

in Germany according to a 2004 report, it was up for the over-fifty age group (Bennett and Taylor 2004: 56). It is likely that realistic, dynamic and differentiated portrayals of the lives of senior citizens on the silver screen will continue to grow. Dresen's *Cloud 9* is part of a strong first step in that direction.

NOTES

My sincere thanks to Brittany Duncan, Derek Dunkelberger, Sean Kinder, Brooke Shafar, Spencer Walters and Rialda Zukic for lively discussions, feedback and/or assistance with research as this manuscript took shape.

- 1 An interactive population pyramid shows percentages based on the '12. koordinierte Bevölkerungsberechnung': <http://www.destatis.de/bevoelkerungspyramide>.
- 2 This word play combines 'DEFA' (the film production company for all films in East Germany) with 'Dresen'.
- 3 Lothar Bisky describes his time as Rector at the Academy for Film and Television 'Konrad Wolf' in Potsdam-Babelsberg in Chapter 7 of his autobiography (Bisky 2005: 131–56).
- 4 'Dogme' refers to the Dogme Manifesto (1995) of Danish filmmakers Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg, which is very purist in its call for the use only of objects and light found on site in making a film, rather than the construction of these.
- 5 While Dresen's films have repeatedly been described as having or showing 'authenticity', he himself distances himself from the idea. He has often stated that all films, even Dogme films are a created product. See Hallberg and Wewerka 2001 or Abel 2009.
- 6 On 22 October 2008, Westheimer appeared on the Johannes B. Kerner show. She discussed her book and Dresen's *Cloud 9*.

Chapter 13

'Seeing everything with different eyes': the diasporic optic of Fatih Akin's *Head-On* (2004)

Daniela Berghahn

When in his seminal article 'From New German Cinema to the post-wall cinema of consensus' (2000) Eric Rentschler mourns the demise of the West German *Autorenkino* and with it the loss of a critical edge, political commitment and artistic innovation in contemporary German cinema, he could not have reckoned with the invigorating creative force of the Young Turks, which was yet to establish itself. German-Turkish directors Thomas Arslan and Fatih Akin are mentioned almost as an afterthought at the very end of Rentschler's essay and referred to as the 'pliers of a liminal cinema' that surveys the 'multicultural realities of a post-Wall community' (2000: 275). At the turn of the millennium it would have required some farsightedness to predict that the revival of German cinema would be in no small measure due to German-Turkish filmmakers, above all, star director Fatih Akin. After a promising start with his feature-film début *Short Sharp Shock* (*Kurz und schmerzlos*, 1998), a ghetto-centric gangster movie aesthetically modelled on *Mean Streets* (1973) by the Italian-American director Martin Scorsese and sharing a number of similarities with Matthieu Kassovitz's *Hate* (*La Haine*, 1995), his breakthrough came with the critically acclaimed *Head-On* (*Gegen die Wand*, 2004), the first German film in 18 years (after Reinhard Hauff's *Stammheim*) to win the Golden Bear at the International Film Festival in Berlin. At the time, the jury's decision was interpreted as a political signal that reflected a change of attitude towards a 'migrant cinema, which has depicted Germany for more than 20 years as the immigration country it refuses to be' (Nicodemus 2004a). The press celebrated the 'Turkish

renewal of German cinema' (Nicodemus 2004a), thereby explicitly acknowledging the impact which second-generation German-Turkish filmmakers such as Akin and Arslan and less prominent directors such as Ayşe Polat, Züli Aladağ and Sülbiye Günar have had on German film culture.

Of course, the cinematic portrayal of migrants in German cinema is nothing new, but dates back to the late 1970s, when the New German Cinema's celebrated *auteurs* made films about Turks and other immigrant communities in Germany. Films like Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* (*Angst essen Seele auf*, 1974), Helma Sanders-Brahms's *Shirin's Wedding* (*Shirins Hochzeit*, 1976), Werner Schroeter's *Palermo or Wolfsburg* (*Palermo oder Wolfsburg*, 1980) and subsequent films made by German director Hark Bohm (*Yasemin*, 1988) and Turkish director Tevfik Başer (*Forty Square Metres of Germany* [*40 Quadratmeter Deutschland*], (1986); *Farewell to a False Paradise* [*Abschied vom falschen Paradies*], (1989) are pessimistic narratives about the marginalisation of migrants and the victimisation of Turkish women. Except for Fassbinder's highly stylised art-house film, these cinematic texts stand in the tradition of the social-problem film, relying on a 'heavy dose of documentary realism to bring to public attention a variety of social concerns' (Fenner 2006: 23). The first phase of German-Turkish cinema is dominated by narratives which perpetuate predictable binary oppositions such as 'urban/rural, oriental/occidental, native/other, hegemonic/subaltern, oppressor/victim' and seek to arouse the viewer's 'sense of moral indignation and compassion' (Fenner 2006: 24–25). While this trend still continues in a number of films made by second-generation German-Turkish filmmakers, on the whole the coming-of-age of the next generation of directors initiated a shift from miserabilist social dramas to a cinema that offers a more differentiated picture of the Turkish diasporic community. By and large their films depict hyphenated identities not as a precarious state of the in-between but instead as a source of mutual cultural enrichment.

