

Free the administrative and financial structure of the film industry of west germ...

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Essay for Lesson 9: The Student Movement and German Terrorism

Introduction

The Second World War brought forth not only physical destruction to Germany, but also cultural destruction, particularly in its film industry. The film industry of West Germany, in particular, went under the inevitable control of the United States (US). American films became popular among the West German public, while prominent West German directors and actors chose to leave West Germany to pursue their careers in Hollywood, with many of them becoming highly successful. Yet, it did not take long for West Germany to become self-reliant in terms of reinvigorating its domestic film talents amidst the continued dominance of American films. The economic recovery West Germany experienced in the mid-1950s enabled its film industry to produce more domestic film outputs as it continuously featured American films, which enjoyed great commercial success during the period. The domineering control of the US over the distribution of American films in West Germany prompted the West German government to render support to domestic filmmakers - a move supported by the growing economy of the nation that time. Although West German films did not fare well commercially in the domestic market due to the continued dominance of American films in West Germany, international success did follow through the international acclaim of domestic filmmakers, many of them having gained working experience in Hollywood. The emergence of New German Cinema in 1962, through the Oberhausen Manifesto, was characterized by support coming from the West German government, the economic resurgence of the nation

and the shift from nonpolitical and positive themes that somewhat denies the sordid political mishaps of Germany prior and during the Second World War, to highly political features that addressed pre and post-Second World War issues critically. The rise of domestic film talents in West Germany, particularly through the New German Cinema, is profoundly attributed to the support of the West German government and its political themes, hence giving the New German Cinema the reputation of being a “ national” cinema (Elsasser 279-306; Rentschler 260-277).

As part of the agenda to bring West Germany back to international prominence, the move of Chancellor Konrad Adenauer to direct the West German government towards sponsoring domestic film talents in the film industry is one that has produced satisfactory results aided by the timeliness of the economic resurgence of the nation. After the Second World War, the German film industry was left in ruins as with the rest of the nation. Filmmakers and actors went abroad to the US to enhance their careers in Hollywood, while the takeover of the US over the western portion of Germany, later emerging as West Germany, entailed the prevalence of American films. Although there is no indication that the West German government saw the dominance of America films in the nation as a troubling prospect, rejuvenating domestic film talents was a move seen as instrumental to the overall recovery agenda of West Germany. Economically speaking, West German films were funded adequately by the West German government through a series of programs and financial packages aiding young West German filmmakers in producing and distributing films,

alongside aiding them to reach commercial success. The assistance coming from the West German government promptly aided West German filmmakers in their agenda to produce films independently. The Oberhausen Manifesto, paving the way for New German Cinema, urged West German filmmakers to move away from producing films devoid of any reference to the past and present political status of West Germany, towards producing more politically-conscious outputs. The efficiency of the assistance rendered by the West German government, the prominence of the Oberhausen Manifesto and the impressive credentials of West German filmmakers made the New German Cinema a vastly successful movement that led domestic film talents in the film industry of Western Germany gain international notoriety, despite moderate commercial success at home (Elsasser 279-306; Rentschler 260-277).

Thematic Focus on The Marriage of Maria Braun by Rainer-Werner Fassbinder

Supporting the premise that New German Cinema is a profoundly “national” cinema of West Germany is the thematic focus on a film by Rainer-Werner Fassbinder, *The Marriage of Maria Braun*. The film, clearly set in post-Second World War West Germany, is a critical testament to the economic resurgence of the nation focusing on the life of a woman named Maria Braun. Maria, whose shrewd economic motives led her to legally and illegally deceive her employer, Oswald, is a symbol consumed by the financial prosperity experienced by West Germany at the time. Yet, the compromise introduced by the financial ambitions of Maria unto her relationship with her husband, Hermann, exemplified the dehumanizing effects of the so-called German

economic miracle. Fassbinder thoroughly completes the dehumanization process through the death of Maria at the end of the film, apparently through suicide. With the film acting as an effective critique on the capitalist rebirth of the West German economy, Fassbinder has strongly contributed to the success of New German Cinema as a movement that brought international acclaim and financial success to domestic film talents in the film industry of West Germany, mainly through themes touching on the political situation of the nation (Elsasser 279-306; Fassbinder; Rentschler 260-277).

Conclusion: Is New German Cinema A Profoundly “National” Cinema?

One could claim prudently that New German Cinema is a profoundly “national” cinema, although it should not go without saying that the West German government did not seek to regulate the political angle of West German films. The increasing radicalization of West German films at the height of the student protests in the 1960s and 1970s may have involved the West German government interfering in the affairs of West German filmmakers. Nevertheless, it is from that aspect as well where one could conclude that the West German government, in conjunction with West German filmmakers, pushed for the improvement of domestic film talents in the film industry of West Germany as part of its agenda to bring back the nation to international prominence, which has already gained ground from the German economic miracle. Moreover, the return of political themes in West German films under New German Cinema signified the strong consciousness given to the national identity of West Germany, hence its sound reputation as a “national” cinema.

Works Cited

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