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The Province Always Rings Twice: Christian Petzold's Heimatfilm noir *Jerichow*

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Christian Petzold's ninth film, *Jerichow*, was submitted for competition at the Venice Film Festival in 2008. Produced by the stalwart Berlin School backers, Schramm Film Koerner und Weber, in cooperation with Bayerischer Rundfunk and ARTE, it opened in German cinemas on January 8, 2009. By the end of the year it hadn't quite hit one hundred thousand viewers (99,357), leaving it in 45th place among the most popular German films of 2009.¹ These viewing figures and the film's overall reception are in line with the filmmaker's previous work, admired by critics and feted on the film festival circuit, without yet achieving a significant popular resonance at the cinema in Germany, despite Petzold's growing reputation as, according to Marco Abel, "arguably the most important German director of the post-wall era."² As Petzold argues, "German cinema has become much more interesting of late. It has become really a very rich cinema – but cinema as such doesn't exist anymore. There are films, but there is no public for them. We have to face this without illusions; and you can't change it either."³

Although Petzold's interviews underline the independent, *auteurist*, nature of his approach to filmmaking, his decision to eschew the avant-garde and essayistic projects

¹ All figures taken from the FFA (Filmförderungsanstalt) website <www.ffa.de>. Accessed 4 March 2010.

² See Marco Abel, "The Cinema of Identification Gets on my Nerves: An Interview with Christian Petzold," *Cineaste*, 33, 3 (Summer 2008) 1, at <www.cineaste.com>. Accessed 26 November 2009.

³ *Ibid.* 4.

avored by his former tutors at the *DFFB*, Harun Farocki and Hartmut Bitomsky, and his utilization across his career of popular genres, from the family melodrama and road movie to the suspense thriller and ghost story, suggest attempts to engage a wider audience: “I have the feeling that I make films in the cemetery of genre cinema, from the remainders that are still there for the taking.”⁴ As Petzold has pointed out, genre cinema has been absorbed largely by television – five of his own films were actually made for television and had limited cinema distribution. In his films “the traces of genre are like echoes,”⁵ and these generic elements are drawn upon particularly to underscore the political resonance of the dynamics between his characters.

Petzold’s *Jerichow* clearly has literary, as well as cinematic antecedents, given that it is an open reworking of James M. Cain’s pulp crime novel *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, written in 1934 and famously filmed in Hollywood in 1946 by Tay Garnett for MGM with Lana Turner and John Garfield in the lead roles, and remade in 1981 by Bob Rafelson for Lorimar in a version starring Jack Nicholson and Jessica Lange.⁶ Cain’s source novel has been utilized a number of times by European filmmakers, with both the French crime film, *Le Dernier Tournant* (1939), directed by Pierre Chenal,⁷ and Luchino Visconti’s *Ossessione* of 1942 completed even before the first Hollywood adaptation. Although Chenal’s less well-known adaptation, released shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War and the German occupation of France, also foregrounds the social position of its characters, Visconti’s film is a significant forerunner of Petzold’s version, given Visconti’s desire to use

⁴ Abel 4.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ella Taylor, “‘Postman Always Rings Twice’ inspires ‘Jerichow,’” *Los Angeles Times*, 17 May 2009 <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/may/17/entertainment/ca-petzold17>.

⁷ Ginette Vincendeau argues that this “is the most socially anchored version of the story [...] Where the 1946 American version emphasizes the erotic charge of the *femme fatale* (Lana Turner) and Visconti’s the attraction of the young male hero (Massimo Girotti), Chenal gives weight and sympathy to the husband, played by Michel Simon, significantly the greater star of the French trio. The ambiguity of Simon’s performance suggests that he is a willing participant in the ‘infernal trio’ rather than simply a victim.” Ginette Vincendeau, “French film noir,” in Andrew Spicer, ed., *European Film Noir* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2007) 29.

the source material “to make visible, beyond the mythical narratives of either James Cain or Fascist ideology, a social and historical repression, the site of a yet-unarticulated story.”⁸