Most of the Young Turks were either born in or came to Germany at a very young age. 'Home' for these filmmakers tends to be Hamburg or Berlin, rather than Ankara or Istanbul. A significant number of films made by second-generation German-Turkish directors engage with issues of identity and belonging, but there are also some that cannot be categorised as migrant or diasporic cinema because they eschew what Kobena Mercer has called 'the burden of representation'

(1990). The Young Turks refuse to be the spokespeople for their ethnic constituency, and want the freedom to choose themes not related to their migratory background. Mennan Yapo's *Soundless* (*Lautlos*, 2004) is a thriller about an assassin that emulates the French *cinéma du look*; Bülent Akinci's *Running on Empty* (*Der Lebensversicherer*, 2006) and Thomas Arslan's *Vacation* (*Ferien*, 2007) feature the existential conflicts of German protagonists. Still, the majority of hyphenated-identity directors play an important role as cultural brokers, and their status within German and Turkish cultures often rests on them being mediators of marginality and alterity. As Graham Huggan argues in *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the margins*, cultural and ethnic otherness has become part of a 'booming "alterity industry"' in which 'marginality [has become] a valuable intellectual commodity' (2001: vii–viii). Fatih Akin, whom Nezih Erdoğan characterises as a 'skilful strategist, complicit in the construction of an intriguing media image that sparks debates and controversies which go far beyond the themes and quality of his films' (2009: 27), is certainly making the most of this market opportunity, deploying strategies of 'self-othering' in the successful attempt to shift his films out of the ethnic niche – to which much of German-Turkish cinema was hitherto relegated – into the mainstream.

This chapter explores how the interstitial position which Fatih Akin occupies as a diasporic Turkish filmmaker is inscribed in his films, in particular his greatest commercial and critical success *Head-On*. Drawing on recent theoretical debates about 'transnational' and 'migrant and diasporic' cinema, it seeks to identify a number of distinctive thematic concerns and aesthetic strategies employed by Akin which make this film a textbook example of contemporary diasporic cinema in Europe.

DEFINING MIGRANT AND DIASPORIC CINEMA

The growing attention that has recently been paid to the work of film directors with a migratory background, both in the context of German and other national cinemas, goes hand in hand with a general shift from national to transnational film studies. In the era of globalisation, hitherto prevalent critical approaches probing the relationship between the cinemas of particular nation-states and national identity no longer corresponds straightforwardly with the reality of film production and circulation. Much of contemporary

European cinema is transnational in respect of its multinational or pan-European sources of funding, its transnationally mobile crew and its target audiences. In comparison with global Hollywood, however, diasporic cinema tends to be more limited in its address, targeting primarily specific national audiences, diasporic collectivities dispersed across several countries or continents, as well as cosmopolitan cinephiles with an interest in world cinema.

Migrant and diasporic cinema challenges the concept of national cinema and 'the national' inasmuch as it articulates and constructs migrant and diasporic identities which transcend the boundaries of the nation-state. It is a particular type of transnational cinema that resists the homogenising effect of globalisation, foregrounding instead issues of cultural and ethnic diversity. It is concerned with the collective memory or the postmemory (Hirsch 1997) of the migratory experience, which has had a profound impact on the cultural identity and the aesthetic sensibilities of migrant and diasporic filmmakers. While migrant filmmakers are first-generation immigrants who have themselves experienced migration,¹ diasporic filmmakers are second- or subsequent-generation immigrants, either born and/or raised in the destination country. They have no personal recollection of migration and often little familiarity with their parents' country of origin. They access their families' histories of migration and dispersal through oral history, family photos and home videos. Occasionally the boundaries between the two are blurred, given that many filmmakers migrated at a very young age. Moreover, in order to avoid an essentialising understanding of migrant and diasporic cinema, based on the filmmakers' biology or biography, it is imperative to open up the concept by including films borne out of the cross-pollination occurring in the 'diaspora space' (Brah 1996: 209) made by filmmakers who articulate a prosthetic memory (Landsberg 2003) of migration and diaspora but who themselves belong to the majority culture (see Berghahn and Sternberg, 2010).

Migrant and diasporic cinema is characterised by a distinctive aesthetic approach, which reflects the 'diasporic optic' (Moorti 2003) of its creators. Inscribed in migrant and diasporic cinema is a particular 'way of seeing [...which] underscores the interstice, the spaces that are and fall between the cracks of the national and the transnational as well as other social formations' (Moorti 2003: 359). Diasporic aesthetics reflect a 'subject position that lays claim to and negotiates between multiple affiliations [...and that] seeks to

reveal [a] desire for multiple homes through specific representational strategies' (Moorti 2003: 359). Consequently, migrant and diasporic cinema is aesthetically hybrid, juxtaposing and fusing stylistic templates, generic conventions, narrative and musical traditions, languages and performance styles from more than one (film) culture.

Born out of the experience of displacement, migrant and diasporic cinema is characterised by a heightened sense of mobility. The dominance of transitional and liminal spaces signals that this particular type of transnational cinema is concerned with identities in flux. A predilection for claustrophobic interiors (especially in early German-Turkish cinema) and locations on the peripheries of global cities (e.g. the *banlieue* in Maghrebi-French cinema) underscores the social marginalisation experienced by many migrant and diasporic subjects. As a cinema that originates from marginalised collectivities that are negotiating their place in the social fabric of hegemonic host societies, migrant and diasporic cinema is centrally concerned with identity politics and the 'other'. It probes difference along the multiple coordinates of race, colour, ethnicity, nationality, gender, religion, generation, class and sexuality. Its strategic agenda is the relocation of the margins to the centre, the valorisation and, ultimately, 'the redemption of the marginal' (Stam 2003: 35).

FATİH AKIN: HEIGHTENED MOBILITY, CONTESTED BELONGING

Born in Hamburg-Altona to Turkish parents in 1973, Fatih Akin began his career in the film industry as an actor. But as he got tired of playing the stereotypical Turk, he turned to scriptwriting with the intention of developing less clichéd roles for himself. When Akin pitched the screenplay for *Short Sharp Shock* to Wüste Film Productions, producer Ralph Schwingel discovered the aspiring scriptwriter's talent and suggested that, rather than playing the Turk Gabriel in the film, he try his hand at directing (Schwingel 2007). During the next few years, Akin and Schwingel worked together on the road movie *In July* (*Im Juli*, 2000) and on *Solino* (2002), the story of an Italian immigrant family in Duisburg.² In 2004, Akin founded his own film-production company, Corazón International, which co-produced *Head-On*, as well as Akin's subsequent films: the musical documentary *Crossing the Bridge: The Sound of Istanbul* (2005), *The Edge of Heaven* (*Auf der anderen Seite*, 2007) and *Soul Kitchen* (2009).

