



# THE BERLIN SCHOOL

FILMS FROM THE  
BERLINER SCHULE

**MoMA**

THE  
BERLIN  
SCHOOL

FILMS FROM THE  
BERLINER SCHULE

RAJENDRA ROY / ANKE LEWEKE

*With contributions by Thomas Arslan, Valeska Grisebach,  
Benjamin Heisenberg, Christoph Hochhäusler, Nina Hoss, Dennis Lim,  
Katja Nicodemus, Christian Petzold, and Rainer Rother*

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# Foreword

The Museum of Modern Art has long celebrated the impact of German filmmakers on global cinema. Ever since the late 1930s, when the Museum's first film curator, Iris Barry, traveled to Europe and began collecting film and ephemera from Germany, the Department of Film has dedicated significant time and resources to researching, collecting, preserving, and exhibiting this work. Our strong partnerships with such national institutions as the Deutsche Kinematek-Museum für Film und Fernsehen, the Bundesarchiv-Filmarchiv, and German Films, as well as many private foundations, have fostered a consequential series of exhibitions and publications over the decades. From *Weimar Cinema, 1919–1933: Daydreams and Nightmares* to *Rainer Werner Fassbinder* and *Werner Schroeter*, MoMA has presented a rich portrait of the movements and artists that make up Germany's cinematic history.

*The Berlin School: Films from the Berliner Schule* adds a new chapter to this narrative. A distinctly post-Wall phenomenon—originally just a loose affiliation of filmmakers working and studying in Berlin—it has no manifesto and rejects dogmatic practice. Nonetheless, the films of the Berlin School have resonated profoundly since the mid-1990s and now constitute one of the most influential auteur movements to emerge from Europe in the new millennium. The early Berlin School filmmakers Thomas Arslan, Christian Petzold, and Angela Schanelec are pivotal figures in German film history. The subsequent generations of Berlin School filmmakers have proven to be particularly adept at enunciating their vision in the cinephile community, fostering what the French critics have embraced as the “Nouvelle Vague Allemande” (German New Wave). Many of these filmmakers have contributed to this publication and will participate in the exhibition, and I thank them first and foremost.

This effort was led by Rajendra Roy, The Celeste Bartos Chief Curator of Film, and his co-curator and coauthor Anke Leweke. I applaud their many years of collaboration. I would also like to thank Christoph Hochhäusler, Dennis Lim, Katja Nicodemus, and Dr. Rainer Rother for their expert contributions to the publication, as well as Sophie Cavoulacos, Curatorial Assistant in the Department of Film, for her tireless shepherding of the project. Sincere thanks to Dieter Kosslick and his team at the Berlin International Film Festival for their nurturing of the Berlin School films and their assistance in developing this exhibition. Deutsches Haus at New York University, the Goethe-Institut New York, and German Films have also played a critical role in the success of *The Berlin School* at MoMA. My thanks go as well to the individuals and distributors who have lent prints for the exhibition. Finally, thanks are due to Laurence Kardish, former Senior Curator in the Department of Film, for his many decades of involvement with German cinema. His foundational work allows the Museum to present these films in the larger context of German film history.

Glenn D. Lowry

Director, The Museum of Modern Art

# Introduction

Rajendra Roy



Angela Schanelec. *Nachmittag* (Afternoon). 2007. 35mm film, color, 97 minutes. Production still. Reinhold Vorschneider and Angela Schanelec

The fall of the Berlin Wall triggered a collapse not only of political institutions but also of many elements of German cultural identity, particularly in the former East. Berlin, with its physical borders demolished, became the epicenter of the country's attempts to reintegrate and to progress politically, economically, and culturally. In the mid-1990s a small group of Berlin-based auteur filmmakers emerged, building from what we can see now, twenty years on, was the intellectual rubble of the Wall. The three founding figures of what came to be known as the Berlin School—Thomas Arslan, Christian Petzold, and Angela Schanelec—all studied at the dffb (Deutsche Film- und Fernsehakademie Berlin, the German Film and Television Academy), but their allegiance was to each other as filmmakers, not as members of a collective movement. Indeed, the Berlin School has always been a critics' designation, not an artists' declaration. Its filmmakers are not aggressively political, and their films are not thematically dogmatic; however, many of them strive to provide a cinematic expression of the search for a new German identity (more recently expanded to include other national and cultural geographies). The films often focus on observant characters struggling to adapt in a time of societal change and explore the difficulties of that adaptation. All of the directors are from the former West, but many of the narratives focus on the Easterners, who were more directly affected by the collapse of their society. The Berlin School's signature portrayals of determined and often desperate attempts to inhabit the present tense reject the notion that the most compelling German stories come from its totalitarian past.<sup>1</sup> And even though there are glimmers of optimism about an uncharted future, the films also expose a lingering reluctance to change.

