

Projekty

**Annexation Effects: Cultural Appropriation
and the Politics of Place in Czech-German Films, 1930–1945**

Project Overview

The PhD dissertation maps various points of cultural transfer in Czech-German films of the 1930s and the 1940s. Specifically, it examines the representation and performance of ethnicity and the layered connections between geographic space, national identity, and mass culture. Drawing on extensive archival research, I analyze some of the different ways in which Czech characters, themes, and locations are represented in German-language films as well as the mostly forgotten contributions of Czech filmmakers to Nazi cinema. Historically linked to German culture, the Czech lands offered a workforce that was easily adaptable to the needs of the Nazi film industry, including actors who could “pass” as German on the cinema screen. My work illustrates that Nazi cinema’s appropriation of Czech culture was informed and, more importantly, legitimated by the Austro-Hungarian legacy. This analysis provides a framework for understanding the German film industry’s stake in the Czech lands and its people. The project explores Nazi cinema as a site of confrontation and negotiation between an unfixed and insecure “German” identity in relation to its (real and imagined) Others. While the filmic depictions of Nazi Germany’s antithetical stance towards Russia, England, and European Jewry are well documented, German cinema’s stance toward Czech identity is ambiguous, and thus deserves more attention. I argue that Czech territory, and Prague in particular, occupies a peculiar position in the German cinematic imagination. At once “familiar” and “foreign,” these spaces consistently appear as the setting for intercultural conflict and for the negotiation of German identity.

Historical context

The dissertation addresses the places of intersection between German, Austrian, and Czech cinema during the early sound era. Issues of nationality are of particular concern for scholarship addressing this period in two main respects: first, in terms of cinematic address, and second, in terms of the political regulation of film culture. With the introduction of sound, the spoken language came to the forefront as a filmic signifier. Film speech enabled a more intimate bond with viewers from one language group, while excluding those from other groups. Consequently, films became more “national” in addressing specific target audiences. This is seen perhaps most clearly in the development of multiple-language versions (MLVs) in the 1930s as a strategy to appeal to divergent (national) publics with the “same” film. Also at this time, issues relating to nationality and nationalism were becoming more heated in the social and political affairs of Europe. Many Czechs perceived the arrival of spoken German on their cinema screens as a new form of Germanic cultural hegemony. These fears were demonstrated most vividly in 1930 when protests against German-language films raged through the streets of Prague, prompting political debate about the necessity to protect Czech film culture. At the same time, the advent of Nazism in Germany and Austria saw the maintenance of national and ethnic identity become a matter of official film policy.

As a sort of “Hollywood of Europe,” the film industry in Berlin dominated the European cinema landscape of the 1930s, drawing talent from throughout Europe, especially from Central Europe. The power of the German cinema grew stronger as the Nazi influence spread throughout the region during the war years. On one level, the title “annexation effects” refers to the period when Czech film production was assimilated into the German industry and Prague became a center for the creation of German-language cinema. The German occupation obviously marks a watershed in the relationship between the German and Czech industries. What my research demonstrates, however, is that the films from this period also display remarkable continuities with pre-war productions, not only on the level of film personnel, but also--perhaps especially--on the level of representation. In this regard, the foundation for annexation was already in place years before the actual political occupation. My project thus foregrounds the cultural and economic preconditions that facilitated German cinema’s appropriation of Czech territory and manpower.

Scholarship

My general theoretical approach to the material is informed by recent work on popular cinema in Nazi Germany by Eric Rentschler, Sabine Hake, Karsten Witte, and Lutz Koepnick.¹⁾ These authors have been important in shifting the focus on Nazi cinema away from its purely propagandistic aspects to highlight film as a popular cultural artifact connected to larger networks of social meaning. My work also takes its cue from the groundbreaking scholarship being done in connection with CineGraph organization in Hamburg, Germany. Over the past decade, the annual CineGraph congresses and the resulting publications have provided intriguing new frameworks for understanding Nazi popular cinema within an international context.²⁾ I also draw on theoretical approaches introduced by current scholarship on genre theory, particularly with regard to operettas, musicals, and *Heimat* films.³⁾ In addition, my project contributes to the compelling new scholarship being done on the Multiple-Language Versions of the 1930s.⁴⁾ Finally, in exploring issues of transnational exchange, my work tests