At the beginning of his career, Akin referred to himself as a German filmmaker (Mitchell 2006), cited the films of Martin Scorsese and John Cassavetes as his chief inspiration, and downplayed his Turkish background. But with the surprise success of the German-Turkish co-production *Head-On*, this changed and the hyphenated-identity director publicly pronounced his dual allegiance to Germany and Turkey: 'I have dual German and Turkish citizenship. I consider myself as a German director [...]. But my personality is split in two – and I still don't know whether I am a Turk or a German' (Akin 2004). In the Turkish press, Akin was reported to have said in 2005, 'I am a gypsy in Hamburg and a dervish in Istanbul [...] My home is Hamburg but I am also the spicy voice of Istanbul. And I love spicy food. I need spice to feel alive' (cited in Erdoğan 2009: 34). As Nezih Erdoğan outlines in 'Star director as symptom: reflections on the reception of Fatih Akin in the Turkish media' (2009), the German-Turkish filmmaker has been at the centre of hotly contested media debates in Turkey, which, on the one hand, claim the prodigal Turkish son for their own national (film) culture while, on the other hand, criticising him for refusing to do military service in Turkey.

Since Akin has embraced his Turkish roots with pride, he has embarked on a mission that seeks to reposition Turkey and Turkish culture in the shifting geographies of the new Europe. For example, the musical documentary *Crossing the Bridge: The Sound of Istanbul* makes much of the suspension bridge across the Bosphorus which connects Europe and Asia, the Occident and the Orient, and to which the film title alludes. The trope of the bridge, frequently invoked to underscore the idea of two 'ostensibly discrete cultures, religions and civilizations' (Adelson 2005: 6), is the film's central conceit, and is used by Akin to highlight Turkey's important strategic position. At the beginning of the film, its narrative voice Alexander Hacke of the German experimental band Einstürzende Neubauten comments: '72 nations have crossed this bridge', thus proposing that Turkey is by no means on the periphery of Europe, but instead occupies a central position in international relations and cultural exchange.

In fact, the majority of Akin's films seem to suggest that all paths lead to Istanbul, with their transnationally mobile protagonists embarking on journeys of various kinds that take them to Turkey. *In July* is an exuberant road movie that takes its protagonist Daniel (Moritz Bleibtreu) away from his dull and secure existence as a schoolteacher in Hamburg across the Balkans to Istanbul in pursuit

of the elusive Melek (Idil Üner), a Turkish woman with whom he falls in love at the beginning of the film. The film is replete with border crossings, chance encounters en route, and culminates in the protagonist's decision not to return to Germany but to continue his travels towards eastern Turkey. In an ironic cameo appearance, Akin inserts himself into the film's diegesis, playing the dim-witted border official at the makeshift Romanian-Hungarian border who performs an impromptu wedding for Daniel and his travel companion Juli. As Rob Burns notes in his discussion of the film, 'just as the border-guard demonstrates how easily seemingly impermeable boundaries can be effaced' when, after the wedding, 'he does not allow Daniel simply to duck under the barrier but insists on having it removed from his path – so, too, the director conceives his film as a whole as dismantling obstacles to transnational understanding' (2009: 24).

Similarly, the six main characters of the multi-strand narrative of Akin's *The Edge of Heaven* move back and forth between Turkey and Germany – and end up in Turkey, regardless of their national origins. Clearly, home has become a negotiable and relative concept. Nejat (Baki Davrak), a professor of German literature and son of a Turkish 'guestworker', travels from Bremen to Istanbul in search of Ayten (Nurgül Yesilçay), a Turkish political activist, in order to inform her of her mother's accidental death at the hands of his father. Meanwhile the beautiful and fiery Ayten has fled to Germany to seek political asylum, but is deported and imprisoned upon her return to Turkey. Her German friend and lover Lotte (Patrycia Ziolkowska) follows her to Turkey, hoping to secure her release from prison, but is accidentally shot dead in the backstreets of Istanbul. Nejat's father, Ali (Tuncel Kurtiz), is also sent back to Turkey after completing his prison sentence in Germany. Lotte's mother (Hanna Schygulla) comes to Istanbul in order to retrace the last steps of her daughter and to accomplish Lotte's mission, the liberation of Ayten. Nejat relinquishes his professorship at a German university, takes over a German bookshop in Istanbul and stays in Turkey for good. The film's final scene shows him on the shores of the Black Sea, where he is awaiting his father's return from a fishing trip.

The protagonists' intersecting itineraries between Turkey and Germany seem to suggest that the two countries have moved closer together in the age of transnational mobility – and perhaps not just in terms of geography. Akin's films draw attention to the interweaving of Turkish and German cultures. For example, by casting Hanna Schygulla, Rainer Werner Fassbinder's muse and one of the most

prominent screen icons of New German Cinema, and Tuncel Kurtiz, best known in the West for his collaboration with the late director Yılmaz Güney, Akin intended to bring together 'two living film legends [...] who wrote film history' (Akin 2008). By paying homage to Turkish and German film histories, he acknowledges the impact of both upon his own creative sensibilities.