Perhaps most critical for the impact and legacy of the Berlin School films, and the factor that ensures their ongoing relevance, is the keen intellect of their creators. Many of the principal filmmakers are able to articulate their visions both in their films and in their writing. Like the French New Wave, the Berlin School is made up of filmmakers who are also authors, fine artists, and critics. This book, which accompanies the exhibition *The Berlin School: Films from the Berliner Schule*, provides a platform for the filmmakers. Thomas Arslan, Valeska Grisebach, Benjamin Heisenberg, Christoph Hochhäusler, and Christian Petzold all contribute essays, observations, or interviews, adding new chapters to the rich and complex written history of auteur filmmaking in Germany. Given MoMA's earlier in-depth investigations of that history, it is not surprising that a new movement such as the Berlin School would be discussed here in the context of its predecessors—most particularly, the New German Cinema of the 1960s and 1970s. But Hochhäusler challenges easy assumptions about lineage in his essay, "On Whose Shoulders: The Question of Aesthetic Indebtedness" and situates the Berlin School films on a global terrain, noting that filmmakers such as

Abbas Kiarostami, Apichatpong Weerasethakul, and Howard Hawks have been at least as influential on the movement as Fritz Lang, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, or Werner Herzog. This becomes increasingly important to note as the influence of the Berlin School spreads internationally and the kinship with other contemporary auteurs is affirmed.

By illuminating these historical and global links, by investigating the filmmakers' motivations, and by exhibiting a range of their films, our hope is to provide opportunities for an international audience to develop a broader familiarity with the Berlin School. For all its landmark innovations, vital narratives, and powerhouse performances, it has not yet had the exposure it deserves. The Berlin International Film Festival, or Berlinale, has championed these films and directors from their emergence, initially in the Forum, Panorama, and Perspektive sections, followed by the main competition. It remains faithful to the cause, bestowing top awards on directors Ulrich Köhler and Petzold and serving as encouragement to other international festivals—Venice, Toronto, New York, and others—to include them in their selections. Audiences outside the festival circuit began to embrace certain of the films only after the Berlin School had been in existence almost two decades. Most prominent has been Petzold's *Barbara* (2012), a period piece set in 1980s East Germany, starring Nina Hoss. The film was Germany's official submission to the Academy Awards®, a first for a Berlin School director, and it increased the visibility of the movement. At the dffb and other film schools across Western Europe, students now study Berlin School films, much as they have those of the Weimar era and the New German Cinema. Each new filmmaker who engages with the strategies of established Berlin School directors inevitably modifies them, creating new variations on the movement's themes and aesthetics. With this perpetual regeneration, the films of the first generations of the Berlin School will be continually revisited, making it hard to say definitively when the movement, or more importantly its influence, has ended. For now, we are content to witness the full flourishing of what Dennis Lim suggests here is the "Next New Wave."

#### Notes

1 Concurrent with the emergence of the Berlin School, films such as *Nirgendwo in Afrika* (*Nowhere in Africa*, 2001), *Goodbye Lenin!* (2003), *Der Untergang* (*Downfall*, 2004), and *Das Leben der Anderen* (*The Lives of Others*, 2006) were released. Set in or focused on the aftermath of Germany's totalitarian regimes, these films were commercially successful and won many international awards, something not commonplace with the Berlin School films.



Thomas Arslan, *Der schöne Tag* (A Fine Day), 2001.  
35mm film, color, 74 minutes, Production still. Left to right: Thomas Arslan, Michael Wiesweg, and Theo Lustig



Christian Petzold, *Barbara*, 2012.  
35mm film, color, 105 minutes, Production still. Hans Fromm and Christian Petzold (right)

# The Beginning

Anke Leweke



Thomas Arslan. *Mach die Musik leiser* (*Turn Down the Music*). 1994. 35mm film, color, 85 minutes. Left to right: Andy Lehmann, Marco Germund, and Andreas Böhmer

It was a revelation. As if *in* the cinema, my eyes were being opened *by* cinema. You just had to watch and see what was happening on the screen. At a Berlinale screening in the mid-1990s, suddenly there was this group of young people on screen, just graduated from school. Silently lounging around in ice-cream shops, in front of service stations, sitting on walls and railings, waiting for whatever may come. Now and again one takes a drag on a cigarette, sips a soda, or starts a conversation, rarely lasting longer than a couple of exchanges.

