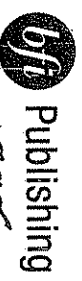


# HOLLYWOOD AND EUROPE

Economics, Culture, National Identity: 1945–95

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# American friends: Hollywood echoes in the New German Cinema<sup>1</sup>

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The number of American sons who are tired of daddy Europe, whom they have to feed, while he is showing them nothing but intellectual condescension, is considerable, and their irritation is to nobody's advantage.<sup>2</sup>

## I Introduction

What figural place did the American cinema have for the film-makers who eventually came to be known as the New German Cinema, navigating between aiming at an oppositional, avant-garde cinema (and thus prone to condescension) and wanting to revitalise the Weimar legacy (and thus envying the vitality and popularity of Hollywood)? Three paradigms, distinct but mutually interacting in the cultural space we call 'national cinema' can be identified: the colonial paradigm, the elective paternity paradigm and the no-contest paradigm. The evidence could come from many directors' works between the 1960s and the 1980s, though not surprisingly, the Hollywood intertext is most pregnant in films also known outside Germany, prompting the thought that 'Hollywood' not only stands at the heart of the New German Cinema becoming a national cinema, but is likely to be an implicit reference point for any European film successfully addressing an international audience.

The paradigms have, in the case of Germany, to be seen in the context of post-Second World War cinema history. When the Allied Powers in 1945 insisted on dismantling the Ufa conglomerate, the Hollywood majors ensured that they had unrestricted access to the German film market. Against this competition, West Germany nonetheless developed, from about 1948 onwards, a relatively buoyant domestic film industry, staffed mainly by ex-Ufa directors and technicians, and relying on traditional genre films and stars for audience appeal. This domestic industry concentrated on the home market, and calculated its subjects as well as its budgets accordingly.<sup>3</sup> It collapsed, however, when the US majors began to reorganise their European distribution network towards the end of the 1960s, which in turn led to the large-scale decimation of second-run or neighbourhood cinemas.<sup>4</sup> By the mid-1970s, when film production had become mainly state-subsidised or financed by television, German films were either restricted to the art

house circuits (where they competed with Hollywood auteur retrospectives) or could be seen in domestic first-run cinemas only if Hollywood had bought them for international distribution and as it were, re-imported them into Germany: this was the case for Wenders and Herzog, as well as for more commercial productions such as Wolfgang Petersen's *Das Boot*, or Volker Schlöndorff's *The Tin Drum* (*Die Blechtrömmel*), conceived from the start as an international, big-budget art film.

## II 'Colonising our subconscious'

This background, at once economic and film-political, has to be borne in mind especially when looking at the 'colonising' paradigm. Undoubtedly, its best-known instance is a scene from Wenders's *Kings of the Road*, where the two protagonists, after getting drunk in a US patrol post near the East German border, agree that 'the Yanks have colonised our subconscious.' Yet this perhaps over-quoted remark points in several directions, and in the context in which it occurs, it functions both approvingly and critically: one of the two men cannot get the lyrics of a pop song out of his head. It suggests that 'colonisation' is associated with rock 'n' roll, which Wenders had elsewhere called his 'life-saver' as an adolescent, when American popular culture provided the antidote to 'twenty years [of parental amnesia] ...; we filled it with Mickey Mouse and chewing gum.' Furthermore, the site is also important: faced with barbed wire, it seems preferable to have one's subconscious colonised by American rock music than to be an actual colony of the Soviet Union, like the other Germany they can see from the abandoned US Army lookout. Thus, the two men allude to America at a juncture in their journey where they are forcibly reminded of the historical events that had brought the Americans to Germany in the first place, and in what role (as liberators from Nazism, and in order to make Germany 'safe for democracy'). Not unimportant for the structure and ideological texture of the film is the fact that the remark is made also at a point in the two men's wary friendship when a growing intimacy and regression to childhood threaten their sense of separate and (hetero-) sexual identity.

Insisting on the multi-layered and suitably ambiguous context of the 'colonised subconscious' is necessary since, in Wenders at least, it cannot be directly identified with the anti-Americanism with which the paradigm is most commonly associated. The latter surfaced most starkly with the screening on German television of the American series *Holocaust*, a docu-drama which had a huge impact among German viewers but which was highly criticised by film-makers and reviewers for daring to make a soap opera out of Auschwitz. *Holocaust* gave rise to a rash of films made in Germany by German directors about the Nazi period. Among them, the best known became Edgar Reitz's *Heimat*, explicitly conceived as a riposte to *Holocaust*.