Yet this form of intertextuality is only one of numerous devices through which Akin draws attention to the 'other within', thereby problematising the notion of difference and the designation of Turkey as Europe's 'other'. On the level of narrative, for example, *The Edge of Heaven* frequently links difference and commonality (Burns 2009: 18). The accidental killing of the Turkish prostitute Yeter (Nursel Köse) in the film's first chapter corresponds to the accidental killing of the German student Lotte in the second; Ali's imprisonment in Germany is mirrored by Ayten's in Turkey; Yeter's coffin is unloaded from an aeroplane at Atatürk airport, while Lotte's coffin is loaded onto what looks like the same aeroplane, which will take her body back to Germany.

More interestingly, perhaps, is the process of appropriating the 'other' in terms of cinematic, musical and narrative traditions. Nowhere is Akin's aesthetic strategy of creolising appropriation, the intermeshing of Turkish and German cinematic and musical traditions, more apparent than in the melodramatic love story *Head-On*.

THE DIASPORIC OPTIC OF HEAD-ON

Head-On is the story of a dark and destructive passion which unexpectedly develops between 20-year-old Sibel (Sibel Kekilli) and 44-year-old Cahit (Birol Ünel), both of Turkish origin and living in Hamburg. They meet in a clinic after having attempted suicide: Sibel by slitting her wrists, Cahit by driving head-on against a brick wall with his car (hence the film's German title, *Gegen die Wand*). The beautiful and highly promiscuous Sibel proposes a marriage of convenience to the cocaine-sniffing Cahit because she hopes to escape from her family's vigilant efforts to protect her honour through an alibi marriage. 'I want to live, Cahit. I want to live, I want to dance, I want to fuck. And not just with one guy. Do you understand!?' she explains to Cahit, before smashing a beer bottle and slitting her wrists with it. The drop-out Cahit appears to be the ideal husband in such a set-up,

since he has nothing to lose and is likely to give Sibel the freedom she desires, while his Turkish background will make him acceptable in the eyes of her parents.

The traditional Turkish wedding is a sham, and Sibel spends the wedding night with another man. However, all is well until Sibel and Cahit fall in love with each other, an unforeseen change in the couple's relationship marked by Sibel cooking a traditional Turkish meal for her husband – her mother's recipe, as she stresses. That night, Cahit accidentally kills Nico, one of Sibel's lovers. Cahit is sentenced to several years in prison and Sibel flees to Istanbul in order to escape her brother's retribution for the shame she has brought upon the family. There, she gradually succumbs to the same self-destructive impulse that determined Cahit's actions in Hamburg: she drinks heavily, starts taking opium, gets raped and provokes a group of thugs to beat her up and nearly kill her. But she survives. Several years later, Cahit is released from prison and tracks her down in Istanbul. When the two meet again, they are both reformed characters: Cahit no longer looks like a tramp, and sticks to water rather than alcohol. Sibel has traded the role of *femme fatale* for that of mother. She has a four-year-old daughter, lives with her boyfriend, presumably the girl's father, and



Figure 13.1: Sibel and Cahit staging a traditional Turkish wedding.

wears androgynous clothes and a short-cropped boyish hairstyle. Even though she agrees to a few nights of clandestine passion with Cahit in a hotel in Istanbul, she ultimately decides that her future lies with her family. The film's penultimate scene shows Cahit embark alone on his onward journey to Mersin. Mersin, though not his home town as such, is his family's place of origin, and therefore seems to offer Cahit, a second-generation Turkish immigrant and German citizen, the opportunity to reclaim his Turkish identity. Cahit's journey to his parents' Heimat is but one of many instances of what could be interpreted as itineraries of reverse migration in Akin's oeuvre.³ As I have argued elsewhere (2006a), such home-seeking journeys do not only put an end to the protagonists' hyper-mobile restlessness but also hail the promise of their redemption.

Not only is the plot of *Head-On* a far cry from the predictable conflicts and ethnic stereotypes of the first wave of German-Turkish cinema, Akin's prizewinning film also represents a new departure in terms of the hybrid aesthetic strategies he employs to tell this melodramatic love story. The film music ranges from popular Turkish songs such as 'Dönmeyen yıllar', performed by the famous *Arabesk* singer Orhan Gencebay, and Sezen Aksu's 'Yine mi Çiçek' to international hits such as 'I Feel You' by Depeche Mode and tracks by German avant-garde and new-wave artists Alexander Hacke ('Tract') and Mona Mur ('Snake' and 'Into your Eyes'). This seemingly eclectic mix of roughly forty songs reflects the multiple cultural affiliations of the director and of his protagonists, Sibel and Cahit. But it does more than just that. 'The soundtrack is the heart of *Head-On*,' writes Andreas Busche (2004). The music determines the film's narrative structure, underscores the characters' feelings and frames of mind and serves as a running commentary. For example, the lyrics of Wendy René's soulful number 'After Laughter (Comes Tears)', which we hear as a radiantly smiling Sibel buys a gingerbread heart with 'I love you' written on it for Cahit, anticipates the disastrous turn which Cahit and Sibel's *amour fou* will take in the very next scene when Cahit kills Sibel's lover with a fatal blow.

Nowhere is the significance of music more apparent than in the six musical interludes which frame and interrupt the linear narrative of *Head-On*. The film's opening scene shows a musical ensemble, consisting of six men dressed in black tie and one woman in a long vibrant red dress, performing against the picturesque backdrop of the Golden Horn and the Süleyman Mosque in Istanbul. The six musicians,

who are symmetrically arranged with the female singer at the centre, sit on chairs on a stage made up of layered Turkish rugs, facing directly into the camera. This tableau, reminiscent of a clichéd picture-postcard impression of Istanbul, is repeated five more times with some minor modifications. The static and repetitive nature of the musical interludes introduces an element of stasis, interrupting the narrative flow and contrasting with the protagonists' mobility and search for identity and belonging.