“So what are your plans?”

“Don’t know, hang out for a while, and you?”

“I’ll see.”

Not much more actually happened, yet a whole way of being was revealed to me, because the film was taking its dramatic tension from real life. And, at a certain age, didn’t we all simply drift for a while, just hanging out? Extending—like the sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds in Thomas Arslan’s directorial debut *Mach die Musik leiser* (*Turn Down the Music*, 1994)—the last days of youth into an eternal present, while apprenticeships, jobs, in short: adulthood, were looming on the horizon? Each snapshot contributes to a sense of idling in Arslan’s work, which is perhaps the quintessence of youth rather than the spectrum of grand feelings frequently evoked in cinema. In his subsequent Berlin Trilogy, Arslan would again take the viewer along into the reality of German streets, immersing himself into the movements of his characters, bringing us closer to them with each step.

The second revelation, at the Berlinale in 1996. Screened in the series New German Films was *Das Glück meiner Schwester* (*My Sister’s Good Fortune*, 1995), by Angela Schanelec. Here one could only marvel at the freedom with which the director took the time simply to observe her characters. The film is about a man in love with two sisters. The two women are standing in front of a building entrance, talking. About banal things and issues that concern them. About happiness and their ideas of love. Private as the situation is, Berlin is present on the soundtrack as the incessant roar of traffic, as the noise of a metropolis. In her directorial debut, Schanelec’s stern, concentrated compositions have already developed a pleasing transparency into the everyday life and inner lives of her heroes and heroines.

The third revelation. In 1998, at the German-language new directors film festival in Saarbrücken, I saw a screening of Christian Petzold’s *Die Beischlafdiebin* (1998; the title can be translated as “postcoital thief”). The film stood out from the rest of the program like an alien object. In precise, confidently

composed images, he follows a roughly forty-year-old woman who has become comfortable living a lie, who seems to be in transit through her own life. A shadowy existence in a film noir shot in color. A woman who, like Petzold's later heroines, struggles for what she believes are her dreams (or at least her options) in life.

Three films, three encounters with directors who represent a shift in the landscape of the German film. In the 1990s that landscape was initially dominated by trivial comedies about the personal relationships of yuppie-like characters in the big city. Then, suddenly, cinema began to open up to German ways of living, to generational mind-sets, to the mood of the country as reflected in a kitchen, on the streets of Berlin, or in a parking lot somewhere in the provinces. It was staggering how radically and how uncompromisingly these directors explored the views and perceptions of their characters, and precisely for that reason returned to objectivity.

Thomas Arslan, Christian Petzold, and Angela Schanelec, who write their own screenplays, continue the tradition of German auteur filmmaking, which was thought to have been virtually lost. These three directors found a home with the intrepid and open-minded producers Michael Weber and Florian Koerner von Gustorf and their company Schramm Film. They also found a home among film critics under the handy classification "the Berlin School," though strictly speaking it is not a school at all but an open association of directors with related aesthetics, in discourse with each other. An open community that continues to be joined by younger directors. The only thing shared by its members, with all the differences in their styles, voices, and subject matter, is the fact that all of them have learned their lessons from cinema history. And perhaps it is precisely their passion for the work of their precursors and their colleagues from all over the world, their delight in being able to enter into dialogue with them, their awareness that every image has a precedent, that makes this cinema so formally aware, so intelligent, and so exciting.



Angela Schanelec, *Das Glück meiner Schwester* (My Sister's Good Fortune), 1995.  
35mm film, color, 84 minutes, Wolfgang Michael and Anna Bolz



Christian Petzold, *Die Beischlafdiebin*, 1998.  
16mm film, color, 85 minutes, Constanze Engelbrecht and Wolfram Berger



A man in a dark suit and tie stands in profile, looking out of a large window.

DIE WELTE



## *On Whose Shoulders: The Question of Aesthetic Indebtedness*

Christoph Hochhäusler

An unwritten rule of the informal movement that critics like to call the Berlin School is that one not generalize about one's colleagues, that one must avoid the expected "we." At the same time, as a "member," I have had to accept being typecast by others, in articles, research papers, and film series that employ this tenuous (in my view) relationship so routinely and so matter of factly that it is impossible to take it personally.