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- 1) Sabine H a k e, *German National Cinema*. New York : Routledge 2002; also *Popular Cinema of the Third Reich*. Austin : University of Texas Press 2001. Lutz K o e p n i c k, *The Dark Mirror: German Cinema between Hitler and Hollywood*. Los Angeles : University of California Press 2002. Eric R e n t s c h l e r, *Ministry of Illusion: Nazi Cinema and its Afterlife*. Cambridge : Harvard University Press 1996. Karsten W i t t e, *Lachende Erben, Toller Tag*. Berlin : Verlag Vorwerk 1995.
 - 2) The CineGraph books most pertinent to my current project are: *MusikSpektakelFilm: Musiktheater und Tanzkultur im deutschen Film 1922 – 1937*. München : edition text + kritik 1998; *Als die Filme singen lernten: Innovation und Tradition im Musikfilm 1928 – 1938*. München : edition text + kritik 1999; and *Babylon in FilmEuropa: Mehrsprachen-Versionen der 1930er Jahre*. München : edition text + kritik 2006.
 - 3) In addition to the CineGraph volumes on genre (in footnote 2) see: Johannes von M o l t k e, *No Place Like Home: Locations of Heimat in German Cinema*. Berkeley : University of California Press 2005; and Tim B e r g f e l d e r, *International Adventures: German Popular Cinema and International Co-Productions in the 1960*. New York - Oxford : Berghahn Books 2005.
 - 4) Some of the most relevant works for my own project are: the articles by Ivan K l i m e š, Petr S z c e z e p a n i k, and Petr M a r e š in *Illuminace* 16, 2004, No. 2; the contributions of Joseph G a r n c a r z and Ginette V i n c e n d e a u in “*Film Europe*” and “*Film America*”; *Cinema, Commerce and Cultural Exchange 1920–1939*. Exeter : University of Exeter Press 1999; and Chris W a h l’s book *Das Sprechen des Spielfilms*. Trier : WTV 2005.

the limits of “German national cinema,” and of “national cinema” more generally, as a historical and theoretical model.⁵⁾

Materials and Methodology

This study offers detailed analyses of various discourses relevant to German-Czech cultural transfer in Nazi cinema. It employs a broad base of resources including newspapers, film journals, unpublished correspondence, as well as films and advertising materials. I offer close readings of a variety of films and provide additional information relating to their production, distribution, and historical reception. The research included viewing many “unknown” films that have not yet been addressed by scholarship.⁶⁾ My project integrates readings of these lesser-known films into existing analytical frameworks and thereby sheds new light on such canonical films as *DIE GOLDENE STADT* (1942) and *DIE VERKAUFTE BRAUT* (1932).

Primary research for the dissertation was conducted in 2004 – 2005 with the combined assistance of fellowships from the University of Washington, Seattle and the Social Science Research Council. I spent this time in Berlin and Prague, where I worked in film and print archives as well as in numerous libraries. I viewed film prints and related materials in the National Film Archives (NFA) in Prague and the Bundesarchiv-Filmarchiv in Berlin. At the National Archive (Národní archiv) in Prague, I examined period newspapers, documents relating to the censorship of specific films, as well as official correspondences from the office of the Reichsprotektorat (Úřad říšského protektora). I explored documents from the files of Ufa and the Nazi propaganda ministry at the Bundesarchiv (Lichterfelde) in Berlin. I found additional primary and secondary sources at the Czech National Library (Národní knihovna), the Berlin State Library (Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin), and the library of the Deutsche Kinemathek in Berlin. In addition to a wide variety of Czech and German newspapers from the period, I also looked at a range of film journals, including *Film-Kurier*, *LichtBildBühne*, *Český filmový zpravodaj*, and *Filmový kurýr*.

Chapter breakdown

Each of my six main chapters examines the intersection of German and Czech cinema from a different thematic or historical perspective. Chapter One looks at the staging of female bodies and the performance of “ethnic drag” by Czech actors in German films. The actresses Anny Ondra and Lída Baarová are the main figures of concern here. Chapter Two deals with questions of authorship and identity in films by Czech-German directors, specifically Karel Lamač, Gustav Machatý, and Karel Anton. I consider the extent to which their work can be understood as representing a uniquely Czech or cosmopolitan voice in German cinema. Chapter Three explores the affinities of geography, nationhood, and genre (specifically operetta, musical, and *Heimat*-film) in the context of Nazi cinema. Chapter Four investigates the politics of place in Czech-German multiple-language version films of the 1930s. Here

5) Recent volumes on national cinema include: Mette Hjort and Scott MacKenzie (eds.), *Cinema and Nation*. London : Routledge 2000; Valentina Vitali and Paul Willemen (eds.), *Theorising National Cinema*. London : British Film Institute 2006; Alan Williams (eds.), *Film and Nationalism*. New Brunswick : Rutgers University Press 2002.

6) Indeed, many of the films have rarely been viewed since they played in theaters over 60 years ago. This is particularly true of the Prag-Film productions and many of the Multiple-Language Versions. Thankfully recent scholarship is finally turning its eye to these obscure films.

I analyze the differing strategies used to represent ethnically coded geographic spaces and regional cultural identities. Chapter Five examines the special role of “Prague” and “Bohemia” in German cinematic tradition. Chapter Six analyzes films produced in occupied Prague within the larger context of German cinema. The primary focus of this chapter is the Praga-Film A.G. and the ways it utilized Czech themes and filmmakers.

K E V I N J O H N S O N

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