The Roma clarinetist Selim Sesler and his ensemble accompany Idil Üner, a German-Turkish actress and familiar face from numerous recent films, who sings mournfully about the pain of unrequited love. The poetic lyrics of the first song, 'Saniye'm', express the suffering of a man whose love for Saniye, with her long floating hair, remains unanswered. Other songs follow, similar in mood and tone. The lyrics of the film's final ballad, 'Su karsiki dagda bir fener yanar', which sets in as Cahit realises that Sibel will not join him on the bus to Mersin, vocalise Cahit's silent despair: 'Over there on the mountain a beacon is burning, falcons fly over its shimmering light. Have all those who love and who have lost their lovers lost their senses like me? I am



Figure 13.2: Musical interludes against a clichéd picture-postcard impression of Istanbul.

infinitely sad. May my enemies go blind. I have lost my mind. May the mountains rejoice in my stead.' The archaic nature imagery invoked here to describe the pain of lost love creates an incongruous juxtaposition with the ugly urban setting of Istanbul bus station and the grey concrete bridge across the intersection of the motorway which marks Cahit's point of departure and final separation from Sibel. This apparent incongruity extends to the protagonists: two damaged, self-destructive individuals whose feelings of desire and despair are elevated by these poetic ballads about unrequited love.

While, on the one hand, the musical interludes underscore the protagonists' emotions, fulfilling a similar function to the non-diegetic mood music in classical Hollywood melodrama, on the other hand, the on-screen appearance of the musical ensemble precludes precisely the affective response in the audience normally triggered by the musical scores of melodrama. In fact, the musical interludes and the epic narrative of the lyrics have been variously compared to the chorus of a Greek tragedy, the distancing devices of Brecht's epic theatre, and even 'the aesthetic of switches and inserts [...] described by Lalitha Gopalan with reference to Bollywood as a *Cinema of Interruptions*' (Göktürk, 2010: 221). Rather than inviting the audience's emotional identification, the musical interludes draw attention to the staging of the melodrama.

Akin plays with and subverts the conventions of melodrama further when, at the end of the sixth musical interlude, the musicians rise from the chairs on which they have been sitting and bow, signalling that their performance is over. Through this simple gesture, the ontological status of the entire film and its relation to the orchestral interludes is questioned: 'Has the audience watched a film with orchestral interludes, or a concert with cinematic inserts?' asks Deniz Göktürk in 'Sound bridges: transnational mobility as ironic melodrama' (2010). Is the film's entire narrative merely an illustration, or rather an updated version of the fateful love rendered in the traditional songs?

The problems arising in the attempt to assign an unambiguous meaning to the musical intervals are largely due to the fact that the sources of Fatih Akin's artistic inspirations are difficult to trace. He is 'tapping into a warehouse of cultural images' (Moorti 2003: 359) taken from classical Greek, German, Turkish and possibly even Indian high culture and/or popular culture, taking a mix-and-match approach, thereby creating an innovative representational grammar 'that seeks to capture the dislocation, disruption and ambivalence that characterizes' (Moorti 2003: 359) his protagonists' lives – and,

arguably, his own: in Hamburg, Fatih Akin revealed in an interview, 'I no longer have the eye for telling stories [...] But in Turkey I have the feeling that I'm seeing everything with different eyes' (Akin, Beier and Matussek 2007).

Although Akin declares that his Hamburg home has become all too familiar to nourish his creativity and imagination, pitting it against the invigorating force of Turkey, coded as the foreign and exotic other, his films tell a different story. Their most distinctive aesthetic strategy is what Moorti theorises under the concept of the 'diasporic optic'. She compares it to a 'sideways look' (2003: 360) that does not endeavour to reproduce home in the diaspora by 'superimposing images of home and abroad, past and present, on each other'. Instead, the diasporic optic reconstitutes home 'in several locales simultaneously [...] it centres on the affect and desire to produce home as a tenuous fragile web of relations [...] shared affiliations and longings' (Moorti 2003: 360). By drawing on the epistemes and cultural codes of more than one culture simultaneously, it probes existing representational practices and invites multiple decoding positions, which depend on the culturally specific knowledge of the audience.

Thus, in the attempt to make sense of the rich intertextuality of *Head-On*, a German audience is likely to tap into a warehouse of cultural connotations significantly different from those associated with Turkish or German-Turkish audiences. German cinephiles are likely to place *Head-On* in 'the genealogy of Sirk-Fassbinder melodrama into which Akin is inscribing himself' (Elsaesser 2008). While the German-born Hollywood *émigré* Detlef Sierck/Douglas Sirk subverted the conventions of classical Hollywood melodrama in numerous ways, Fassbinder inflected the generic conventions further when he gave Sirkian melodrama a distinctly Brechtian twist. According to Fassbinder, Brechtian distancing techniques invite the audience to witness emotions and to reflect upon them, but forestalls emotional identification. Fassbinder wanted to go further than that by letting his audience 'feel and think': 'I want to give the spectator the emotions along with the possibility of reflecting on and analysing what he is feeling,' he stated in a much-quoted interview with *Cineaste* in 1977. Just as much as Fassbinder denied his indebtedness to Brechtian aesthetics, arguably, as Gerd Gemünden suggests, to highlight his 'own originality and creativity' (1994: 59), Fatih Akin denies the influence of Fassbinder upon his oeuvre – yet film critics and scholars do not seem to tire of tracing the affinities between these two prolific German

auteurs (see Akin, Beier and Matussek 2007; Handling 2007; Elsaesser 2008). Both rely on melodrama to reach large audiences, and both inflect this popular genre through their own distinctive signatures. Both infuse melodrama with a high degree of artificiality, be it static tableaux, multiple framing devices and a Sirkian camp use of colour in the case of Fassbinder's *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*, or the similarly static tableaux of the musical interludes, which look like deliberately corny picture postcards from Istanbul, or the architectonic symmetry of mirror-image scenes, through which Cahit's and Sibel's lives are connected. For example, in the Hamburg-based part of the film, Cahit dances, suffused in red light with blood streaming down his arms in a bar, while in the Istanbul-based part of the film, Sibel dances under the influence of drugs and alcohol with a red spotlight illuminating her face, while the other guests stare at her, bewildered.⁴ The semicircle of patrons in the bar, fixing their eyes upon Sibel's trance-like dance, is also reminiscent of the scene in Fassbinder's *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* in which the female bartender and guests are staring at Ali and Emmi on the dancefloor. Here, too, the onlookers' incredulous gaze signifies social marginalisation or exclusion.