Whenever I have had to speak abroad about the films of this loose grouping—in which there are friendships, to be sure, even collaborations, but no common direction, and certainly no programmatic consensus—I have frequently been confronted with echoes of other German artists. Among the predictable names that have come up in question-and-answer sessions are those of Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Gerhard Richter, Bertolt Brecht, and even the Becher School of photographers. In short: each questioner has dredged up what he already knows about Germany and tried to relate it to the films, and of course such connections can always be fabricated.

A favorite motif in criticism is the notion of a "skipped generation." In this case, the assertion is that film in Germany sank back into artistic insignificance during the Helmut Kohl era, after the auteur tradition had been propagated there in the late 1960s and brought to full flowering by Fassbinder, Werner Herzog, Alexander Kluge, and others, in what became known as the New German Cinema.<sup>1</sup> And now, some decades later, the Berlin School is said to be carrying on the aims of the earlier group. Seductive as such an account may be—I have occasionally resorted to it myself—it illuminates less than it obscures.

But what actually unites us? Whose shoulders are we standing on? Is there such a thing as a common aesthetic origin? In the following, I attempt to provide a few suggestions, without any claim to comprehensiveness and most definitely without having polled my colleagues.

Art is never produced in a vacuum, but the cinema appears to be an especially contingent medium, one that has traditionally been required to reconcile the most contradictory demands, such as art and



commerce. At the same time, the (feature) film is self-referential to the highest degree. Film history forms into fractals, with the same stories told again and again, and again and again, in a similar way, though there appear to be pendulum swings with respect to style. The *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) of the 1920s and early 1930s was a response to German Expressionism, postwar Italian Neorealism to the “white telephone film” (escapist Italian films of the fascist era, set in high society); the New Wave arose in opposition to France’s “Tradition of Quality”; and the Oberhausen Group has contended with “Papa’s cinema.”<sup>2</sup> And even though this dialectic does violence to the confusions of film history, the “new earnestness” of the Berlin School can be interpreted as a response to the “culture of entertainment” in the West German cinema of the late 1980s, early 1990s.

But this new earnestness also has a great deal to do with altered social coordinates. With reunification, the issue of identity took on new meaning in radically different ways in the East and in the West. Many in the East felt unsettled by what they perceived as an aggressive economic and cultural takeover, and not infrequently they reacted with withdrawal or with *Ostalgie* (nostalgia for the East that was). In the West, the hangover was milder, mostly associated with the question of what was left of the old Bundesrepublik. Berlin became the site of a new beginning, especially for art, but also of suppression, as the East Berlin scene—and most especially the film scene, including the DEFA (Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft, the state-owned film studio in East Germany)—was brutally pushed aside. Hans-Jürgen Syberberg was met with ridicule and rancor when he suggested that one of Berlin’s (three) opera houses be closed and that, in exchange, DEFA be retained as a center of film production. Munich, previously the unchallenged center of West German film, quickly lost its luster, outshone by a new Berlin cinema (Tom Tykwer, Wolfgang Becker, Dani Levy, Detlev Buck) that promised rejuvenation but offered little else.



The Berlin School films of Thomas Arslan, Christian Petzold, and Angela Schanelec (all of whom grew up in the West) were foreign bodies in this landscape. And it is no coincidence that their early works evoke the old Federal Republic in a more or less opaque way. Theirs is an introspective cinema that questions what remains. Christian Petzold’s *Die innere Sicherheit* (*The State I Am In*, 2000), a key film for me, is a good example of this. The film tells about former (West German) leftist terrorists who had a hard landing in the post-ideological age. The old currency, the old certainties are no longer valid—and their own daughter proves how petrified and how hollow her parents’ “alternative” has been for a long time. Ulrich Köhler’s *Bungalow* (2002) also inductively recounts the Kohl era—using the example of a Bartleby figure who refuses everything, even refusal—and the feeling that something has ended but that something new has not yet taken shape.

