ideal woman in the GDR. Nelly rebels against an expectation of how people should look in post-war Germany, after being in a concentration camp. Control over one's appearance is also significant in *Heaven*, as it allows the merging of Philippa's and Filippo's identities, which symbolises and allows the characters' agency in the final part of the film. This desire to look the same as another person seems to be in opposition to Barbara's desire to differ from what is expected in terms of her appearance, but both of these approaches are a response to the threat of state surveillance.

The concept of the gaze structures both *Barbara* and *Phoenix*, but Petzold shows it has the potential to be more than just restrictive. Nelly initially conforms to but then escapes the gaze of her former husband and *Barbara* ends with the protagonist exchanging looks with André as his equal, despite the fact that she is the silent object of his and another man's gazes at the beginning of the film. Related to this, control over the human body is often used in Petzold's films to convey agency: in *Barbara*, the protagonist's control over small things such as how she sits have great significance, as does the Stasi's ability to monitor her movements and invade her body. In *Phoenix*, Johnny often controls Nelly's body but for the majority of the film it is not legible to him, as he does not know her true identity, and this accords Nelly a significant amount of power.

The portrayal of agency in the films in question is more in line with Fiske's and Certeau's ideas than Mulvey's, or Foucault's in his earlier work, demonstrating a departure from the bleak view of agency we see in the theory which emerged in the 1970s. *The International* is the film in my corpus which has the closest model of agency to that in *Discipline and Punish*: in this film Tykwer is shown to share Foucault's view about the pervasiveness of power and the limits on human agency which are described in this text, but he departs from Foucault's model with his focus on a group of powerful villains. This choice successfully makes Tykwer's model of power more understandable and makes it conform to the norms for a conspiracy thriller, but also means that the complexity in Foucault's argument about how systems function is lost. *Heaven*, in contrast, can be illuminated by knowledge of this argument but the optimism in the portrayal of agency in this film, as in the other films in this thesis, means that this portrayal differs from Foucault's argument about the omnipresence of power. In *Auf der anderen Seite*, similarly, there are signs of the kind

of system which Foucault describes, with ‘tactics’ which ‘find [...] their base of support and their condition elsewhere’, but this system is not all-powerful. Particularly in the scenes in Akin’s films which take place in prisons, it is clear that Akin’s model of power differs from Foucault’s description of how power operates. Petzold also portrays a more optimistic model of agency than we find in *Discipline and Punish*. In *Barbara* the text sets up a model which *Barbara* self-reflexively reproduces and then departs from: as the power relations and the gazes in the film change, Barbara is able to break out of the panopticon and escape an individualizing gaze. Foucault’s work also lends a vocabulary to the discussion of bodies in *Phoenix*, although the portrayal of the human body in the film ultimately also differs from Foucault’s analysis. *Discipline and Punish* is still relevant to a discussion of how contemporary films portray agency, yet the films in this thesis illustrate how it illuminates rather than provides a model for this portrayal.

Using ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ in an analysis of Petzold’s films makes clear how they differ from earlier cinema, and shows that it is possible for women to have agency in film, even in ones in which surveillance plays a large role. Visser’s concept of the feminist gaze is more helpful, however, for discussing the way in which Barbara struggles against and resists the male gaze. The female gaze functions as a description of the alternative to the male gaze which we see in *Barbara*, in the scene in which Barbara refuses to watch Schütz in a moment of vulnerability, thereby refusing to reverse the power relations between her and him and be the one in control.

The Practice of Everyday Life illuminates the presentation of both agency and constraint in my corpus. *Heaven* and *Barbara* both reflect the idea of living in or navigating the ‘space of the other’ but also the room for resistance which can be found

in Certeau's text, with *Heaven* illustrating how it is possible to, albeit temporarily, evade surveillance and state control in a city, and conveying the Certeauian idea of tactics. Fiske's argument, which accords importance to 'micro-histories and -experiences' and presents a more positive view of the possibility of agency, is also reflected in the significance of characters' control over their environments in Akin's and Petzold's work. The fact that these environments can be presented visually in the filmic medium enriches Fiske's research, as does the accompanying phenomenon of characters' control over their appearances signifying their agency and social identity. Fiske's argument about the human body is also more instructive when looking at the films in question, particularly Petzold's, than Foucault's argument is: Petzold uses the body to communicate both agency and victimhood, which reflects Fiske's argument that the body embodies both the social order and the 'social differences within that order'. It is clear that the historical approaches to agency which describe a mixture of scope for action and constraint are most helpful for illuminating the models of agency in contemporary German cinema, themselves often characterised by this combination.