Turkish audiences are likely to see things differently. Rather than placing Akin's film in the tradition of Sirk's and Fassbinder's melodrama, they will associate it with Yesilçam, Turkey's popular cinema, which flourished during the 1960s and 1970s. Yesilçam (lit. 'green pine'), named after the street in Istanbul's Beyoğlu district, where the film studios, production companies and agencies were based, is the Turkish equivalent of classical Hollywood cinema. According to Savas Arslan, Yesilçam modifies and translates Western, in particular Hollywood, cinema 'by putting it into the vernacular, transforming it into a local product, by openly pirating scripts, themes and footage from Hollywood and European films' (2009: 85). This 'Turkified' genre cinema is characterised by a melodramatic modality (Arslan 2009: 85), predictable binary oppositions such as rural-urban, poor-rich and decadent-honourable, which reflect in simplified terms the social and economic conditions of Turkish society at the time. Whereas melodramatic love stories of the 1960s usually end happily, Yesilçam melodrama of the 1970s and 1980s often ends with broken hearts and lives torn apart, reflecting the mood of the times, when the hope for the modernisation of Turkish society gradually began to fade as unemployment and other major social problems loomed large.

The 1970s are also known as the golden age of *Arabesk* music and film. As Martin Stokes outlines in his study *The Arabesk Debate* (1992), *Arabesk* was originally a type of music associated with the labour migrants who moved from rural south-east Turkey to Istanbul and other urban centres, where most of them settled in *gecekondus*, squatter towns, on the urban periphery. But soon Turkish *Arabesk* developed into a more encompassing social and cultural phenomenon of rapid urbanisation. It also had a significant impact on the film industry. Famous *Arabesk* singers, including Orhan Gencebay, Ferdi Tayfur, İbrahim Tatlıses, Müslüm Gürses along with the child singer Küçük Emrah, starred in *Arabesk* films which revolved around intense emotions such as '*hüsran*' (disappointment, sorrow), '*özlem*' (yearning, longing), '*kara sevda*' (melancholy) and '*hasret*' (longing, ardent desire) (Stokes 1992: 145–49).⁵ The initial migration to the city, the disintegration of the family, the sense of deracination, alienation and solitude in the urban environment bring about the protagonists' 'emotional malaise whose description occupies most of the *Arabesk* lyric texts' (Stokes 1992: 144). In the big city, traditional codes of honour clash with modern morality, resulting in the protagonists' moral conflicts and their social and psychological decline. Love is depicted as an all-powerful force from which there is no escape. 'Love and fate are inexorably intertwined. Without love, the protagonist has no fate. Put another way, the fate of the protagonist is to love, and this love is the cause of his self-destruction' (Stokes 1992: 156). The ill-fated lovers of *Arabesk* films drown their sorrow in alcohol and are condemned to endure their fate passively.

Akin's *Head-On* is clearly indebted to the *Arabesk* tradition, as has been noted by, among others, the German-Turkish writer Feridun Zaimoğlu. Too numerous are the correspondences to be overlooked: the pivotal role played by music; dislocated, ill-fated lovers, who numb their *kara sevda* with alcohol and drugs, who slit their wrists, crush glass with their bare hands and whose despair culminates in attempted suicide. Zaimoğlu explains Sibel and Cahit's multiple acts of self-mutilation as a distinctly Oriental way of dealing with ecstasy and agony: Orientals publicly flagellate themselves as an act of penitence, until blood is streaming down their backs, while ecstatic fans, from the poor urban periphery, express their idolisation of a pop star by cutting themselves in public with razor blades (Zaimoğlu 2002). But Akin modifies the narrative paradigm of *Arabesk* film, empowering his protagonists in the end to determine their own

destiny rather than passively succumbing to the destructive powers of an ill-fated love. This idea is, once again, emphasised by music: 'Life's what you make it', the film's final song programmatically states as the credits roll.

The hybrid aesthetics of *Head-On* are a treasure trove, or possibly a Pandora's Box, inviting audiences, critics and scholars to decipher this multicultural web of references. Thus, Zaimoğlu also places *Head-On* in the context of German Romanticism, praising it as a 'grandiose love epic [that] revives German Romanticism' (2002), while Deniz Göktürk considers the Turkish film *Cholera Street* (Agir Roman, Mustafa Altıoklar, 1997) to be 'a major source of inspiration' (Göktürk 2010: 224). After all, Akin provides an explicit clue to this particular film: before Sibel slits her wrists in the bathroom of her and Cahit's Hamburg flat, she puts on a CD with the title 'Agir Roman', as a close-up of the CD label shows. Turkish viewers will immediately recognise the film music from *Cholera Street*, which adds an additional interpretative dimension to *Head-On*. Yet audiences not familiar with Turkish cinema are likely to miss this particular reference, as well as the numerous other ones to Turkish popular culture.

Thus, watching one and the same film across borders results in different decodings, the result of the diasporic optic inscribed in *Head-On* itself. When Zaimoğlu asked Akin in an interview whether one needs a 'Türkenbonus' ('bonus of being Turkish') in order to understand his film, the director replied that one can see the film from three different vantage points, a German-German one, a German-Turkish one and a Turkish-Turkish one. In *Head-On*, he tried to reconcile these different perspectives, aiming for the largest common denominator (Akin and Zaimoğlu n.d.).