The seriousness of these films, criticized often enough as humorless or arty, may also have to do with the fact that almost all of us are cinematic late bloomers (and perhaps for that reason zealots as well). Most of us majored in other fields or even practiced other professions before settling on cinema. Angela Schanelec—like Maria Speth—studied acting and worked as an actress. Thomas Arslan majored in German studies; Christian Petzold, German studies and drama. Benjamin Heisenberg studied sculpture; Ulrich Köhler, art, philosophy, and visual communication; and Henner Winckler, also art. Valeska Grisebach majored in philosophy and German studies; Isabelle Stever, mathematics; and I studied architecture. Almost all of us turned to film only later. Accordingly, most of us were past the age of thirty—unusually old by local standards—and more or less set in our ways by the time we made our debut films.

Although I don’t know specifics about my colleagues’ preferences and role models, I can say that we share a specific relationship to film history. The habit of thinking about film history as a kind of encyclopedia that one can refer to again and again seems to me more decisive than any fondness for the same type of cinema. In a way, the cinema of the Berlin School is unthinkable without the possibility of

ranging through all periods and across national borders that has been offered by the DVD. Some films can be thought of as patent rereadings of previous narratives. Petzold's *Yella* (2007), for example, in which films by Herk Harvey (*Carnival of Souls*, 1962) and Harun Farocki (*Nicht ohne Risiko; Nothing Ventured*, 2004) are blended with a short story by Ambrose Bierce ("An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge," 1890). Arslan's *Im Schatten* (*In the Shadows*, 2010) could also be mentioned, as an updating of Jean-Pierre Melville's genre films. With some exaggeration, such films could be called metacinema—they are cinematographic palimpsests, deliberately overwriting "sacred" film texts. The change in cinema brought about by the DVD surely deserves closer study, but to my mind what has changed above all is one's distance from film. Ownership of a DVD, as opposed to a film reel, puts one in control by furnishing analytical tools—pause, forward, back, faster, slower, larger, smaller, as well as audio commentaries and so on—and allows one to research aspects of film history in a way possible before only at considerable expense. I suspect that our "Olympus" is, for that reason, more eclectic than that of previous generations, less rigidly oriented along the Hollywood-Paris axis.

As for stylistic influences, recent Asian cinema—in large part made accessible by the DVD—plays an important role, from Abbas Kiarostami to Hsiao-hsien Hou (whom Arslan names as an important influence), from Apichatpong Weerasethakul (on whom all of us are more or less in agreement) to Lav Diaz (an important discovery for Grisebach), from Sang-soo Hong (a key figure for Köhler) to Edward Yang. These are filmmakers for whom the form is political and who, for all their differences, open up the boundaries of narrative by subverting classical tempo, linear narrative, and identifiable pattern. At the same time, American cinema of the "classical" period is an important reference point—John Ford, Howard Hawks, Raoul Walsh, and of course Fritz Lang, Ernst Lubitsch, and Alfred Hitchcock—as a cinema that was created with the self-assurance of a mass medium whose primacy was as yet unchallenged by other media.



Christoph Hochhäusler. *Falscher Bekenner*. 2005. Constantin von Jascheroff

Thomas Arslan. *Der schöne Tag*. 2001. Serpil Turhan



Confident cinema. Our own national influences, I feel, pale by comparison, at least in terms of conscious quotation from, say, the New German Cinema of the 1970s—which does not mean that Fassbinder and Co. play no role. But, in terms of genealogy, I don't think they constitute the main branch.

In fact, the Berlin School, despite what the label suggests, is not a specifically German phenomenon. All over the world there are filmmakers exploring related terrain. In Austria (Jessica Hausner), in Argentina (Lisandro Alonso, Lucrecia Martel), in the United States (Lance Hammer, Kelly Reichardt), in Japan (Naomie Kawase, Hirokazu Kore-eda), and in many other places. But just what is this terrain? I feel it would be mistaken to focus on formal decisions, such as long takes. More important, it seems to me, is a certain approach to narrative and a specific concept of characters, both of which have formal consequences. I am sure that each of us would describe these shared approaches differently or even dispute them altogether, but it is my sense that three factors play a paramount role.