Visconti places the classic trio from Cain’s novel, the drifter, the bored wife and the dull, petty husband, against a carefully chosen landscape, centered on a roadside *osteria*, next to the winding Po river, and surrounded by the bleak fields and marshlands of the Delta Ferrarese. The dusty road, which features in recurring ways throughout *Ossessione*, is also a route out of provincial poverty and monotony, with the larger cities of Ferrara and Ancona beyond the horizon. The geography of Visconti’s adaptation is precise and deliberate: the film’s central theme is one of homelessness, rather than of illicit and subversive sexual passion; it explores a collective desire to find a place of belonging, a home, beyond the repression of Italian fascism. The composition of spaces within the frame, particularly the use of landscape, and the viewing relations, the “ways of seeing” of the main protagonists, are key to reading *Ossessione* as a political film. *Ossessione* constructs a world of contrasts, the dark, disheveled and claustrophobic interior spaces of the *osteria* set frequently against the bleached-out sun-scorched exteriors along the road. Yet every attempt made by Gino and Giovanna to escape the decayed and repressed “home” which is not one acts only to return them to where they started. The road holds no clear utopian promise. However, as Giuliana Minghelli notes, the film does register fleeting images of utopian space beyond the binaries of “house” and “road,” often within the frame but behind the characters’ backs or beyond their viewing perspective.⁹ In this way, as Minghelli argues, the film’s audience can see what is

⁸ See Giuliana Minghelli, “Haunted frames: history and landscape in Luchino Visconti’s *Ossessione*,” *Italica*, 22 June 2008.

⁹ See Minghelli for a detailed reading of the political implications of Visconti’s use of landscape: “*Ossessione* does not simply rediscover the Italian landscape; it is a story in search of an inhabitable landscape. The spaces of the movie, claustrophobic interiors and unreachable utopian horizons between which the human figures are caught, are hardly habitable. Yet between these two incommensurable spaces, carefully framed allegories of belonging open a breach in the apparent limits of the characters’ historical and narrative present. These ‘deep surfaces’ intimate the existence of an outside that yearns to enter the visible narrative on the screen. Significantly, these revelatory allegories emerging from the landscapes always lie behind the characters’ shoulders, remaining unseen by them but not the thoughtful viewer” (18).

literally and figuratively *beyond* the characters, the possibilities for a new way of belonging in Italy after fascism, of relating to place, landscape and nation.

Petzold's landscape is equally deliberate, and his framing of the three central characters, Thomas, Laura and Ali, against an everyday post-unification topography as intentional as Visconti's. As in his earlier film, *Wolfsburg* (2003), where the political geography of the provincial VW town allowed the director to explore a specific myth of German place and history, the titular location, *Jerichow*, foregrounds the landscape of contemporary Germany. Although the actual town is in Sachsen-Anhalt, Petzold's film relocates it to the Prignitz region, northwest of Berlin, in the flat countryside on the banks of the Havel where Brandenburg meets Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. Petzold's version of *The Postman Always Rings Twice* explores the constellation of the set characters as a deliberate "postfordistische Liebesgeschichte,"¹⁰ set at a moment in the development of capitalism when in Germany, as in other industrialized nations, the conditions of the labor market are undergoing huge changes, with the loss of long-term job security and the rise of temporary work, of subcontracting and franchising. For Petzold, Prignitz represents post-Fordist Germany at its bleakest. This is the vanishing point of blue-collar employment in Germany and comes at a similarly pivotal moment in economic and social history as did earlier versions of *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, with their focus on the bleak situation of the working class in the aftermath of the Great Depression or, later, on the final stages of fascism in Italy. Petzold notes how he came across both the region and the town of Jerichow during the filming of his previous film, *Yella* (2006):

Mir ist "Jerichow" eingefallen, als ich mit meinem kleinen Sohn Schauplätze für "Yella" gesucht habe. Während ich Brücken fotografierte, hatte er auf dem Film seiner Einwegkamera nur Verkehrsschilder, unter anderem das

¹⁰ Petzold in "Making Of *Jerichow*," DVD Extras, *Jerichow* (2009, Schramm Film Koerner und Weber, dir. Christian Petzold).

Ortsschild “Jerichow.” Das sah so schön aus und eröffnete zusammen mit der Weite der Landschaft eine geradezu mythische Tiefe.¹¹

Petzold’s use of the town name “Jerichow” as his title highlights one of the key themes of the film, namely resurrection. As the director notes, the name brings to mind the flower, the rose of Jericho, which is famous for appearing to have wilted and died, only to return to life again when given water. This ability to find a new life is one shared at the beginning of the film most obviously by Thomas, returning to the region to make a fresh start, but also in more subtle ways by Laura in her “new” life with Ali, and also by Ali, given his success at achieving economic affluence despite his “outsider” status.¹²