How problematic such a 'reply' can be for a film-maker seeking to redefine a national cinema is strikingly apparent in two reactions to *Holocaust*. Elie Wiesel, writing in the *New York Times* in 1978, was shocked:

The film is an insult to those who perished and to those who survived. In spite of its name, this 'docu-drama' is not about what some of us remember as the Holocaust. ... I

am appalled by the thought that one day the Holocaust will be measured and judged in part by the NBC tv production bearing its name. . . . The Holocaust must be remembered. But not as a show.<sup>5</sup>

A year later, in May 1979, Edgar Reitz also published an article, apropos of *Holocaust*, entitled 'Let's Work on our Memories':

If we are to come to terms with the Third Reich and the crimes committed in our country, it has to be by the same means we use every day to take stock of the world we live in. . . . Authors all over the world are trying to take possession of their history . . . but they often find that it is torn out of their hands. The most serious act of expropriation occurs when people are deprived of their history. With *Holocaust*, the Americans have taken away our history.<sup>6</sup>

At first glance, the two statements are identical in judgment and sentiment. They condemn the series' fictionalisation and trivialisation, and fear for the survival of history and authentic memory. But in the case of Reitz, one is bound to ask: who is speaking? How can a German who grew up under Hitler lay claim to this history, appropriate it, and complain that the Americans have 'expropriated' it? One can only speculate about Reitz's sense of rectitude: might it be that the 'colonial' discourse Hollywood/European cinema has surreptitiously usurped another historical discourse, that of Hitler and Auschwitz? If so, then aggressors and vanquished have changed places in the process. Reitz, by claiming 'our history' is claiming victim status. Hollywood ('the victors') makes a film called *Holocaust*, which 'conquers' the world markets, while the Germans (the vanquished) make films called *Our Hitler* and *Heimat*: the intended irony of these titles pales to an unpost-modern white irony, as one blushes to realise the larger irony that cancels it, as 'Hitler' and 'Heimat' connote once more the very causes of the 'Holocaust'. For his part, Reitz might point to an advertisement for *Holocaust*, carried in *Screen International*, which shows jackboots in formation crushing a bleeding Star of David, while the legend proclaims 'The Guild Marches on: Holocaust - Another International Winner?'

The 'mastering of the past' (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*) which became such a slogan in Germany in the 1970s and 1980s was in no small measure a reaction to and a rejection of Hollywood doing this mastering for German society and its film-makers, while the focus on Fascism as a film subject was also (for Syberberg and Fassbinder) an effective strategy of address, for it allowed the New German Cinema to discover in Nazism a subject and a genre which could rely on audience interest and foreknowledge the world over, making even difficult films like

Syberberg's *Hitler: A Film from Germany* accessible to foreign audiences. A slightly different version of the colonising paradigm can be found in Werner Herzog, who, after a number of tries, finally achieved his international breakthrough with *Aguirre* (1974), quite explicitly about the dialectics of coloniser and colonised, a topic that the director was to pursue also in his subsequent films, such as *Fitzcarraldo*, *Where the Green Ants Dream* and *Cobra Verde*. What is significant for the series is first of all Klaus Kinski, who plays the lead in three of them, and who is himself a figure in whom the Italian spaghetti Western, the international

with Hollywood. To this rich cinematic intertext, Herzog added pastiche echoes of the Brazilian cinema *novô*, and in particular, of Glauber Rocha's magic-realist neo-colonial fable *Black God White Devil*.

Second, however far Herzog travelled to the four corners of the world, he always sought there his native Bavaria, whether in the Australian bush or in the Amazon jungle, in the High Andes or in Railroad Flats, Wisconsin (*Strazek*). It points to the 'colonised' status of Bavaria within Germany itself, where the resentment of the 'hinterland' against the rest extended even to Munich, traditionally seen as the Hollywood on the Isar ('Schwabylon').

Finally, the films that Herzog made with Kinski encapsulate not only his oeuvre, but define a crucial strand of the New German Cinema generally. Yet in what sense is the Kinski/Herzog persona 'typically' German? Herzog relied in no small measure on a number of Hollywood macho heroes, from Douglas Fairbanks to Errol Flynn (especially in the films of Raoul Walsh), from Robert Aldrich's use of Burt Lancaster (in *Vera Cruz*, *Apache* and *Uzana's Raid*) to Charlton Heston and Jason Robards (who was to have played Fitzcarraldo, until jungle fever got the better of him).

### III Elective paternities or the 'Oedipal' paradigm

The second complex often goes under the name of the 'fatherless society' (Alexander Mitscherlich),<sup>7</sup> and alludes in the first instance to the particularly intense conflicts between fathers and sons among the first post-war generation, who seem to have grown up either without a father altogether (as was the case for Fassbinder and Herzog), or who found their fathers incapable of feeling remorse for, or even admitting to their part in, the Nazi regime (this father-image seemed prominent among writers, but included the son of perhaps the most notorious of film directors under the Nazi regime: Veit Harlan).