First, in terms of narrative, there is a shift away from the center and toward the periphery. In nineteenth-century history painting, the idea was to depict the decisive instant, the very moment that Caesar crossed the Rubicon. By contrast, French Impressionism focused on the beauty of the quotidian, and the historic moment was disregarded. One can interpret the shift that distinguishes our films from the American mainstream or from its offshoots in German television drama in just this way. Instead of the decisive moment, for us it is more a matter of before or after, and seldom is the main character a figure who "makes history." Rather—and now we come to my second factor—it is about characters who stand at the periphery of events, with interior lives the viewer can only speculate about. Perhaps this could be called antiexhibitionism; by no means are all the figures timid or mute, but none of them pretends to be as self-congratulatory as the heroes we are accustomed to from the mainstream. One could also say that the characters preserve their mystery, and with it their dignity. It is therefore not surprising that the majority of our characters are adolescents, young people who are more observers than protagonists. This leads to the third factor—a cinema of observation, not of action. It is not plot entanglements that are most important,



but rather the vision, the view of the world. This is ideally realized in Schanelec's *Marseille* (2004), in which a photographer, played by Maren Eggert, "surrenders herself to the [strange] city"<sup>3</sup> in order to become a witness rather than an active participant. In this, we link up with a long tradition in the European cinema, from F. W. Murnau to Andrei Tarkovsky, from Michelangelo Antonioni to Robert Bresson.

The question of how German our films are has led to controversy again and again, especially given the elective affinities with filmmakers outside Germany. Aside from the love for the language, there are few things German that we worship; there is not much flag-waving going on among us. Our films speak of the here and now, to be sure, and many of them are set in the German provinces. But when asked, most Berlin School directors describe themselves as European or see themselves—at least on the cinema map—as cosmopolitan. What links us perhaps more strongly than issues of national identity are German production conditions. And here a paradox comes into play that is either sad or comical, depending on how you look at it. The films of the Berlin School—which are committed to cinema as a space for concentration, where a storyteller can trust the audience to register subtle signs, in contrast to the crude antics of television drama—find their largest (though still modest) audiences on television. There are both structural and cultural reasons for this. Among the structural reasons is the fact that we do not have a film industry per se but rather a (predominantly public) television industry on which producers depend as well as various public funding institutions. However, cinema is little more than a showcase for television, a "flagship store" as Harun Farocki put it,<sup>4</sup> that at best lends prestige to its programming.

True commercial success in German cinema is a rare exception; the rule is the exploitation of cinema as window dressing in television programming. Accordingly, the same people are found both in front of and behind the camera both in cinema and in television, which further blurs the distinction between the mediums. On top of this come cultural factors. Traditionally, film has earned no particular respect as art in Germany; whereas music, theater, and the fine arts all enjoy great prestige, the cinema is still seen as mere entertainment. As a result, our films are made on very limited budgets, which is inevitably apparent in the

finished product and influences the choice of material, the number of roles, and the film's design. A large part of this economy of means, which is often celebrated and at least as often reviled, is thus simply ... economy. Or the result of it. We have learned to love the "aesthetic of poverty." Because it is wise to love what is possible? That would be too pessimistic, but it is not altogether beside the point.

Even if we do not share a manifesto, as I mentioned above, we are in constant dialogue with each other. Not everyone with everyone else, but it is a lively association. There are also obvious collaborations. A handful of cameramen (Reinhold Vorschneider, Bernhard Keller, Patrick Orth, Hans Fromm), casting directors (Simone Bär, Nina Haun, Ulrike Müller), editors (Bettina Böhler, Stefan Stabenow), and production designers (Silke Fischer, Kade Gruber, Renate Schmaderer, Beatrice Schultz) have been involved in a majority of our films. A few directors share writing credits—recently, for example, Henner Winckler and Ulrich Köhler on *I Turn to You* (forthcoming). Benjamin Heisenberg cowrote my debut film, *Milchwald (This Very Moment)*, 2003), and Valeska Grisebach served as Maren Ade's dramatic advisor for *Alle Anderen (Everyone Else)*, 2009—to name some examples.

That many films are consequently made "in close proximity, without fences" as Christian Petzold put it<sup>5</sup>—that is to say, with repeated references to one another—is hardly surprising. I felt Petzold's *Gespenster (Ghosts)*, 2005), for example, to be to some extent a reaction to Schanelec's *Marseille* (2004): a French couple in Berlin, two young women lost in their own city. My second feature film, *Falscher Bekenner (I Am Guilty)*, 2005), was in many respects conceived as a response to Köhler's debut, *Bungalow* (2002). In Ulrich's film, the hero seemed rootless, which is why I made a family film. And also Köhler's *Montag kommen die Fenster (Windows on Monday)*, 2006) could be understood as an (unconscious) alternative take on my *Milchwald*, in that it also deals with a woman who neglects her maternal duties and flees her unfinished house. Many other such connections could be made. Films criticize films, build upon visual experiences, continue narratives, reformulate ideas. The same is true in Hollywood, but in our case it takes place on a more intimate scale.