Drawing on the familiar *noir* trope of the return of the traumatized, disillusioned war veteran to the peacetime city, much of the first half of the film addresses the triangulation of the main characters through Thomas’s narrative perspective, even if not through a specific use of his POV. The film opens directly into an exploration of what might be rebuilt out of the ruins of a capitalist dream, as the opening shots from a handheld camera focus on the dark-suited back of Thomas, returning to the region of his childhood to rebuild his life and sense of self, after the death of his mother. The tightly constrained focus of the mobile camera allows little outside Thomas’s dark frame to register onscreen initially, foregrounding the limited possibilities for even seeing wider spaces that will become a prevalent feature of the narrative. The house he has just inherited is full of the traces of his past, and he is unable to construct a space for his adult self. He cannot return to his childhood bedroom and sleeps downstairs on the floor of the living room. He hides the money that is the key to his new life in his childhood retreat, a treehouse in the garden. Thomas has inherited his childhood home after the death of his mother. But Thomas’s past – we learn that his time as a serving soldier in the *Bundeswehr* in Afghanistan has ended in a dishonorable discharge – is not a direct narrative

¹¹ Peter Uehling, “Wiederauferstehung in der Prignitz,” *Berliner Zeitung*, 8 January 2009.

¹² *Ibid.*

concern of the film: there is no attempt to utilize flashbacks, voiceovers or any other direct exploration of memory to uncover, or recover, Thomas's deeper sense of self. His previous experiences are registered less in psychic terms, and more in his corporeal muscle memory: his disciplined physicality is registered onscreen both through medium close ups of his unclothed torso and through his ability on several occasions to react instantly to physical confrontation and to act as a bodyguard for his employer, Ali. In the new economic regime of low-paid seasonal work, Thomas's body has to adapt itself quickly, and we see him in literal terms having to adapt physically to the remaining opportunities in the diminishing labor market, lying horizontally on a machine harvesting cucumbers.

Halfway through the film, the narrative focus switches to follow the perspective of Ali's wife, Laura. Yet in *Jerichow*, care is taken by Petzold to break with *noir* conventions of the *femme fatale*, through, for example, eroticizing Thomas's undressed body rather than hers, and by downplaying the forbidden extramarital sexual desire which so often drives the plotting in noir generally and in previous adaptations of *Postman*. For the taboo that is at the heart of *Jerichow* is grounded in the economic rather than solely in the libidinal: as Laura tells Thomas, "Man kann sich nicht lieben, wenn man kein Geld hat." [See Clip 1.] Petzold's concern is with the operations of capital within a specific location, with how the post-unification economic settlement in Germany is registered through the spatial anxieties of the film's key characters. Laura's initial rejection of Thomas's proposal that she leave her husband is registered as she looks around the unmodernized house that he has inherited, and she refuses to return to the life of economic impoverishment that she has escaped through marriage to the patriarchal, suspicious, and violent Ali. Her practical organizational skills, and her pragmatic and mobile lifestyle, where she appears unfettered by emotional or wider familial ties, or by the desire to find a "home," leave her as the character most aligned to the needs of mobile capital. Yet, like the other characters played by Nina Hoss in Petzold's films,

she appears as one of the undead, a ghost adrift in the world of post-Fordist economics.¹³ She explains her dependency on Ali in terms of huge debts she has run up. This economic trauma, which is exacerbated by the current bleak employment situation in the region, provides the narrative logic needed to accept her claim that she can't find work or material security without the marital compromise she has entered into.

This third figure, a Greek in Cain's original novel, is transformed into the brutal, paranoid husband, Ali, a Turkish migrant, a successful businessman keen to build a home in his new *Heimat*, yet acutely aware of his homesickness for Turkey and of his failure to integrate fully into the Prignitz region, despite his material success gained through operating a skewed franchise system of *Imbissbuden*, where he does not have to contribute to social welfare payments for his operators and yet can dictate that they buy supplies wholesale from him. In this way, and in another nod to Fassbinder, the marginalized and cuckolded "other" also operates as exploiter of those even more economically vulnerable. Petzold's writing of the husband as ethnically "other" allows *Jerichow* to register some of the casual racism present in Cain's novel but elided from both *Ossessione* and Garnett's 1946 film version.¹⁴ In the novel, Frank often refers to Cora's husband Nick Papadakis as simply "the Greek," while part of Cora's craving for economic security away from her husband, who "stinks," is owing to her fear of being thought, by association, not white, "Mex," and "greasy."¹⁵ In *Jerichow*, Laura's fear of downward social mobility is expressed explicitly in economic, rather than ethnic, terms. Whereas both Benno Fürmann and Nina Hoss had worked with Petzold on

¹³ In this there are parallels with the figure of Giovanna in *Ossessione*, who, according to Minghelli, is "the graven image of the societal norm [...] the story she tells is the failure of imagining a world outside bourgeois values, and her subsequent 'naturalist' rebellion is just a confirmation of those values – the destruction of the bourgeois husband in order to retain all he stands for" (12).

