

German Film in the Twenty-First Century: Transcript

Luke: We are going to discuss *Vier Minuten* and *Die kommende Tage*. Do you think these films could have been made in English or do you think there is something specifically German about them?

Maren: My film, *Die kommende Tage*, is often compared to the film *Children of Men* which is an English film, because they both have the same premise about the dystopian near future. So, I think yes it could have been, although there are some German particularities, like certain terrorist groups and certain ideas about environmentalism which might not directly translate to English culture.

Bex: I think in terms of setting, my film couldn't have been in England or America. It's very much tied up with questions of the Nazi past, with *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, and part of it is set in the Deutsche Oper and it uses German music – they have Schumann as part of the soundtrack – so it is very German in a way.

Luke: Despite the fact that these two films deal with themes that are relevant to audiences all around the world, neither of these films was particularly successful outside of Germany. Why do you think that was?

Maren: Well, *Die kommenden Tage* wasn't even particularly successful in Germany! It was considered 'Prädikat wertvoll', so it was considered a very good film by critics, but nobody went to see it. I think this has to do with the narrative; because it is a science fiction film, it

should meet with what science fiction theorists calls a ‘novum’, which means a fantastic element around which all the other things make sense. So, in *Children of Men*, you have the premise that women are infertile and that is why all civilisation breaks down. However, in *Die kommende Tagen* there is no fantastic element. It is an idea about running out of resources which is generally believed to be true, so the fantastical elements that happen afterwards don’t make much sense because they have no fantastic presence, there is no novum. So, it fails a bit as a narrative and this is why it probably didn’t have a big audience.

Bex: I think perhaps the reason that *Vier Minuten* was not so successful as it could have been is because it deals with a lot of difficult topics – suicide, death, the Nazi Past, imprisonment, child abuse – so many difficult themes. And packing that all into one film, it’s quite a dark film. It’s a good film, but a dark film!

Luke: Do you think that German-language films can be successful outside of Germany, or do they have to deal with the Nazi or GDR past to be successful?

Maren: There are lots of films which are successful. *The Baader Meinhof Komplex*, for example, was a very successful film, as was *Das weiße Band*. However, films that are set in Germany sometimes have a certain cultural context about language, cultural settings like the city (they are about Berlin or Hamburg), and if you don’t have access to this it is a very hard sell.

Bex: I deal mainly with queer cinema in Germany and Britain, and I think a lot of the lesbian films aren’t set in the past. Most of them are set in the present and they deal with contemporary issues, be it migration or gender. I’m not sure how successful you would say

they would be. How do you measure success? But in terms of German queer cinema, it doesn't really deal with the Nazi past or the GDR. In comparison, British queer cinema is very much set in the past using the heritage genre, costume genre. So there is quite a distinct difference there.

Luke: Do you think these two films and their narrative style and content are reflective of the type of cinema being produced in Germany today?

Maren: Well, science fiction is not done in Germany. It's a real rarity and I don't think there will be another one in the near future. However, films about terrorism are a very, very big theme in German cinema. The identification with RAF and its terrorist legacy is one of the defining features of German identity so there will be a film about the RAF or a terrorist-like organisation. A couple of them every year maybe and I am sure there will be more!

Bex: I would say that *Vier Minuten* is perhaps a good example of German cinema in the way that it does use contemporary issues but also does look at the National Socialist past. But I would also say in terms of queer German cinema, it doesn't fit into that group as well.