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including contributions by Margit Sinka.
*German Culture through Film; An Introduction
to German Cinema.***

Newburyport, MA: Focus Publishing, 2005. ISBN 1-58510-102-8. Pp. 225. Includes a Workbook, *Arbeitsbuch zu German Culture through Film*. ISBN 1-58510-145-1. Pp. 276.

German Culture through Film follows the same format as the widely popular series *Cinema for French Conversation* and *Cinema for Spanish Conversation*, also published by Focus. As recent research has shown, students exposed to authentic film and media acquire a familiarity with the target culture more accurately than those who have interacted only with text-based materials and instructional videos, since they are provided with the opportunity to experience the feel, rhythm and look of a foreign culture. As a result, the use of film at all levels of language instruction has become more common; however, when appropriate textbooks are not available, instructors have to spend countless hours developing their own materials. Because the German textbook market has a much smaller customer base than Spanish or French and therefore offers fewer choices when it comes to suitable classroom materials, German instructors will undoubtedly greet these new additions with enthusiasm. *German Culture through Film* and *Arbeitsbuch zu German Culture through Film* are intended for introductory courses on German film, both for German majors and for non-German-speaking novice film studies students. Thus, they reflect the reality of many German programs faced with cuts and the necessity of boosting enrollments by offering content courses on film and folklore to a German- and English-speaking constituency simultaneously. Therefore, the English text (*German Culture through Film*) provides background information on the history and culture of Germany of interest to both groups of students, a list of related films and secondary sources, as well as analyses of thirty-one more or less important films, while the workbook (*Arbeitsbuch zu German Culture through Film*) offers excerpts from the screenplays, *Kulturinformationen*, content questions, and language exercises for fourteen of the films highlighted in the English book (hereafter referred to as the Textbook). Both books contain detailed and well-crafted questions for analysis. In addition, almost every chapter features one or two stills or a movie poster. The majority of the films presented are readily available on DVD or VHS.

The films chosen range from Robert Wiene's Expressionist masterpiece *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (1920) to Wolfgang Becker's recent post-reunification success *Good Bye, Lenin* (2003). Intended as a resource for classes taught in German and English, the Textbook approaches the teaching of film both chronologically and thematically. The introduction (pp. 2-5) offers useful suggestions to the instructor for the thematic organization of a survey course on German film. Each chapter is devoted to one movie and contains the following elements: basic

information about the film, a plot summary, historical contextualization and a short interpretation, followed by questions and assignments for class discussion and analysis. Conversely, the *Arbeitsbuch* is written entirely in German and intended for the German-language portion of an undergraduate film class. It begins with a useful glossary of film terminology, designed to provide the students with the tools to discuss both the technical and narrative aspects of film analysis (pp. 3-9). The book bypasses the silent period and begins with Joseph von Sternberg's *Der blaue Engel* (1930). Like the textbook, it also ends with *Good Bye Lenin*. In each chapter, assignments are built around a cluster of scenes. Relevant cultural information, song lyrics, or explanations of institutions and terms referred to in the movie, as well as content questions, guide the students toward a deeper understanding of the film narrative. Matching exercises familiarize students with pertinent vocabulary and idiomatic expressions, and are interspersed throughout each film chapter. Occasionally, scripts for key film sequences are provided, allowing students to read dialogues as well as listen to and view the scenes on screen. Finally, each chapter contains a number of *Kulturinformationen* relevant to each movie. The layout is clear and the movie stills well chosen. On the whole, both the Textbook and the *Arbeitsbuch* are solidly conceptualized and very user-friendly, and the cultural information provided is germane to the socio-historical contextualization of the films.

It is safe to say that *German Culture through Film* fills a void in the German textbook market. However, despite the authors' expressly stated intention to "introduce students to the rudimentary aesthetics needed for understanding films, even those from their own culture" (pg.1), an English glossary of film terminology is missing. Furthermore, students new to film analysis in general, and visual learners in particular, could have benefited from assignments integrating the excellent stills. By simply asking the readers to identify elements of cinema in each of the stills, the authors could have afforded students multiple opportunities to hone their own observational and analytic skills. However, the descriptions provided simply reinforce the authors' own interpretations and analyses. One example of such a missed opportunity is the well-chosen still from F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (pg. 15). Rather than offering a description, the authors could have asked the readers to describe the effects of camera angles and interpret the shot composition, while making their own excellent analysis accessible in a separate section of the book or in an instructor's resource manual. Other stills invite comparisons between films and could allow the students to draw their own conclusions as they begin to understand how visual vocabularies are borrowed and adapted. Such connections could be easily made by asking readers to contrast the still from Fritz Lang's *M* (pg. 43) with the one from Wolfgang Staudte's *Die Mörder sind unter uns* (pg. 81). Not once are students asked to analyze the use of color or black and white. Some of the films in this book that clearly lend themselves to these types of analyses are Sandra Nettelbeck's *Bella Martha*, Wim Wenders' *Der Himmel über Berlin*, and Volker Schlöndorff's *Die Blechtrommel*. In short, while the analytical questions pertaining to each film are excellent, visual learners — who, I suspect, enjoy taking film classes — are faced with mainly text-based assignments. Auditory learners, on the other hand, will find many well-crafted assignments that ask them to analyze the function of