¹⁴ "Ich war erstaunt, wie viele Türken sich in der Prignitz eine Existenz aufgebaut haben, meistens Kebab und Gemüse. Die sehen sich so'ne Stadt wie Perleberg an und fragen sich: Wo machen wir hier eine Dönerbude auf, wann kommen die Leute wo vorbei? Das habe ich so in den Film eingebaut. Außerdem finde ich den unterschweligen Rassismus interessant: Der Türke, der es zu Wohlstand gebracht hat, und die beiden Deutschen, die es nicht geschafft haben und am Ende noch sagen 'Den bringen wir um'" (Petzold, quoted in Uehling).

several previous film projects, forming the key couple in the earlier *Wolfsburg*, the third character, Ali Özkan, is played in *Jerichow* by a Petzold-newcomer, Hilmi Sözer. Although Sözer is familiar to German audiences from both his regular TV work and his role in film comedies such as *Der Schuh des Manitu* (2001) and the Cologne-based projects with Tom Gerhardt, *Voll Normaal* (1994) and *Ballermann 6* (1997), his performance in *Jerichow* marks a change in direction in terms of the tragic register of the Ali role.¹⁶ Sözer's casting in Petzold's film is interesting given his own status as a successful second-generation Turkish-German, who was born in Ankara but migrated to Nordrhein-Westfalen at the age of six, a detail which registers in his performance of Ali as a Turkish-German with a specifically western German regional accent. This marks Ali out as a double outsider in the impoverished eastern German region, and for Petzold, moreover, allows his character to be linked firmly with the industrial traditions of the Ruhrgebiet, an area for Petzold which enjoys a more egalitarian sense of solidarity through shared blue-collar working practices than other areas in Germany, and hence, according to the director, is less self-conscious about ethnic differences.¹⁷

Although Laura and Thomas appear initially not to be motivated by ethnic antagonism towards Ali, Petzold uses this adaptation of *The Postman Always Rings Twice* to raise questions about exactly what binds Laura and Thomas together, given that their physical desire for each other is deliberately played down and can hardly be seen in the terms of the film itself as justifying a murder plot. It is here that the exact significance of the figure of the successful migrant becomes so important to this retelling.¹⁸ Ali's otherness is registered in a

¹⁶ See the interview with Hilmi Sözer conducted by José Garcia, 'Heimat muss man aufbauen', *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger*, <<http://www.ksta.de/html/artikel/1230850613191.shtml>>. Accessed 31 August 2010.

¹⁷ See Petzold in Claudia Lenssen, "Ein Interview mit 'Jerichow'-Regisseur Christian Petzold," *Tip Berlin*, <<http://www.tip-berlin.de/kino-und-film/ein-interview-mit-jerichow-regisseur-christian-petzold>>. Accessed 31 August 2010.

¹⁸ Michael Sicinski argues that Petzold utilizes genre conventions in *Jerichow* to explore the "unexamined racism of Western spectatorship" and that the film as a whole can be read productively as a "cinematic referendum on Turkey and the E.U." See Sicinski, "Once the Wall has Tumbled: Christian Petzold's *Jerichow*,"

key scene as he organizes a party on the beach to celebrate his employment of Thomas, and his happiness at being with his wife and with Thomas, someone who, he hopes, has also become a friend. Thomas and Ali's relationship is awkwardly configured, with Ali not sure how to invite Thomas to be a friend as well as an employee, as shown in the clumsy embraces between the two men at a number of points in the film. Thomas declines Ali's invitation to dance alongside him at the beach, a key moment in the dynamics between the three characters, at this point refusing the element of a homosocial relationship (which has replaced the homoerotic bond between Io Spagnolo and Gino in *Ossessione*). However, Thomas's initial encounter with Ali had been nothing but fraternal, as he set down the symbols of his impoverished, domesticated, new life, his supermarket shopping bags, to rush to help Ali out of the river after Ali's road accident. This action given freely is interrupted or even "ruptured" by his catching sight of the piles of cash on the seat of Ali's Range Rover, thus rendering their fraternal relationship immediately also potentially economic. In the beach scene, as Ali plays "Nazar de Mesin" by the Turkish singer Gülsen and drinks from a bottle of Raki, dancing drunkenly on the sand and gazing out to sea, his remembered dance movements communicate this constructed hybrid Turkish *Heimat* on the German beach, as he stares out across the waves of the Baltic. The camera registers his drunken body from the POV of Thomas and Laura, in a two-shot sitting on the beach. "Du tanzt wie ein Grieche," Thomas tells him. [See Clip 2.] In a film where the corporeal speaks as loudly as language, this registers not just how he is seen as "other" by Thomas and Laura, but as an unspecific and even erroneous other, his body having lost the capacity to communicate his real identity to the spectatorial gaze of "the Germans." Ali attempts at this point to draw the two Germans into sharing or at least understanding his feelings of belonging and *Heimat* by forcing them to dance together to the

