

## ***Die Kommenden Tage: Transcript***

November 2010 saw the release of a cinematic rarity: a German science fiction film called *Die Kommenden Tage* (2010). Written and directed by Lars Kraume, *Die Kommenden Tage* is a film about the Kupers, a well-to-do middle-class family on their personal journey from today to eight years in the future.

During this time the demand for ‘the world’s last resources’ plunges the world into the fourth Gulf War. This, in turn, generates an influx of migrants onto the streets of Germany. The fight for ecological resources turns into a reduction of economic resources for the world’s citizens. The three children of the Kuper family follow different paths. Each of them is discontented with the political situation that their parent’s generation created. The father is a high-standing lawyer whose company enables the destructive exploitation of the ‘final’ resources by big companies. Eldest daughter Cecilia is influenced by her radical boyfriend Konstantin to join the terrorist organisation *Die Schwarzen Stürme*. The youngest child Philip joins the Bundeswehr, and middle child Laura dreams of a peaceful family life and sees procreation as the only meaningful philosophy to follow.

*Die Kommenden Tage* is reminiscent of Thomas Mann’s archetypal German family saga *Die Buddenbrooks*. Mann’s novel detailed the radical changes in German society in the nineteenth century. *Both* narratives connect the economic and societal changes in Germany with the private disfunctionalities and the decadence of a bourgeois family and, like Mann, director Lars Kraume sees the bourgeois lifestyle as doomed. However, where Mann lamented a decline in the value of artistic intellectualism, Kraume sees the decline of the decadent family as symbolic of the decline of the decadent nation state. In Kraume’s film, the

economic and ecological excesses of global capitalism are incompatible with the traditional German welfare state system and lead to the eventual collapse of society as we know it.

In *Die Kommenden Tage* change has two aspects:

1. the violent collapse of old certainties (the welfare state) and political guarantees of liberalism (in the form of *Grundrechte*, constitutional rights),
2. the other is devastating man-made ecological catastrophes.

These changes are met with more violence in the form of Die schwarzen Stürme. The idea expressed by the terrorists in the film is that 'self defence against the system' is not only legitimate but needed to prevent the excesses of an inherently corrupt system. This idea is a deliberate self conscious echo of Germany's recent past.

The real-life terrorist group Rote Armee Fraktion, who were most active in the 1970s, had made it their mission to lead a guerrilla-like struggle against the building blocks of the capitalist system; a system which they regarded as a self-perpetuating, vicious circle of injustice and exploitation that had to be eradicated. Like the Red Army Faction forty years ago, *Die Kommenden Tage* also sees today's political system of excessive Capitalism as doomed. *Die Schwarzen Stürme* in fictional form express a real life desire: a radical implementation of sustainability (the conservation of an ecological balance by avoiding depletion of natural resources) in order to avoid what is seen as the inevitable outcome of uncontrolled capitalism which is wars, ecological disasters and an escalation of misery.

What is remarkable is that the idea of sustainability itself has become an unquestionable truism in German culture. The idea of sustainability is based on the precautionary principle. The precautionary principle states that policies that are felt to be harmful to humans or the environment are to be rejected outright without the need for scientific proof. The

precautionary principle has been the guiding principle of the German government since the early 1970s. The precautionary principle is thoroughly ingrained in the self-conception of Germany and a disregard for it is often met with a general feeling of incomprehension and emotional outrage.

So, sustainability and the precautionary principle have informed the German politics for longer than those of most other countries. This has given rise to the impression that there is an inherent fear of risk taking in German culture, often described as ‘German Angst’. Many see this as a ‘fear of impoverishment of competence and a fallback into barbarity’ that means a falling back into the barbarity of the Third Reich.<sup>1</sup> This fear is analysed rigorously by political scientist Hamed Abdel-Samad, who says: ‘My thesis is: The greatest fear the Germans have is from themselves. Many believe that they do not live in a developed democracy which can deal with a homogenous society. They think many are able to just follow the next fanatic. One looks into the rear-view mirror and believes that one looks into the future.’ With this in mind – what could be described as a fear of ‘too much freedom’ – it is not surprising that *Die Kommenden Tage* was welcomed by the German press as a film with ‘high plausibility’ and a ‘close relationship to today’ that shows how the world ‘will look like in ten years time’.

Dystopian futures are very common in science fiction. Sci-fi film is a genre that strongly relies on *mise-en-scène*. *Mise-en-scène* refers to everything that appears before the camera and its arrangement. In science fiction film it is within the *mise-en-scène* that the new and futuristic is interwoven with the familiar, without being directly involved in the story so the vision of the future is inconspicuous.

---

<sup>1</sup> Bode, Sabine (2006), *Die deutsche Krankheit – German Angst* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta) p.257; 7.

The images of the future are often to be found in the backdrop of the scenes rather than in the foreground of the narrative. This is no different in *Die Kommenden Tage*. The collapse of society is more clear in the background than in the narrative itself. The philosopher and film enthusiast Slavoj Žižek says that, ‘If you look at the thing too directly, the oppressive social dimension, you don’t see it. You see it an oblique way only if it remains in the background.’<sup>2</sup> Here, the background becomes the actual story onto which the characters provide a connecting thread. *Die Kommenden Tage* is created with high realism in its mise-en-scene, with the intention of portraying the collapse of society accurately and believably. To be effective, the mix of the familiar and the futuristic elements has to still be recognisable as ‘our time’ (so, we are familiar with what we see) whilst experiencing an *Entzückung*, a rapture, from this very familiarity.

In *Die Kommenden Tage* the first sign we are in the future is glimpses of new forms of advertising (a common trope in many recent sci-fi films). The film introduces the ‘future’ through garish adverts of the side of busses. The next indicator is that technology has advanced in daily life, expressed through the characters’ familiarity with a new generation of computer screens. However, this is where the comfortable images of the future stop. What comes next is more unsettling. A distortion of familiar Berlin landmarks and uncanny re-imagining of ‘what is to come’ through images of what is uncomfortable in the present. An almost circular logic that shows the ugliness of poverty by showing how ugly poverty is.

Life in the future is revealed as the camera follows the protagonists, often in tracking shots, through the streets of the city, revealing the state of affairs as the background to the protagonist’s story. What are usually establishing shots (so ‘Where is the scene set?’, ‘How

---

<sup>2</sup> ‘Comments by Slavoj Žižek.’ *Children of Men* DVD (Cuarón, 2006). Universal Pictures.

does character A get to place B?') are now the most important part of the narrative. Following the character is to encounter, by association, the ruination of decent standards of living. The background in the film is also the metaphorical background of the protagonists' circumstances.

*Die Kommenden Tage* understands itself as a cautionary tale about the dangers of excess capitalism. It is an attempt to visualise the future, extrapolated from what is commonly felt to be the worst case scenario today. *Die Kommenden Tage* embodies a fear of contemporary problems - in particular a German fear of 'falling back into barbarity'.