Specifically, the phenomenon of urban terrorism during the 1970s is often seen in terms of the Oedipal paradigm, nowhere more clearly than in the omnibus film *Germany in Autumn*. One can speak of a veritable Oedipalisation of history in this film which for the most part is structured around a double drama of father and son, namely that of Hans Martin Schleyer, kidnapped and eventually killed writing a farewell letter to his son, and that of Manfred Rommel, mayor of Stuttgart, and son of 'Desert Fox' Field Marshall Rommel, who after the defeat at El Alamein, was ordered by Hitler to commit suicide, so that he could be given a hero's funeral. *Germany in Autumn* is the attempt to explain via such complex family bonds the relationship between economic affluence and political violence, but also to find in them a model and metaphor for the peculiar continuities within discontinuity that characterise Germany's history, where in less than fifty years four distinct political regimes violently succeeded each other. Yet as Fassbinder's contribution makes clear, neither the narrative closure provided by a double funeral symmetrically inverted (that of the terrorist 'victim' Schleyer, and that of the 'terrorist' Ensslin) nor the double father-son axis between Rommel and Schleyer could contain the paranoid power of the events at Mogadishu airport and Stammheim prison. The confrontations between Fassbinder and his

mother, Fassbinder and his homosexual lover, Fassbinder and his former wife are designed to cast doubts on the narrative closure on which a founding myth of West German democracy was built, namely that (masculine) ideals of self-discipline, responsibility and citizenship had done away with the authoritarian personality. Fassbinder, in giving reign to the Fascist within, goes further, in that he seems determined to deny to the representation of history the symmetry of the heterosexual lineage so cautiously and perhaps sentimentally imposed by Kluge and his collaborators in the framing events of *Germany in Autumn*: if fathers and sons, Fassbinder seems to say, then let it be absent fathers, homosexual sons and masochistic mothers.

Against this 'national' paternity, Fassbinder and other film-makers invoked a quite different lineage of fathers, father-figures and totemic names: thus, Werner Herzog spoke of himself as 'legitimate German culture' in the footsteps of F.W. Murnau, Fritz Lang and Lotte Eisner, while Wim Wenders alluded to John Ford (in *Alice in the Cities*), to Fritz Lang (in *Kings of the Road*), Sam Fuller and Nicholas Ray (in *The American Friend*, *Lightning over Water* and *The State of Things*).

In what sense, however, could the auteurs of the New German Cinema consider themselves as the 'sons' of the Weimar cinema, or even the grandsons? Was there an 'Oedipus complex' to be resolved between the film-makers and the tradition to which they wish to belong? Were the films of Wenders, Herzog, Fassbinder rewriting the Weimar cinema or Nazi cinema? Perhaps there is a splitting of the father image into good Fathers (the Hollywood émigré directors: Fritz Lang, Douglas Sirk); and bad Fathers (Veit Harlan, Arthur Maria Rabenalt, Wolfgang Liebeneiner)? In a very public gesture, Fassbinder 'adopted' Sirk as his father, Wenders did 'mourning work' for Nicholas Ray, and Helma Sanders-Brahms paid fulsome tribute to Defa-director Wolfgang Staude.<sup>8</sup> Werner Herzog, in an act of calculated homage, remade *Nosferatu*, and undertook a pilgrimage to the Paris home of Lotte Eisner. But another German director, Niklaus Schilling, was happy to admit to his admiration for Harald Reinl, a representative, if ever there was one, of Papa's Kino,<sup>9</sup> while Syberberg paid tribute to equally ambiguous names: in *Karl May*, for instance, to Helmut Käutner and Kristina Söderbaum, wife of Veit Harlan and star of *Opfergang*. *Die Goldene Stadt* and *Kolberg*.

Faced with the discontinuity of German history at one level, but the continuity of the German film industry at another,<sup>10</sup> New German Cinema invented for itself a new kind of history, a genealogy of elective affinities, not only as a way of understanding the overwhelming presence of the American cinema and American popular culture after 1945, but also in order to bridge the gap opened up by Nazism and reappropriate a good Germany: Socialist or *grand bourgeois*, cinephile and professional, international and popular – in short everything that German film-makers (and their films), at least in the 1950s, were deemed not to be. The directors of the 1970s rewrote German history often enough as film history. Reference back to Weimar cinema, for instance, became considerably more frequent under the impact of the New German Cinema's success in America. It was an ambiguous gesture, inasmuch as, in the case of Fassbinder, national history as film history brought him closer to a fundamental reappraisal of, precisely, the much-admired German cinema of the 1950s and thence to a new understanding of

how intensely the national imaginary of cinemagoing (or, rather, TV-watching) Germany was still identifying with the Ufa-style stars and genres of the 1930s and 1940s. Fassbinder's allusions to Ufa movies as a key element for explaining part of Germany's historical and social continuity across all the political breaks since Weimar are negatively confirmed by such ideological-critical studies as Klaus Kreimer's of the continuities in personnel;<sup>11</sup> genres and stars, but it is also positively affirmed by empirical studies which indicate that well into the mid-1960s German entertainment films were, year in year out, far more successful at the box office than Hollywood films and that to this day they still enjoy the highest audience ratings when shown on television.