song, “Sen Aglama” by the “Königin der Türkei,”¹⁹ celebrated singer Sezen Aksu, and this gesture of steering them together in a demeaning fashion sets in train the couple’s shared desire to pay him back. Ali’s entrepreneurial drive and ability, often shared by migrants, according to Petzold, to grasp quickly the economic “rules of the game” in a new landscape, allow him to work to his own advantage the post-Fordist franchise system, and this entrepreneurial acumen marks him out in the otherwise failing region. Yet this “Migrationsenergie” and organizational drive makes him resented, and hence vulnerable, too, to the envy of those left behind by the new economic situation.²⁰ In this sense, contemporary German-Turkish relations are given a specific spin in that the energy and vitality of the determined immigrant become valuable commodities in an impoverished landscape, and are desired by the two Germans, cast adrift by the changing economic circumstances and unable to adapt as effectively as the “newcomer.” The plot against Ali is hatched because the Germans essentially want to possess his energy as much as out of a thwarted sexual desire for each other. The economic settlement is damaging for all three: Laura confesses that she cannot afford to leave the marriage, and Thomas, living initially from food stamps, is unable to take on her debts. Murder is the only answer, an exteriorization of the damage caused by the conditions of “franchise” capitalism in post-Fordist times, and yet there is also an interior displacement, as Ali’s health is shown to be particularly delicate, his work almost literally killing him, according to a medical report he communicates to Laura. Like that other filmic Ali, in Fassbinder’s *Angst essen Seele auf*, his traumatic experience of his social situation is played inwards, resulting in the inability of his body to stand strong against these damaging forces. The economic disintegration of the region and the demand for spatial mobility is

¹⁹ The songs are not listed in the film’s closing credits, but Sezen Aksu is mentioned in interviews with Hilmi Sözer. See, for example, the booklet from Piffil Medien accompanying the DVD release.

²⁰ See Petzold in “Das Amerikanische der Prignitz: Christian Petzold im Gespräch,” video interview in *Cargo* magazine with Ekkehard Knoerer and Simon Rothöhler, 2009. <<http://www.cargo-film.de/artikel/das-amerikanische-der-priegnitz-christian-petzold-/>>.

ultimately enacted on the body of the outsider: “Ich lebe in einem Land, das mich nicht will, mit einer Frau, die ich gekauft habe,” Ali confesses to Laura at the film’s climax.

However, as the film makes clear, the three characters are attempting to rebuild their lives in a particularly blighted environment. The landscape around Petzold’s *Jerichow* bears the weight of Germany’s recent history, part of the borderlands during the German division, and, since the fall of the Wall, subject to an ongoing process of depopulation as its residents migrate to the more prosperous cities, making this region one of the least densely populated areas in the country and with little prospect of any positive change. It is this impoverished, post-unification landscape that Petzold uses to explore the contemporary possibility of *Heimat*, and by extension he participates in the recent revitalization of the *Heimatfilm* genre, here as an unusual hybrid *Heimatfilm noir*.²¹ Although the *Heimatfilm* has existed in one form or another since the earliest years of German cinema, it has yielded arguably fewer critical histories of its attempts at hybridization than established genres in other cinemas, and little in the way of discourse on any merging of *noir* elements within the *Heimat*. Perhaps the most useful forerunner of the *Heimatfilm noir* might be the somberly-titled *Rosen blühen auf dem Heidegrab* (1952), produced by Richard König’s small König-Film company and directed by brother Hans König. Although this film utilizes the spectacle of rural landscape and draws on romantic melodrama in its plotting, its cinematography alludes to the shadows and lighting conventions associated with German expressionism and later with the cycle of American *films noirs*. In its complex allegorizing of an historical rape, it allowed contemporary audiences to read it as participating in discourses on German victimhood after the Second World War, and, as Johannes von Moltke argues, although a *Heimatfilm* hybrid, it “ends up as a horror film in which Eschmann is the monster and Dorothee incorporates the living dead,” rather than as a