music and song lyrics. This is especially true for assignments pertaining to Sternberg's *Der blaue Engel*, Heiner Carow's *Die Legende von Paul und Paula*, Wolfgang Petersen's *Das Boot*, Leander Hauflmann's *Sonnenallee*, Tom Tykwer's *Lola rennt*, Vanessa Jopp's *Vergiss Amerika* and *Bella Martha*.

In contrast to the Textbook, the *Arbeitsbuch* does feature some movie still-based activities. The assignment for the still from *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* (pg. 59) is worded in such a way that students cannot help but discuss the elements of cinema using the vocabulary listed in the glossary. However, most of the image-based exercises (like the one from *Der blaue Engel*, pg. 22, and Bernard Wicki's *Die Brücke*, pg. 50) mainly ask students to situate a particular scene within the movie narrative and to explain its significance. This is a conversation starter, for sure, but one that elicits more descriptive than analytic responses. In some cases, the choice of movie stills for an assignment is a little perplexing. The chapter on *Die Brücke*, for example, features two stills. The assignment created around the second one is purely descriptive and pertains to the plot, whereas the more powerful shot merely functions as a chapter opener or filler. This first image could have lent itself to a variety of cinematographic analyses and interpretations, especially since the authors state in the textbook that "the photo gains power from the youth of the victim and his placement in the frame, which emphasizes how alone he is and reminds viewers of how pointless his death is" (Textbook, pg. 107). In both texts, the question therefore is: why not let the students come up with such insights on their own?

Since the *Arbeitsbuch* is intended for students acquiring both language and content, the structural and form-focused exercises are divided into *Wortschatz* and *Strukturen*. Every chapter contains several *Wortschatz* sections aimed at building vocabulary. Students are asked to match synonyms or definitions and, at the end of each chapter, to complete a "cloze-activity," based on vocabulary relevant to the discussion of the chapter film. *Strukturen*-segments appear much more randomly, and not in every chapter. They range from practicing prepositions to restating sentences from the movie in a different tense or in the subjunctive, and practicing the plural form. While contextualized within the discussion of the movie, and, as such, valuable language exercises, they appear much too infrequently to be of much use to those instructors aiming to further intermediate-level students' grammatical competency. Again, as noted with regards to the authors' analyses of movie stills, an instructor's resource manual or possibly a CD-ROM providing structural practice might be a useful addition to the *Arbeitsbuch*, if the book is truly intended for use at the intermediate level, as stated.

Also, since the iconic images from films like *Caligari*, *Nosferatu*, and *Metropolis* are so indelibly intertwined with German culture, it is somewhat regrettable that the *Arbeitsbuch* does not contain a chapter on one of those films. Even though silent films may not yield much in terms of aural language acquisition, the title of the book nevertheless suggests an introduction to German culture as it is transmitted through film. Any of the above-mentioned films would certainly offer enough opportunities to practice speaking about camera angles, *mise en scène*, cuts, and style. And, while I can appreciate the authors' possible reasons for excluding Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph des Willens* from the *Arbeitsbuch*, I find this

omission disappointing. If one of the stated reasons for teaching film is also to help our students develop media literacy, guiding them to focus on Riefenstahl's use of the masses as ornament and extreme camera angles for propaganda purposes, both as elements of fascist aesthetics, should be part of an undergraduate course on German film, regardless of the language of instruction. Lastly, from the point of view of language acquisition, I find the fact that *Die Mörder sind unter uns* was left out of the *Arbeitsbuch* downright puzzling. This movie, more than most, features didactic, slowly and clearly spoken dialogues as a stated stylistic element deliberately adopted by the director to educate the German public about their responsibility and guilt. Although the film's language appears wooden by today's standards, in my experience students find it easy to understand.