#### IV Family romance

As a counter-example within the Oedipal paradigm one might refer to some of the films of the New German Cinema made by women directors, who also focused on the experience of adolescence, though emphatically not in relation to either America or popular culture. It was not movies and chewing gum that became the markers of a specifically historical subjectivity, but the mother's reaction to the heroine's first menstruation, or scenes of family strife, intensified by the recall of embarrassing moments, as if only pain and shame could furnish an affectivity adequate to the representation of history in its discontinuous, intermittent presence (*Germany Pale Mother/Deutschland bleiche Mutter*, Helma Sanders-Brahms, 1979; *Hunger Years/Hungerjahre*, Jutta Brückner, 1979; *Something Hurts/Es was tut weh*, Recha Jungmann, 1980). Dyadic bonds, such as mother-daughter relations (Margarethe von Trotta, Helma Sanders-Brahms) became the privileged metaphors of understanding not only patriarchal society, but the specifically filmic ways of figuring continuity in discontinuity and the authentic as a property of the image.

The conjunction of painful memory and female masochism has in common with the search for continuity through elective paternity the paradigm of identification – identification with the self as other, the other as self: against the male 'I want to be where/who my father once was, we find 'I want to see myself from where my mother once saw/punished/embarrassed me'. Identification with parental figures in this mode often focused on figures who were themselves tied to the past by guilt, depression and anxiety: ex-Nazis, cowards of conscience, who survived by self-deception and deceiving their children, or alcoholics and drug-dependents, driving themselves to suicide. *The Marriage of Maria Braun*, *The German Sisters* (*Die bletene Zeit*, Margarethe von Trotta, 1981), *Sisters or the Balance of Happiness* (*Schwester, oder die Balance des Glücks*, Trotta, 1979), *Germany Pale Mother*, *Malou* (Jeanine Meerapfel, 1981) are some of the titles that offer themselves as attempts to enter into a different relationship with national history.

By contrast, one of the most frequently recurring motifs among male directors is that of the 'wild child': the Kaspar Hauser story. Although it would seem to be particularly prominent in Werner Herzog, his *Kaspar Hauser* is only one aspect of

by Herzog himself to his trip to the United States as a young man, when he spent six months working night shifts in the steel mills of Pittsburgh. In Herzog, the dialectic of coloniser and colonised, master and slave, is complemented but also rendered more complex by the dialectic of the underdog and the over-reacher, figurations which can be seen as two sides of the revolt against the father.

## V Hollywood, Fascism and the popular

The inner logic of one part of the New German Cinema during the 1970s and early 1980s was thus to engage with Hollywood and its economic supremacy in very indirect ways.

First, by positing an alternative imaginary – that of German Fascism – in order to contrast it as well as compare it with the imaginary of American popular culture. Against both of them – when viewed as imaginaries of the spectacle, of kitsch, narcissism and sentimentality – one could then oppose the notion of mourning work and melancholia, of self-abandonment and self-flagellation as politically and cinematically more ‘authentic’. This was Syberberg’s strategy in *Hitler: A Film from Germany*, where Hitler’s and Goebbels’s obsession with cinema emerges as both Germany’s ‘answer’ to Hollywood and American superpower aspirations, and as Germany’s fateful attempt to create an indigenous popular mythology for the age of the mass-media and consumer culture which, had it been ‘successful’, would have saved Europe from, precisely, Mickey Mouse and chewing-gum.<sup>12</sup>

There is something both dangerously naïve and historically absurd in this ‘what-if’ nostalgia for a better and purer Germany, if only it had developed its own popular culture. But one can also recognise in this picture the populist and anti-modernist mirror image of Adorno and Horkheimer’s high-modernist equation of the American culture industry with German Fascism. Latterly, Syberberg has radicalised his anti-American position, by suggesting that West Germany after 1945 lost its cultural identity twice over.<sup>13</sup> Not only did the common people embrace American popular culture as an antidote to having been caught out by the mass-deception of Fascist entertainment, but its intellectual establishment also over-identified with the other: this time, with the Jewish émigrés and their view of German culture. By making Walter Benjamin and T.W. Adorno the good conscience by which to assuage their own guilt, and taking over from them a wholly negative view of romanticism, nationalism and popular culture, German intellectuals, according to Syberberg, had missed an authentic coming to terms with the Nazi past just as fatally as had the masses who uncritically and enthusiastically embraced Hollywood and American popular culture after the war.

## VI Wim Wenders and the no-contest paradigm

A more nuanced and differentiated picture of America can be found in the generation ten years younger than Reitz or Syberberg. Apart from Fassbinder and Herzog, it is above all Wim Wenders in whose work the relation to America and

Curiously enough, this relation takes the form in which no effort is spared to ensure that conflict and antagonism are avoided and mitigated. In this sense, Wenders’s best-buddy or no-contest paradigm is the answer to or sublation of the two previous paradigms, the colonising and the generational. In another sense, however, it stages them, by taking them into a more hallucinatory, but also more specifically cinematic, register.