²¹ Citing Helmut Käutner, Petzold proposes that “If there’s a man and a woman, it’s about a family. If there are two men and a woman, it’s about society.” Quoted in Taylor.

blending of the *Heimatfilm* with a *film noir*.²² Conversely, more has been written on German cinema's general utilization of noirish concerns in films which range from Staudte's use of the traumatized war veteran in *Die Mörder sind unter uns* (1946),²³ taking in Fassbinder's frequent self-reflexive recourse to gangster noir across his output, to the use of *neo-noir* in more recent German cinema to call into question the "normalization" of Germany.²⁴

The *film noir*'s typical focus on the dynamics of urban modernity might make it sit uneasily alongside the predominately rural milieu of the *Heimatfilm*. Yet, like the *film noir*, the *Heimatfilm* also offers a specifically spatial organization of its engagement with the forces of modernization. This is a genre that "for almost a century has circled obsessively around the questions of home and away, tradition and change, belonging and difference inscribed in the German term *Heimat*."²⁵ As Edward Dimendberg has argued, one of the key innovations of the *film noir* cycle of the 1940s is its primary concern with the "spatialization of anxiety" under modernity. Dimendberg focuses particularly on the context of the trauma of the recent war and of the returning veteran's integration into the modernized city. In doing so, Dimendberg draws on Kracauer's reading of the German street film and the later *noir* cycle in the US as registering "material evidence of psychic disintegration."²⁶ Subsequently, and utilizing the work of Lefebvre, Dimendberg addresses the spatial infrastructure of the urban and suburban settings characteristic of *film noir*, isolating particularly two interrelated spatial modes: "centripetal and centrifugal space, tendencies toward concentration and dispersal [...]" aspirations and anxieties connected to experiences of the center and periphery."²⁷ The

²² For a detailed reading of this film, see Johannes von Moltke, "Heimat/Horror/History: *Rosen blühen auf dem Heidegrab*," in *No Place Like Home: Locations of Heimat in German Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005) 99-113.

²³ See Tim Bergfelder's reading of this film in the context of German film noir, "German cinema and film noir," in Spicer, *European Film Noir*, 144-146.

²⁴ See Paul Cooke, "German neo-noir," in Spicer, *European Film Noir*, 165-169 and 173-181.

²⁵ von Moltke 3.

²⁶ Dimendberg, "Down These Seen Streets a Man Must Go: Siegfried Kracauer, 'Hollywood's Terror Films,' and the Spatiality of Film Noir," *New German Critique*, 89, Film and Exile (Spring – Summer 2003), 134.

²⁷ Dimendberg, *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004) 18. As Dimendberg notes, the film noir remains preoccupied "with traumas of unrecoverable time and space, the

“spatialization of anxiety” features too in the *Heimatfilm*, as far from evading the agents of potential destabilization in its generic concerns, it has offered traditionally a highly recuperative and integrative reading of the effects of modernization, proposing positive or even utopian resolutions to its narrative conflicts,²⁸ or, in Johannes von Moltke’s useful term, a process of “nostalgic modernization.”²⁹ Yet if *Jerichow* invites a reading from the generic perspective of the *Heimatfilm*, such a reading would need to note the failure of the province, of Prignitz-as-*Heimat*, to integrate its three characters successfully and to offer a recuperative spatial resolution to the anxieties addressed concerning mobility and displacement in this landscape of *Imbissbuden*, discount stores, unemployment offices and minimum waged seasonal work that mark out the post-Wall province. What Lefebvre’s project on the social production of space underscores repeatedly, and what comes to the fore in Petzold’s film too, where there is hardly a scene that doesn’t involve some reference to economic exchange, is that the ongoing process of spatial reconfiguration under modernity is so firmly linked to the workings of capital.³⁰

If Petzold’s film is generically hybrid, it also works with an already hybridized sense of place, deliberately registering the way that the post-unification move to a post-Fordist economic policy and the calls for labor flexibility and mobility in contemporary Germany reinforce the Americanization of the German *Heimat*. Petzold’s adoption of Cain’s crime novel as the anchoring text is highly significant, given that for Petzold it acts as the source for one of the few Hollywood films that is able to explore class tensions and deindustrialized

inability to dwell comfortably in either the present or the past” (1). Drawing on Ernst Bloch’s notion of the non-synchronous, Dimendberg understands film noir as in part nostalgicist, “a polyrhythmic and multi-spatial entity” in Bloch’s phrasing, which invokes “the past while anxiously imagining the future,” revealing “multiple spatialities, no less than multiple temporalities” (3).