The extent to which the portrayals of agency in the films in question are universal, or whether they are specific to contemporary Germany (in the case of Akin's films) or other times and places in which the films are set, is a theme often brought up in reviews and criticism. All three filmmakers at the centre of this thesis have been accused of universalising discourse in their films, indicating that this is an easy trap to fall into when attempting to make a comment about agency. 'Universalist' is an insult which has been levelled against the portrayal of political engagement in *Heaven* and the universalised values and norms in *Auf der anderen Seite* have also been criticised, as has Petzold's decision to keep the GDR's iconography out of his images in *Barbara*. Yet the portrayals of agency in all of the films I have analysed,

with the exception of *The International*, are rooted in a particular country, or two in the cases of *Gegen die Wand* and *Auf der anderen Seite*. Tykwer's portrayal of agency in *The International* attempts to encompass the entirety of contemporary society and he makes the argument that because of the global network we see in the film everyone is equally powerless, yet in *Heaven* Tykwer uses a case study in one country, whilst communicating that it is a case study rather than an isolated incident. Akin also makes an effort to make the issues he deals with in a specific milieu in his films seem like universal issues, so that his narratives are relevant to non-German or Turkish viewers, and Dargis's description of the tribulations of the characters in *Gegen die Wand* as 'at once specific and universal' reflects Akin's success in making the narrative of this film seem relevant to the viewer but also interesting and believable because of its particularity. The details of the narratives in Petzold's films are very specific in many ways, primarily due to the occupations he has chosen for his characters and where and when they are set, but he also attempts to make them relevant to present-day Germany. There is clearly a balance to be struck here: the danger of focusing on a particular situation is that the viewer finds it irrelevant to their life and the filmmaker fails to make a wide-reaching point about agency, and the danger of not including this specificity is that the presentation of a particular situation is unbelievable and uninteresting in its universality. Yet I have argued that despite the accusations of universalising discourse, with the exception of *The International* the films in my corpus are successful in this regard.

As well as striking the right balance between specific and universal, my analysis has shown that films which include a degree of ambiguity are more likely to succeed in engaging the viewer and in presenting a portrayal of agency which is well-received. A more ambiguous portrayal also allows for more spectatorial agency, as the

viewer has more control over the meaning in the film. This is another area in which *The International* is an example of a less successful approach: Tykwer's over-reliance on dialogue to put forward a comprehensive model of power does not leave much room for the viewer's interpretation and it is criticised in reviews. In *Heaven* Tykwer's approach of including symbolic and fantastical elements is more effective in terms of bringing some ambiguity into the film, and Petzold's technique of using less dialogue and a mainly visual portrayal of the situations he places his characters in also allows space for the viewer to make up their own mind about the societies we see in the films and the extent to which they allow characters to be agents. Akin's approach is different, yet similarly successful due to the non-didactic way in which he presents ideological discourse: Akin has different characters express different points of view about issues around power but is careful not to take sides, and lets the viewer make up their own mind. Despite these different ways of introducing ambiguity into the films, all of them except *The International* end in a way which encourages the viewer to reflect on the final moments and what could happen next, which emphasises the importance of this ambiguity. *The International's* ending, with its montage of newspaper articles spelling out how the plot continues, throws the ambiguity at the end of the other films into sharp relief.

Tykwer refers to the 'moral and structural ambiguity' of *Heaven* in the director's commentary on the film, and this distinction is also useful for considering ambiguity in other films in this thesis, and more widely. The ambiguity I have just discussed is part of the structures or the narratives of the films but moral ambiguity can also be found in several of them. My analysis of *The International* sets up the danger, in terms of the engagement of the viewer, of a film having pure protagonists pitted against villains: the viewer can distance themselves from the villains and not

reflect on what they would do in the antagonists' situation, or what they would *be able to* do, which stops the viewer from fully considering characters' agency. *Heaven*, in contrast, has a complex protagonist who, albeit accidentally, kills innocent people and the film also poses moral questions by putting characters in ethically complicated situations. Although the theme of moral ambiguity is not as central in *Gegen die Wand*, *Auf der anderen Seite* goes further and includes a complicated constellation of the state, state officials, a resistance group opposed to the state and individual members within this group, and there is no clear line between the state and its opponents in terms of moral behaviour which leads the viewer to reflect on their actions and the values that may lie behind them. Similarly, the conventional simplistic portrayal of Stasi officers, informal collaborators during the GDR, and people who betray others to the Nazis is disrupted by Petzold's films, in which these characters can be compromised yet ordinary people, and it is left to the viewer to interpret their behaviour.