The paradigm can itself be broken down into three separate complexes – that of nostalgia, or a controlled regression to childhood, where the hero wants to look at himself from the place where he once stood (*Alice in the Cities*, *Kings of the Road*, *Paris Texas*, *Wings of Desire* and *To the End of the World*). Second, that of narrative versus image, history versus the mirror. This is exemplified by the contrast between detectives and angels in *Wings of Desire*, the stories beyond the nuclear flash in *The State of Things*, and the French gangsters against the New York cowboy in *The American Friend*. In each case, it is as if Wenders (or his hero) needs to know he was in paradise (in the desert, in Los Angeles, an ‘Angel’?) in order to want to return to history (i.e. Germany, Berlin, the Nazi past). Third, the non-conflictual paradigm also needs to articulate itself via stand-ins or representations of the cinematic apparatus, which has to be mastered in order to reassure oneself of access to the maternal, a process whereby Hollywood connotes no longer the father (as in the totem figures John Ford or Fritz Lang), but the ambiguously outlined but nonetheless absolutely necessary presence of the mother.

Wenders seems the only German film-maker who knows the United States well, so much so that he often plays off one America against another. In his early film reviews, for instance, the good America is either that of Nicholas Ray or of San Francisco rock bands like Creedence Clearwater Revival, while the bad America is 1960s Hollywood movies (and spaghetti Westerns, which Wenders detested even though they were Italy’s own peculiar homage to America). When he came to make his own films, Wenders did not protest directly against what he perceived as the oppressive dominance of Hollywood; his early shorts dispensed with words altogether and let rock music speak in their place. It was as if for the young film-maker two languages were inadmissible: Hollywood TV dramaturgy and spoken German, so that films like *Same Player Shoots Again* (note the English title, taken from a pinball machine) appear to be anti-narrative films, where long slow pans and a rock music soundtrack point an accusing finger at that to which it refers negatively: suspense, action, dialogue. Only English lyrics could be trusted (besides Creedence Clearwater Revival, it was The Who, Jimmy Hendrix, The Doors) and only a cinema of *temps morts*, of observation could reply to the hectic business of a certain Hollywood cinema of car chases and smash-ups, where action is, according to Wenders ‘always a form of pornography, a raping of objects, of people, of feelings, landscapes, and spectators’. The Hollywood of the 1960s became for Wenders both antagonist and mirror, the implied term of a stance adopted intuitively in order to get away from a claustrophobia which in time Wenders would read historically as part of post-war Germany’s malaise, but also politically, as colonisation.

## VII Wenders and the US: 'The American Friend'

Rather than dramatised as conflict, the latent antagonism towards colonisation by Hollywood is in Wenders most often figured – apart from the elective paternity of Ray or Fuller – in the form of sibling rivalry or an ambiguous friendship: one thinks of the relation between the character played by Patrick Bauchau in *The State of Things* and his Los Angeles producer, who hides from the Mafia by driving round the freeways all night singing 'Hollywood, Hollywood ... people never had it so good ... in Hollywood'.

The most subtle and complex example of this antagonism mediated as sibling rivalry and tenuous friendship, however, is undoubtedly *The American Friend*. The story can easily be read metaphorically, as an explicit disquisition about the relationship between Europe and Hollywood: the frame-maker Jonathan who knows that Ripley, the cowboy in Hamburg, is passing off fake paintings at an auction, is bribed into committing a murder in Paris, but then is rescued by Ripley from the consequences of his act. West Germany, in the figure of Jonathan, at first snubs the advances of America, represented by Dennis Hopper's Ripley: Jonathan responds with high-handed moralism to the glad-handed joviality of the *ingénue* cowboy. But soon the relation between these two characters becomes more ambiguous. Not only is Jonathan's aloof inwardness and self-absorption challenged, and eventually cracked open, by Ripley, but Jonathan also seems to need Ripley to tell him who he is by telling him what he is worth.

At another level, the film is about two kinds of Americas, brought into play and played off against each other. The first America – 'violent America' – is that of crime, of exploitation, shady deals, power struggles, pornography, labyrinthine international conspiracies, a cold and hostile, cruel and aggressive America. In Wenders it is associated with plotting, both in the literal and the literary sense, and it is part of the 'imperialist' or colonising side of the United States. Present in that part of *The American Friend* which can be read metaphorically, it is the hold, economic as well as in terms of brute force, that the US has over Europe and over the film industry in particular. Giving, so to speak, the image of superpower America seen from outside, Wenders needs, in order to represent it, a labyrinthine, paranoid plot driven by a complex narration: precisely a thriller story.