²⁸ See Alasdair King, “‘Placing Green is the Heath’ (1951): Spatial politics and emergent West German identity,” in Randall Halle and Margaret McCarthy, eds., *Light Motives: German Popular Cinema* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2003) 130-134.

²⁹ See von Moltke 133-134.

³⁰ As Lefebvre notes, echoing Gramsci, “is it conceivable that the exercise of hegemony might leave space untouched?” Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001) 11.

social conditions; but beyond that, the Prignitz region has a strong historical connection to economic migration to the US. Petzold notes how in preparing the film he encountered place names such as Philadelphia and Neu-Boston, so named because Frederick the Great had donated land to residents to establish new villages and thus head off mass *Landflucht* from Prussia to the US.³¹ The contemporary region, for Petzold, is significantly Americanized: despite EU money having restored the architecture of the town centers and their cultural institutions, there is little sustainable economic activity, and this deindustrialization leads to centrifugal forces pulling residents away, to the shopping malls on the outskirts and to the *Autobahnen* that link the Prignitz to stronger performing economic regions. As in the provincial US, argues Petzold, the Prignitz inhabitants drive pick-ups or 4x4s, and what little economic activity there still is largely involves the booming and ubiquitous DIY stores, as atomized individuals attempt to build their own private *Heimat* in the “Ruinen eines amerikanischen Traums.”³²

One of the fundamental themes explored in *Jerichow* is the process and even possibility of “*Heimat*-Building” under post-Fordism. One key starting point, according to Petzold, was reading in a local newspaper in Prignitz during the filming of *Yella* about the arrest of a Vietnamese driver after his car had broken down. The trunk was full of bags of coins, which it transpired had come from the forty-five snack kiosks owned by the driver. He had built up a business and bought a house in the woods for himself and his family. He had tried to construct a *Heimat* in a dying region, with little employment or prospects, and yet he had established his business here in spite of the conditions of disintegration. This process of “*Heimat*-Building,” according to Petzold, lies at the center of his film, the attempt to start again against the odds, like Robinson Crusoe, rebuilding a world despite the forces of modern capitalism. However, this new world will always be vulnerable once things become

³¹ Knoerer and Rotholoer. See also Ekkehard Knoerer, “Rest-Energien,” perlentaucher.de, 7 January 2009. <<http://www.perlentaucher.de/artikel/5147.html>>

³² Petzold in Uehling.

complicated, and other people, friendship, and love enter, and the world explodes. Money is present in every scene, as an image, as currency, as a sign of betrayal.³³ Petzold's generic borrowings from the *Heimatfilm* include the provincial setting and the focus on the attempts by the characters to find ways of belonging in the spaces marked out by the film. Moreover, the *noir* plot is filmed predominantly in bright daylight rather than shadow, with the greens of the rural location, woods, meadows, and riverbank figuring prominently. A grazing deer is in focus as Thomas regains consciousness after being knocked out early in the film. The *Heimatfilm* has traditionally figured as one of its key modes the registration of a centripetal force; its key spatial points in the provincial village pull its characters back into the locale and into the collective. In *Jerichow*, this process of *Heimat*-building is individualistic and voluntaristic and centers not on the eponymous small town itself, which is never seen, but on two remote and private houses (one house already with clear boundaries separating it from a fairytale wood, the other Thomas fences off as soon as he arrives there), and on a beach on the Baltic coast that occupies a privileged space as repository of Ali's dreams of *Heimat*. Yet the three central characters are shown as continually subject to displacement despite their yearning for a fixed center. The fringe characters, too, are shown to be highly vulnerable to the centrifugal forces of capital under the conditions of post-Fordism. The use of names, music and objects in the *mise-en-scène* suggest that they have gravitated to Germany from Lebanon, Vietnam, and Tunisia, as well as from Ali's homeland, Turkey. Significantly, Petzold eschews the obvious generic use of the provincial landscape as spectacle: the *Heimat* remains the unseen throughout. There is an absence of panorama shots or extreme long shots of the rural locale. The landscape is never seen in either unmotivated or unmediated form: predominantly, the countryside is registered from windows or in the wing mirrors of the cars

³³ As Petzold makes clear, this process of "Heimat-Building" is one carried out by his male protagonists, who need money and a woman to establish a stable sense of home. Laura stands outside this drive-to-*Heimat*, expressing instead the desire for money in order to be independent, motivated by an ideal of freedom rather than of *Heimat*.