A problem that this need for ambiguity poses, however, is how filmmakers are to clearly communicate complicated relationships in film, and in the case of films which have agency at their centres the relationship between individual and supra-individual forces is often particularly important. *Gegen die Wand* and *Phoenix* are examples of films which focus less on supra-individual forces: the culture and religion of Sibel's family dictate how she is allowed to behave in *Gegen die Wand* but the film does not fully situate Sibel and Cahit within a political context, and although it is the National Socialists who are responsible for Nelly's internment in a concentration camp in *Phoenix*, rather than the role of the Nazi party being explored in this film there is an emphasis on Nelly's development. Yet the other films in this thesis showcase different approaches to portraying a system in film. *The International*, on

the one hand, illustrates the difficulty filmmakers can face in this regard: Salinger attempts to bring down a single institution, despite the fact that the film emphasises the network this institution is part of, and this is evidence of the importance of supra-individual forces not being fully thought through. *Heaven*, in contrast, manages to convey and stress the importance of both an impersonal system and powerful individuals: there is Vendice, who brings a face to and symbolises late capitalism, but also the faceless mass of black cars who communicate the idea of the state, or a system. A similar technique is used in *Auf der anderen Seite*, in which we see both anonymous groups of policemen, representing the supra-individual force of the state, and individual state officials. In *Barbara* Petzold partly relies on the viewer's knowledge of the society in which the film is set to portray a supra-individual force: he does not need to stress that Schütz is part of a network of Stasi officers, that Schütz stands in for the rest of the network in *Barbara*, and that the point Petzold makes about Schütz's humanity is also true for the rest of the Stasi. Yet there are also allusions, in line with Petzold's laconic style, to the travel ban and what goes on in disciplinary homes, which gesture to a larger picture of the power of the state.

The kind of agency Barbara aims for is also relevant to how Petzold portrays the political system in the GDR. Although she is to a certain extent a victim of this system, her aims are modest: she is not trying to effect global change, like Salinger, or national change, like Ayten, by trying to overthrow the regime in the GDR. She is not even trying to change how power operates in a city, like Philippa. Instead, she changes the lives of her patients, and in this she is more successful than any of the characters with wider-reaching aims. The agency she has is not simply personal, however, as it affects other people's lives. It is in this way that humans are shown to be able to act on more than a personal level, whereas all the characters in my corpus

who try to make changes to a political system ultimately fail, and the films thus emphasise the lack of political agency in contemporary German cinema.

In this thesis there has also been a discussion of why the films in my corpus were made and are watched, which can provide a richer insight into agency. I have argued that a search for how an individual can be an agent lies behind all three directors' work, yet they are far from being documentary filmmakers, educating the viewer about an aspect of reality. Tykwer expresses a desire to deal with what he sees as a contemporary issue in *The International*, but he chooses to do this within the paranoia thriller genre, which is a potentially effective way to engage the viewer and to entertain them, but limits the model of agency which Tykwer can include in his film. It became clear when looking at *The International*, along with *Heaven*, that one way in which people use cinema, particularly cinema they expect to be entertaining, is to reinforce their idea of how the world works, rather than to have their world view challenged. One explanation for the model of agency in *The International* is that it is Tykwer's reaction to the portrayal in the final part of *Heaven* being dismissed as kitsch because it does not fit with the viewer's sense of agency, yet a drawback of the other extreme, i.e. the negative portrayal of agency in *The International*, is that it is an example of a model of power which reinforces the world view which is most convenient for the viewer, and absolves them of any responsibility for trying to effect change in the world.