Furthermore, since the textbook professes to be *An Introduction to German Cinema* (as its subtitle states), I feel that the authors' categorical dismissal of the escapist *Heimatfilm* as "largely kitsch or milieu productions" (pg. 3) is unfortunate, especially since these films continue to be a staple on central European television and undeniably remain part of German culture. Because the authors do not provide a more balanced representation of West German film production by including one such movie, students may come to believe that until the advent of New German Cinema, East German DEFA films dealt with the question of guilt, while West Germany produced anti-war or war films, such as *Hunde, wollt ihr ewig leben?*, which, in the authors' own words, "propagated a myth of military values unrelated to the cause of the National Socialists" and draws "a clear distinction between those who commanded and those who fought" (pg. 99).

Finally, the title *German Culture through Film* is somewhat of a misnomer, since the type of culture students are asked to analyze in this two-book series is "Culture" with a capital "C". If the publishers had remained closer to the titles of the two successful French and Spanish series mentioned above, I, for one, would not have expected activities and assignments that invited intercultural comparisons or analyses of culture-specific issues such as conversational timing, taking turns, gestures and personal space, alongside content and linguistic structures. The *Arbeitsbuch*, especially, clearly intended for students not only learning about German film but also acquiring the language and culture, could have contained additional assignments geared towards the attainment of cultural proficiency. To become truly conversant with a new culture necessitates honing skills of observation. Apart from inviting analyses and interpretations, activities designed around film segments could also encourage students to watch and interpret non-verbal behaviors, make comparisons with their own culture and determine strategies for effective communication in German. Since films have the power to connect students with linguistic and cultural issues simultaneously, learners have the opportunity to gain significant cultural knowledge, including those more elusive issues pertaining to "culture" with a lower-case "c". Most of the movies chosen for *German Culture through Film* allow for the examination of conversational conventions and underlying cultural values. Yet, the only activity encouraging cross-cultural analysis occurs in the chapter on Caroline Link's *Nirgendwo in Afrika*, where students are asked to contrast the exiles' life with one of the indigenous cultures of Kenya. The questions for this activity are super-

ficial and elicit descriptions as well as some plot interpretation; they do not, however, lead to meaningful cross-cultural comparisons, even though this subsection is entitled *Zwei Kulturen* (pp. 244-249). Of course, the students are not really provided with the tools for meaningful analogies, and are asked to compare not one but two cultures alien to them. The questions also do not address the problematic depiction of African culture in this particular movie.

On the whole, though, as someone who teaches upper-level film classes in German, uses film to further linguistic and cultural proficiency at the intermediate level, and has recently been asked to accommodate English speakers interested in German movies, I welcome this addition to the somewhat bland German textbook market. More thorough structural practice for language learners could easily be addressed with additional ancillary materials, such as an instructor's resource manual, an interactive Website, or a CD-ROM. The quality of the content questions and the analytic assignments certainly enable students to learn about the cultural uniqueness of German film. I could see myself using the *Arbeitsbuch* in an intermediate-level German class, if I added a greater variety of language exercises, partner work, and cultural awareness activities. For a German film course taught in English, I can envision assigning the Textbook as a required text, especially if used in conjunction with a detailed glossary of film terms and Sabine Hake's *German National Cinema* or Richard McCormick and Alison Guenther Pal's *German Essays on Film*; then the authors' analyses, their socio-historical contextualization, and analytic assignments in *German Culture through Film* would provide non-German speakers with a thorough and satisfying introduction to German film.

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Publisher's Response

We at Focus always appreciate thorough and thought-provoking reviews of our latest texts. This reviewer raises a number of interesting questions and points us to some areas in which we might develop these and other texts in future editions. (Focus publishes a number of other books in modern languages that draw strongly on feature films.) And all the reviewer's points are well worth addressing.

Part of the challenge of publishing in this area has been to find just where in the curriculum feature films work best, and then to integrate them effectively into the curriculum. We are anxious to refine our products based on feedback, as well as to publish other texts that address the needs of different classes.

Clearly, feature films are an outstanding addition to the FL classroom because they provide authentic culture and language despite their sometimes R-rated materials. Also, they clearly appeal to an audience that is far more cinematographically sophisticated than previous generations. Websites and DVDs are high on our list of ancillaries to support our film books, but for the moment the technology is not here for us to provide clips on Websites or DVDs at a fair price (and we try to keep our prices reasonable). Obtaining permissions for film stills can

be a nightmare! But we are working on it, and we appreciate receiving feed-back and ideas from the teaching community.

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