CONCLUSION

What, then, does Fatih Akin bring to contemporary German (as well as Turkish) cinema that makes him such a powerful and distinctive creative force? Why is his *Love, Death and the Devil Trilogy*,⁶ of which *Head-On* is the first and *The Edge of Heaven* the second part, frequently compared to Fassbinder's *FRG Trilogy* (BRD Trilogy, 1979–81) and the tradition of politically engaged cinema which, at the turn of the new millennium, Eric Rentschler feared was lost forever? Arguably with the exception of his contribution to the omnibus film *Germany 09: 13 Short*

Films about the State of the Nation (Deutschland 09: 13 kurze Filme zur Lage der Nation, 2009) modelled on the New German Cinema omnibus film *Germany in Autumn* (Deutschland im Herbst, 1978), Akin is not a political filmmaker as such – nor was Fassbinder, for that matter. Both attempt to marry the popular with the political, and both are more interested in the politics of representation than in politics as such, at least in their films. Therefore, much of the media discourse on Akin's contribution to the ongoing debates about multiculturalism, integration, *Leitkultur* and Turkey's accession to Europe centres on his star persona: he is a *Vorzeige Deutschtürke*, that is a role-model German-Turk whom both the Turkish community in Germany and in Turkey, as well as German advocates of a liberal multicultural Germany are eager to enlist as their ambassador. As the Green Party parliamentarian Özcan Mutlu commented shortly after *Head-On* won the Golden Bear, 'When I come to think of it, I am sure that with Fatih Akin's success, a new era for us Turks here in Germany has begun' (quoted in Lau 2004). But Akin's high media profile should not distract from his achievements as a filmmaker: by problematising the notion of difference and by rewriting the master narrative of the German nation 'by and from the margins' (Moorti 2003: 371), Akin has turned a new page in German film history. In that sense, Akin's films are anything but a cinema of consensus, nor are they in stylistic terms. Akin's diasporic imaginary is, perhaps, best summarised in the words of a much more famous diasporian, Salman Rushdie, who pronounced migration and the ensuing process of hybridisation as the chief sources of innovation in contemporary culture: 'Mélange, hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that is how newness enters the world. It is the great possibility that mass migration gives the world [...] change-by-fusion, change-by-conjoining. It is the love song to our mongrel selves' (1991: 394).

NOTES

The quotation 'Seeing everything with different eyes' is taken from Akin, Beier and Mattusek 2007. This chapter has evolved out of a larger research project, funded by the AHRC under the Diasporas, Migration and Identities Programme, on Migrant and Diasporic Cinema in Contemporary Europe (www.migrantcinema.net), which I led between 2006 and 2008. Some of the material in this article has been previously published in Berghahn (2009) and Berghahn and Sternberg (2010).

- 1 It is perhaps worth noting that the majority of migrant and diasporic films across Europe are made by diasporic rather than migrant filmmakers, presumably because first-generation immigrants are too absorbed by the economic struggle of establishing themselves and finding a livelihood in the host country. In the German-Turkish context, most films about first-generation immigrants were made by German directors.
- 2 For a discussion of *Solino* see Berghahn 2006a; for the reception of *Solino* in Germany and Italy, see Schwingel 2007; for a discussion of *In July* see Burns 2009.
- 3 In the documentary *When I Am Thinking of Germany: We Have Forgotten to Return* (*Denk ich an Deutschland: Wir haben vergessen zurückzukehren*, 2001) Akin undertakes a similar journey, exploring his family's history of migration and re-migration and visiting his father's place of origin on the Black Sea coast. *Short Sharp Shock*, *Solino* and *The Edge of Heaven* all culminate in homebound journeys.
- 4 For insightful discussions of similar mirror-image scenes, see Burns 2009: 16–17 and Göktürk (2010).
- 5 I am indebted to Açıya Tunç, who has kindly shared her knowledge of the *Arabesk* tradition in Turkish music and film and its relationship to Yeşilçam melodrama with me.
- 6 Akin refers to the title of this trilogy in an interview with Zaimoğlu (Akin and Zaimoğlu n.d).

Chapter 14

No place like Heimat: mediaspaces and moving landscapes in Edgar Reitz's *Heimat 3* (2004)

Alasdair King

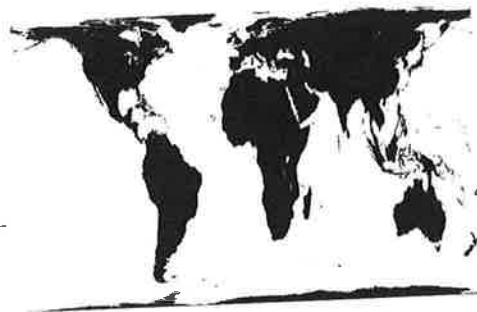
What was once a film in a movie theatre, then a fragment of broadcast television, is now a kernel of psychical representations, a fleeting association of discrete elements: [...] The more the film is distanced in memory, the more the binding effect of the narrative is loosened. The sequence breaks apart. The fragments go adrift and enter into new combinations, more or less transitory, in the eddies of memory: memories of other films, and memories of real events.