The picture would not be complete if I failed to mention formative teachers and mentors. Arslan, Petzold, and Schanelec found Hartmut Bitomsky and Harun Farocki to be important teachers at the dffb (Deutsche Film- und Fernsehakademie Berlin, the German Film and Television Academy) and even got to know each other in their seminars. As students, Petzold and Arslan assisted Bitomsky and Farocki on various projects, and to this day Farocki collaborates on Petzold's screenplays. He also served as dramatic advisor on Isabelle Stever's upcoming project, *Hotel Lounge*. This connection with Farocki and Bitomsky is surely the most telling proof of the theory of the "skipped generation" (which I rejected above). But it is no coincidence that the two men were by no means protagonists of the New German Cinema but rather antagonists, first as writers and editors of the important journal *Filmkritik*, then in their documentary works (and also in the failure of their feature-film experiments intended to counter the literary adaptations then in vogue). Their films and analytical methods have left perhaps their clearest traces on the Berlin School—at least, on its "first generation." But even among younger members there have been formative encounters with filmmakers of that earlier generation, all of them New German Cinema outsiders who turned to teaching partly in response to the precarious working conditions. Köhler and Winckler, for example, found teachers and champions in the experimental filmmakers Rüdiger Neumann and Klaus Wyborny. Important for me was Tankred Dorst, known mainly as a dramatist, who in the late 1970s–early 1980s made three very personal and unjustly forgotten films with a keen sense of German history and "disruptive people"<sup>6</sup>—*Klaras Mutter* (*Clara's Mother*, made for television, 1978); *Mosch* (1980, also made for TV); *Eisenhans* (*Strange Fruits*, 1983)—and who occasionally reads my screenplays even today.

"The Berlin School" is a critics' label. Originally coined to describe the cinema of Arslan, Petzold, and Schanelec, it gradually came to encompass a great many other directors, including me. Because each critic counts differently and identifies different stylistic features as typical, various subsets have been identified. It is important to recognize that such designations fail to fully accommodate all its "members" and their works. That was true ten years ago, and it is even truer now. Every label carries an expiration date, and to my mind this one has passed. The films of the last few years have veered further and further apart. Genre and costume films, comedies, and thrillers have tended more and more to defy expectations, a development that I find both necessary and liberating. School is out, and I am eager to see what comes next.

#### Notes

1 In 1962 a group of cinephiles—among them Alexander Kluge, Edgar Reitz, Peter Schamoni, and Herbert Vesely—declared their "ambition to create the new German feature film." This so-called Oberhausen Manifesto positioned itself against the dying UFA tradition and cleared the way for the New German Cinema, even if most of the signatories (with the exception of Kluge and Reitz) failed to ride the wave they helped to create. See <http://www.oberhausener-manifest.com/oberhausener-manifest/>.

2 The radical young filmmakers of the Oberhausen Group declared that "Papas Kino ist tot" (Papa's cinema is dead).

3 Schanelec wrote in the press material for the release of the film: "A young photographer travels to Marseille. The more she becomes fixated with the city, the harder it becomes for her to return to her former life. She must deal with the consequences." See <http://www.peripherfilm.de/marseille/inhalt.htm>.

4 Interview with Harun Farocki, "Zukunft Kino," *Kinema Kommunal* (magazine of the Bundesverband Kommunale Filmarbeit e.V.) 1 (January–March 2008): 2.

5 Petzold has used this expression many times in conversation. See, for example, our email exchange in Dominik Graf, Christian Petzold, and Christoph Hochhäusler, "Mailwechsel Berliner Schule," *Revolver* 16 (May 2007): 9, where he says: "Perhaps the whole business of the Berlin School has something to do with it. That one didn't have a supportive environment, in his work, that the films also had no context, nothing to be compared to. The same thing is surely behind your desire for genre, after all, for genre means context, tradition, deviations and conformities. I happen to like our present loose relationship, or community without fences."

6 Dorst, from an interview with his cowriter Ursula Ehler, *Revolver* 18 (January 5, 2008): 60–87. Ehler described their films as being about people who "are in the way."



Top and bottom: Christoph Hochhäusler, *Milchwald* 2003. Leonard Bruckmann and Sophie Charlotte Corrad





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