or delivery van traveling across country to numerous franchise outlets. High angle and aerial shots are used, not to afford a liberated viewing position, but to underscore that even these angles correspond to the viewing positions adopted by the protagonists. The aerial views reveal themselves to be the viewing points of activities of spying, voyeurism, and thus hardly grant access to utopian spaces outside neo-liberal economic exchange. There are no extreme long shots of everyday life: there is an almost complete absence of background figures caught in everyday activities. One clear exception to this is the conversation between Thomas and Ali about where to resituate the *Imbissbude*: in the background are only streams of cars on the main road hurrying to work. This suggests that there is no outside registered onscreen beyond economic exchange: the sexual relationship between Thomas and Laura, which could offer a counterpoint, is immediately undermined by Laura's insistence on the importance of the economic to any notion of libidinal desire or love. The one unmotivated extreme long shot in the film is an almost abstract screen of two related blue tones, out to sea, with no ground in shot. The abstract nature of this shot suggests the impossibility of registering onscreen a space which is beyond the constraints of contemporary capitalism and underscores Petzold's seeming pessimism about the possibilities of utopian moments under the current system of economic exchange. This shot is also taken from the exact position from which Ali will later drive to his death off the cliff, aligning the unmediated perspective with a subsequent subject position of despair and suicide, rather than a starting point for an inhabitable landscape of immanence and possibility. When Ali describes buying a plot of land near his birthplace in Turkey, to return to as his true *Heimat*, the photos he exchanges with Thomas remain shielded from the camera.

The landscape may not be offered up as spectacle, but this is a film that takes to heart the importance of an economy of looks, of spectatorship. The "spatialization of anxiety" is underscored in the viewing relations implied by the camera positions adopted throughout the

film, implicating each character in turn as would-be controller of the gaze, and also implicating the audience in this network of observation. Here Petzold echoes Fassbinder's fascination with the power of the gaze in his genre reworkings. There are numerous shots that foreground the act of looking, observing, spying, from cars, from the woods, from the windows of the two houses, on the cliff above the beach. *Jerichow* may not offer a *Heimat*, but it provides plenty of temporary hiding places, for money, for each of the three characters when they prefer to remain out of sight, and for paranoid spectatorship. Like Fassbinder again, Petzold allows us to see one character watching another, only to reveal at a subsequent point that a third character was observing the other two all along: the observer commenting on the act of observation witnessed. Petzold's obsession with viewing relations, with who can see what, and what can't be seen, suggests, in an echo of the constraining force of fascism on the perspectives of the characters in *Ossessione*, that neo-liberal capitalism curtails the ability of the protagonists to "see" beyond the chains and dependencies that it sets up around them. The possibilities of figuring a social and political alternative to contemporary capitalism are limited for Petzold's characters, both in this film and in his wider work. As in Fassbinder's melodramas, there are also numerous recurring compositions in which the three central characters exchange spatial positions, carrying out actions or assuming poses or actions previously undertaken by another of the three. This structuring suggests that the three individual characters are potentially interchangeable in this drama of deceit and betrayal, downplaying psychological depth and foregrounding instead the overall system of exchange in which all are victims, exploiters and exploited.

In a film which is bookended by two deaths – Thomas's mother's at the beginning, and Ali's suicide, or "Freitod," if that is possible under this deracinated and mobile "franchise capitalism" – Petzold suggests that it is impossible in contemporary Germany to find a stable and successful alignment with the centripetal forces that underscore the desire for *Heimat*.

The first death pulls Thomas back centripetally to his childhood provincial home, to the encounter with the ill-matched married couple and into a triangular fatal attraction. The second death reworks Cain to suggest that there is no escape from the centrifugal forces of mobile franchise capitalism: for Petzold, there is little chance of an enduring post-Fordist *Heimat*, for either the returning soldier or the successful immigrant. The province, it seems, rings twice. As Henri Lefebvre argues, and as Petzold's film proposes, "each period, each mode of production, each particular society" produces its own logic of spatial conditions, and its own sense of centrality: "the centre or focal point is the place of sacrifice, the place where accumulated energies, desirous of discharge, must eventually explode."³⁴ With the inevitable crime playing out against the "immanent borderscapes that make up the heart of late capitalist Germany,"³⁵ Petzold's use of genre cinema again raises questions about the economic and political settlement of contemporary Germany, about Turkish-German relations under post-Fordism, about the fatal attraction of dreams, and about the impossibility of returning home.



³⁴ Lefebvre 332.

³⁵ Abel 1.

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