Within this world, there is, however, another America, that of Ripley's friendship, whose rhythm and logic do not follow the Chinese-box plot characterising the paranoid subject. Instead, this story progresses by crisscrossing, by paths converging and overlapping and separating again, without ever joining and merging. It is a constellation also to be found in the early Wenders films, notably in *Alice in the Cities*, *Wrong Move* and *Kings of the Road*, where it is the very epitome of narrative progression when structured by man/man or man/child relationships, beautifully and succinctly conveyed by the final sequences of *Kings of the Road* when rail and road, train and truck weave in and out of each other's path. In *The American Friend*, this is the world of equality, of exchange rather than exploitation. Instead of the bribes that Minot (the Paris gangster) makes, the gifts that Ripley and Jonathan make each other (inextricably linking sexuality with visual representation, since these are gadgets showing mainly 'naughty' pictures) con-

two moments – the exploitative and the egalitarian – are carefully interwoven and contrasted in *The American Friend*, because they signify the America of people-oriented behaviour, of an externality and a casualness which do not imply a disregard for life, but on the contrary allow a solitary self to experience the other, learn from the other, tolerate the other in a difference generated from anonymity itself. While both the Mafia's America and Ripley's may ultimately be corrupting, the latter's non-confrontational cool appears as a kind of utopia, where (German) intensity and inwardness can be exchanged for the lightness of touch and easy-going charm, where a mutual identification takes place without creating neurotic dependency. Contact rather than conflict, identity lived and renewed by interchange rather than by territorial claims seems to be the goal. Yet it clearly is a world that excludes women. In working this out, *The American Friend* plays through all the possibilities that this relationship could take, including its negative connotations, such as the figure of the Double and the vampire – the former as the image of one's own death, the latter as the appropriate figuration of colonisation, one in which the victim seeks out the vampire, to find in him the image of his own desire.

Why does Jonathan (who shares his name with the hero of both Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and Murnau's *Nosferatu*) collude so readily, why is he tempted at all? What has this Hamburg Faust to gain from his New York Mephisto? In the film, the answer once more relates to the problematic status of (German) inwardness to (American) surface: Jonathan's cultural superiority displayed at the auction is defensive, repressing the knowledge of its own precariousness. Hence it is apt that illness should be the central metaphor of Jonathan's condition: what he represses within him makes him vulnerable. The blood disease, inverting the attraction of the vampire's bite, relates to Jonathan's haughty pride in his workmanship, the illusion of thinking himself above the implications of his trade of frame-making, namely his own role in the commodification of painting, and more generally, in the process where art has become a forgery of values. To this disavowal, Ripley holds up a mirror, and tempts Jonathan with the hidden question: what am I really worth, what price can I put on my life, what is the material equivalent of my spiritual pretensions, my rarefied existence? In short, what is my European culture worth? It is the recognition that such culture and refinement as Jonathan displays in his early dealings with Ripley may be a sham, hollow, already decayed, part of a disease, incurable, terminal, which folds the film in upon itself in the final scenes.

Wenders's America is thus characterised by a double signification: as image for the reality of the self, and as the reality of that image. Caught up in the dialectic of subject and object, self and other, inside and outside, subjectivity can only be tolerated as image. But this existence as image is itself doubly coded: Wenders, like Handke and others, categorically refuses the polarity involved in the Oedipal father-son opposition, on which the old inner-outer divide, as well as the subject-object divisions, were modelled. In this sense, it is the two-dimensionality of the image, its function as mirror, which allows for such a perfect elision of the staging of Oedipal conflicts in Wenders's films. At the same time, such elision produces its own reversal: vision and the 'image' are associated, quite logically in a world still dominated by Oedipal relationships, with either pre-Oedipal regression

or death. The fascination with the America of Dennis Hopper (as Ripley but also as *Easy Rider*), and the anxiety over 'plotting' as that other side of America, find their common denominator in the reinscription and retranslation of (the image of) 'America' into the means of its mechanical reproduction. Hence the two sides of Hollywood, capitalist hell and life-saving heaven, the latter associated with a newly regained immediacy and primary satisfaction: the innocence which joins, in West Germany's history, GI-America and childhood. America has colonised, even more than the unconscious, the experience of childhood, through Wrigley's chewing-gum and Disney cartoons, through Saturday matinees at the movies and rock 'n' roll from the American Forces Network. These experiences in turn are inseparable from juke-boxes and slot-machines, movie theatres and record-players: gadgets which represent primary pleasure by metonymy.