Akın and Petzold, in contrast, seem to seek not to reinforce their viewers' ideas of how the world works, but rather to challenge them, but crucially whilst creating models of agency which seem believable (as opposed to the one in *Heaven*). These twin aims are praised by critics. Part of the appeal of Akın's films to reviewers is that they are seen to be able to contribute to existing debates taking place in

contemporary Germany, which is evidence that these films too are dealing with contemporary issues, yet they are praised for providing a counter-narrative to established ones. Petzold, in *Barbara*, breaks away from the simplistic portrayal of perpetrators and victims which we see in other GDR films, which will have at least partly informed the viewers' idea of how this world worked, yet reviewers have also praised his portrayal of the GDR as authentic. Reviews show that *Phoenix* is seen to be doing something different from other German films set in the same period and Petzold, like Tykwer, is working within a genre here, which shows that genre films do not have to simply entertain rather than inspire reflection.

It remains to be seen, and analysed, how these filmmakers' work continues: whether or not their presentations of agency continue in these veins is a question for further research. There are also some omissions from my work on agency in contemporary film, although the three directors I have focused on do span a range of traditions. A discussion of agency in the films of Oskar Roehler, whom Akın also characterises as a 'Bruder im Geiste', would be a fitting extension of this project, and the recent German films which have been most widely seen within Germany, often comedies, are also missing from my analysis. Bora Dağtekin has directed three out of five of the single most successful films in each of the years 2012 to 2016, namely *Türkisch für Anfänger*, *Fack ju Göhte*, *Fack ju Göhte 2*, so it would be interesting to look at his work to in particular to investigate whether this interest in agency can also be found in more commercially successful German film.

Adding Roehler's and Dağtekin's films to the corpus of films analysed with a focus on agency would, however, still leave a significant group of people out of the picture: female directors. Although there have been many women in front of the camera in the films considered in this thesis, and some references to films made by

women, the three filmmakers at the centre of my argument have been men. This does not present a very skewed picture of who is making films in Germany: a 2016 report revealed that just 22% of German fiction films released between 2009 and 2013 were directed by women.⁴³⁴ Yet there are prominent female directors in the contemporary German film scene. Indeed, the German film which has got the most international critical attention recently is Maren Ade's *Toni Erdmann* (2016), which was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film and the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival, and makes Ade another strong contender for the most prominent member of the Berlin School. Angela Schanelec is also an important member of this school of filmmaking, and there are also women (and men), such as Doris Dörrie and Margarethe von Trotta, who belong to a different generation from Tykwer, Petzold and Akin but are still making films. Further research could be carried out, looking into whether female directors present a similar portrayal of agency to the men at the centre of this thesis. The effect of the gender of the artist on a portrayal of agency would be particularly interesting in the context of filmmaking, that is a space in which women's voices are not heard as often as men's.

Despite the ways in which this project could be extended, particularly to reflect changes in the contemporary German film landscape since I started my research, there is much in this thesis which is new. My analysis of the interest in agency which is evident in the films in this thesis brings out a new trend in contemporary German cinema. I demonstrate that this agency is often characterised by scope for action and constraint and I illustrate how portrayals of human control in contemporary German film reflect recent theoretical work on the possibility of being

⁴³⁴ European Women's Audiovisual Network, 'Appendix IV — Germany', *Where are the women directors? Report on gender equality for directors in the European film industry 2006-2013* (2016), 1-39 <http://www.ewawomen.com/uploads/files/MERGED_Press-2016.pdf> [accessed 28 August 2017] (p. 24).

an agent within limits. Through my focus on agency, I also elucidate links between Tykwer, Akin and Petzold, filmmakers who are normally dealt with separately in scholarship.

I bring *The International* into the discussion of agency in Tykwer's oeuvre; bring out the connections in terms of the presentation of agency between this film and *Heaven*, as well as using the comparison to explain Tykwer's differing approaches in the two films; and situate this analysis within contemporary German cinema more widely, and its interest in limits on agency in a globalised world. I analyse the role of chance and coincidence in Akin's work for the first time, as well as contributing to the ongoing discussion of the significance of background in his films. It is clear from my discussion of Akin's films that there is a range of limitations on agency in his work, and this discussion emphasises that Akin, and other German filmmakers who deal with characters from migration backgrounds, are not just interested in identity. I contribute an analysis of agency in *Phoenix* and a close reading of several scenes to the currently small amount of literature on the film. The close readings throughout this thesis combined with the wider argument about the interest in agency in contemporary German film illustrate that the originality of this thesis lies both in the broad and the specific.

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