## VIII America and childhood: in search of the mother

In this respect, America figures in Wenders as neither the son nor the father, but as the image of the maternal. For America is the always re-remembered satisfaction of the image, whose status as memory is safeguarded by access to the means of mechanical reproduction, comparable to the oral satisfaction of the maternal, whose capacity to give pleasure is, however, also associated with the anxiety of separation and loss. In Germany the site of the maternal is inaccessible without encountering the father (cf. in *Kings of the Road* where Hans Zischler's visit to his hometown becomes a settling of scores while his father is asleep), unless the maternal is already identified with Hollywood or the image (as is the case with the character in *Kings of the Road* played by Rüdiger Vogler, who also visits his childhood home in order to find, under the stairs, a rusty movie can full of old comics, a scene which Wenders borrowed from one in Nicholas Ray's *The Lusty Men*). Rüdiger Vogler here puts himself in the place of himself as child in just the same way that Wenders puts himself in the place of Nick Ray, when Nick Ray was young and 'lusty', making a movie with Robert Miltchum. Putting yourself in the place of where someone else has once been, and thus constructing an other (a structure of temporal-spatial displacement) in order to come to terms with loss, or with the loss of the Other, this is thus a special, and cinematically charged case, of nostalgia, while it is also an act of mourning for a German childhood that might never have been (seeing how Wenders's autobiographical remarks contradict such an idyll as that of the maternal home in the middle of the Rhine, just beneath the Lorelei): the fantasy of a founding, like Moses in the bulrushes, or Kaspar Hauser in his privy, which takes us back to the wild child and the prodigal son, associated as we have seen with all three paradigms.

The motif of the man who has to reinvent himself as the little boy lost is both repeated and deconstructed in Wenders's most radical film about America, *Paris Texas*. It is, first of all, far and away Wenders's most complex example of how an entire family turns each other into projections and fantasy figures, de-realising each other until they are no more than products of each other's desires. The father, Travis, has to make himself father by playing through the Oedipal scenario in

son: at school, the swap of boots, the brother motif), then by learning to 'be' a father in front of the mirror and the approving gaze of the Spanish maid, and finally, by initiating a journey and an adventure where both father and son are looking for the mother. When she is finally found – represented as pure product and construct of a number of desiring narratives – the family is not reunited, but the father puts the son in the lover's place, in order to watch himself through the son, returning to the mother: in other words, closure and resolution of the story are attained by elaborate temporal-spatial shifts and displacements, deferrals in time and space through which the Oedipal scenario is not so much lived as reconstructed and re-enacted in the form of an enabling fiction. The film thus dramatises in its very narrative the processes of identification, projection, repression of the Other by doubling the image of the self. It is no longer a matter of the son constructing himself in the image of the father, but the father constructing himself in the image of the son.

From the story that Travis and Jane are telling each other, it is clear that at the core of the film is an unresolved incest fantasy (Travis did not want to be separate from Jane, he refuses the Oedipal order of work, of being responsible and the provider, of being adult, male and father). This fantasy is resolved by being staged, imaged and retold. In the end the family exists purely in the register of the look and specularly: mother and son united under the eye of the father who would like to be in the place where the son is. *Paris Texas*, ostensibly a film about a place, a time and the self (literally the hero's origin, the place where he was conceived) is thus, as all Wenders's movies, a film about remembering, forgetting and repressing, but played out across the image, the photo, the fantasy produced by narrative. Amnesia and ubiquity of images are now tied to the family as impossible unit, which can only survive as an imaginary family.

## IX America: Europe's past?

The identity of the New German Cinema, I have been arguing, was, during the brief period it was experienced as such, founded on a series of fantasies, all of which are displaced versions of antagonism and competition, Oedipal rivalry and over-identification with and around Hollywood: perverse in Syberberg, disingenuous in Reitz, geographically dislocated in Herzog, disarmingly devious in Fassbinder, and filial-fraternal in Wenders.

At the same time, these fantasies are eminently readable: first, against a very traditional German history in which America figures as the screen of self-projection and self-alienation ('you have to go away in order to come home' as Luis Trenker's old schoolteacher puts it in *The Prodigal Son*).<sup>14</sup> But they can also be read as an often very precise account of an act of self-creation, by a national cinema that, because it disavows its own popular cinema ('Papa's Kino' of the 1950s and the Ufa genres of the 1940s) has to go to Hollywood to legitimate itself. In the course of this, it stages both a revolt and a submission, thus rewriting dependency into a Kaspar Hauser founding story and into the return of the prodigal son (cf. the opening scene and repeated motif in Reitz's *Heimrat*): both together are Germany's own myth of an 'independent' and 'national' cinema, in a movie business which is global and interdependent or not at all.

This paradox is implicit in Wenders, giving rise not only to a restless wandering career, but to a series of reveries about the destruction of the past as memory and trauma, and its transformation into scenario and spectacle: witness the narrative progress of the hero in *To the End of the World* who steals from the US Navy an imaging device they had stolen from his father, and with which he records for his mother, who is blind, images that can be directly transmitted to her brain. Here, the preconditions for escaping Oedipal subjectivity as conceived from the father are a double Promethean act of defiance, undertaken in order to make way for the reconstruction of a pre-Oedipal state, from the perspective of the son, via fantasies of turning oneself into images and return thus to the mother. Yet because these have become technological fantasies, they are also post-Oedipal, where the past is resurrected as spectacle through the machines of sound and vision: a definition of nostalgia as retrospective narcissism, in which the Other is appropriated not by an act of confrontation or submission to it, but by acts of rewriting, reproduction, simulation. The fiction sets up an endless play of separation and difference, of substitution and deferral, which sustains itself by the simultaneous coexistence of several spaces and time frames: a new geometry of representation by which the old rivalry between Hollywood and Europe might be laid to rest (in Australia...).

Thus, Wenders can epitomise a typically European attitude, looking to America as the verification or corroboration of his insights into cinema and film-making, and across the movie business, his insights into corporate capitalism or the military-industrial complex, and how a post-industrial 'information' society will shape human relations. At the same time, Americans may want to mirror their own disquiet about US capitalism and its penetration of societies on a global scale, in the image that Europeans like Wenders project of it out of their own cultural and historical situation. To the American experience of American society as at once natural and universal corresponds a European sense of Europe's own difference compared to America's Otherness, a conjunction which in turn allows Americans to experience themselves as different across the markers of European cultural specificity. On the other hand, America as the Other returns to Europeans as their own mirror, in a displacement that is both temporal and geographical, where America is indeed, as Max Frisch has hinted, Europe's future as well as its past.

While Wenders continues a tormented love-hate relationship, binding him to the America within and without, the New German Cinema has transformed its encounter with imaginary America into an increasingly introspective and retrospective look at the old and new Germany within and without; alternatively, it abandoned the figurations altogether in favour of a turn to action, with directors like Wolfgang Petersen (*In the Line of Fire*, *Outbreak*) and Volker Schlöndorff (*The Handmaid's Tale*, *Homio Faber*) making films in North America for global commercial and art house audiences. Although the reasons for these shifts (and the decline of film-making in Germany) are doubtless more complex,<sup>15</sup> it would seem that for much of the 1970s and 1980s it was precisely this multiply figured, projected and introjected 'Hollywood' which gave the New German Cinema its identity, if not to itself, then to its international audiences.

## Notes

- 1 This chapter incorporates passages previously published in T. Elsaesser, 'The New German Cinema's Historical Imaginary', in B. Murray and C. Wickham (eds), *Forming the Past* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1992). A slightly longer version can be found in D. Ellwood and R. Kroes (eds), *Hollywood and Europe* (Amsterdam: VU Amsterdam, 1994).
- 2 Max Frisch, *Stichworte* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1975), pp. 80–1.
- 3 Arthur Brauner, Germany's leading post-war producer, used to point out that the *Heimat* films were so successful for his company because he knew exactly how much each film would make at the box-office. There was thus no point in investing 'even a single penny more' either in the writing and directing, or the locations and production values: he had a product, he knew its market, and that was that. See Claudia Dillmann-Kühn, *Arthur Brauner und die CCC* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Filmuseum, 1990).
- 4 An instructive example is the story of the German distribution company Gloria (headed by the legendary Ise Kubaschewski) which during the 1950s and early 1960s had become prosperous by producing the films it knew it could distribute successfully; Gloria eventually lost out to the Americans in the struggle for the West German distribution and exhibition sector.
- 5 Elie Wiesel, 'Trivializing the Holocaust: Semi-Fact and Semi-Fiction', *New York Times*, 16 April 1978.
- 6 Edgar Reitz, 'Arbeiten an unseren Erinnerungen', *medium* vol. 5 no. 79, May 1979, pp. 21–2.
- 7 See T. Elsaesser, *New German Cinema: A History* (London: Macmillan, 1990), pp. 239–43.
- 8 See R. W. Fassbinder, 'Six Films by Douglas Sirk', in J. Halliday and L. Maltby (eds), *Douglas Sirk* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Film Festival, 1971), pp. 95–107.
- 9 Quoted in Andreas Meyer, 'Auf dem Weg zum Staatsfilm?', *medium*, November 1977, p. 15.
- 10 One only needs to recall the notorious fact that virtually the entire film establishment of the Federal Republic in the 1950s and 1960s had played an active role in the Nazi film industry.
- 11 See Klaus Kreimeier, *Kino und Filmindustrie in der BRD: Ideologiekonstruktion und Klassenwirklichkeit nach 1945* (Kronberg: Scriptor, 1973), pp. 53–67.
- 12 See 'The Syberberg Statement: We Live in a Dead Land' (text of a television interview), reprinted in *Pravework* no. 6, Autumn 1977, pp. 12–15.
- 13 See in this context also Eric L. Santner, 'The Trouble with Hitler: Postwar German Aesthetics and the Legacy of Fascism', *New German Critique* no. 44, 1992.
- 14 For Luis Trenker, see Eric Rentschler, 'How American is It: The US as Image and Imaginary in German Film', p. 609.
- 15 See Elsaesser, *New German Cinema*, pp. 309–23.