Burgin (2004: 67)¹

PROLOGUE

It is almost halfway into the final episode of Edgar Reitz's six-part film series, *Heimat 3: A Chronicle of Endings and Beginnings* (*Heimat 3: Chronik einer Zeitenwende*, 2004) that one of the most disorienting sequences of this concluding production in the *Heimat* trilogy occurs. In some ways, this could be the *mise-en-abyme* of *Heimat 3*. Hermann, Reitz's central character in both *The Second Heimat: Chronicle of a Generation* (*Die zweite Heimat: Chronik einer Jugend*, 1992) and *Heimat 3*, has packed up his Munich apartment – 'the old stories are packed away in boxes' – thereby giving up finally and definitively his alternative 'home', the approximate English translation for the extraordinarily emotive German concept of *Heimat*, which implicitly evokes a sense of one's community, of one's roots, as well as the specific place where one lives. In so doing, he has committed fully to the main house he has built up with his partner, Clarissa, on the banks of the Rhine, very near

TAURIS WORLD CINEMA SERIES



Series Editor: Lúcia Nagib, Professor of World Cinemas, University of Leeds

Advisory Board: Laura Mulvey (UK), Donald Richie (Japan), Robert Stam (USA), Ismail Xavier (Brazil)

The aim of the **Tauris World Cinema Series** is to reveal and celebrate the richness and complexity of film art across the globe, exploring a wide variety of cinemas set within their own cultures and as they interconnect in a global context.

The books in the series will represent innovative scholarship, in tune with the multicultural character of contemporary audiences, and they will draw upon an international authorship, comprising academics, film writers and journalists.

Prominent strands will include **World Film Theory**, offering new theoretical approaches and re-assessments of major movements, filmmakers, genres, technologies and stars; **New Cinemas**, focusing on recent film revivals in different parts of the world; and **new translations** into English of international milestones of film theory and criticism.

Books in the series include:

Theorizing World Cinema

Edited by Lúcia Nagib, Chris Perriam and Rajinder Dudrah

East Asian Cinemas: Exploring Transnational Connections on Film

Edited by Leon Hunt and Leung Wing-Fai

Lebanese Cinema: Imagining the Civil War and Beyond

By Lina Khatib

Brazil on Screen: Cinema Novo, New Cinema, Utopia

By Lúcia Nagib

Contemporary New Zealand Cinema

Edited by Ian Conrich and Stuart Murray

New Turkish Cinema: Belonging, Identity and Memory

By Asuman Suner

New Directions in German Cinema

Edited by Paul Cooke and Chris Homewood

New Argentine Cinema:

By Jens Andermann

Queries, ideas and submissions to:

Series Editor: Professor Lúcia Nagib – l.nagib@leeds.ac.uk

Cinema Editor at I.B.Tauris, Philippa Brewster – philippabrewster@gmail.com

New Directions in German Cinema

Edited by Paul Cooke and Chris Homewood

I.B. TAURIS

LONDON • NEW YORK

Published in 2011 by I.B.Tauris & Co. Ltd
6 Salem Road, London W2 4BU
175 Fifth Avenue, New York NY 10010
www.ibtauris.com

Distributed in the United States and Canada Exclusively by Palgrave
Macmillan, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York NY 10010

Copyright © Paul Cooke and Chris Homewood 2011

The right of Paul Cooke and Chris Homewood to be identified as the
authors of this work has been asserted by them in accordance with the
Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988.

All rights reserved. Except for brief quotations in a review, this book, or
any part thereof, may not be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a
retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic,
mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior
written permission of the publisher.

ISBN PB: 978 1 84885 907 4

ISBN HB: 978 1 84885 908 1

A full CIP record for this book is available from the British Library
A full CIP record for this book is available from the Library of Congress
Library of Congress catalog card: available

Typeset in Stone Serif by Dexter Haven Associates Ltd, London
Printed and bound in Great Britain by TJ International, Padstow, Cornwall



CONTENTS

List of illustrations	vii
Contributors	ix
Introduction: Beyond the cinema of consensus? New directions in German cinema since 2000 <i>Paul Cooke and Chris Homewood</i>	1
1 'A kind of species memory': the time of the elephants in the space of Alexander Kluge's cinematic principle <i>John E. Davidson</i>	20
2 <i>Downfall</i> (2004): Hitler in the new millennium and the (ab)uses of history <i>Christine Haase</i>	39
3 'Wonderfully courageous'? The human face of a legend in <i>Sophie Scholl: The Final Days</i> (2005) <i>Owen Evans</i>	57
4 Music after Mauthausen: re-presenting the Holocaust in Stefan Ruzowitsky's <i>The Counterfeiters</i> (2007) <i>Brad Prager</i>	77
5 Aiming to please? Consensus and consciousness-raising in Wolfgang Becker's <i>Good Bye, Lenin!</i> (2003) <i>Nick Hodgin</i>	94
6 Watching the Stasi: authenticity, <i>Ostalgie</i> and history in Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's <i>The Lives of Others</i> (2006) <i>Paul Cooke</i>	113

7	From Baader to Prada: memory and myth in Uli Edel's <i>The Baader Meinhof Complex</i> (2008) <i>Chris Homewood</i>	130
8	The absent Heimat: Hans-Christian Schmid's <i>Requiem</i> (2006) <i>David Clarke</i>	149
9	Play for today: situationist protests and uncanny encounters in Hans Weingartner's <i>The Educators</i> (2004) <i>Rachel Palfreyman</i>	166
10	German <i>Autoren</i> dialogue with Hollywood? Refunctioning the horror genre in Christian Petzold's <i>Yella</i> (2007) <i>Jaimey Fisher</i>	186
11	'A sharpening of our regard': realism, affect and the redistribution of the sensible in Valeska Grisebach's <i>Longing</i> (2006) <i>Marco Abel</i>	204
12	Too late for love? The cinema of Andreas Dresen on <i>Cloud 9</i> (2008) <i>Laura G. McGee</i>	223
13	'Seeing everything with different eyes': the diasporic optic of Fatih Akin's <i>Head-On</i> (2004) <i>Daniela Berghahn</i>	239
14	No place like Heimat: mediaspaces and moving landscapes in Edgar Reitz's <i>Heimat 3</i> (2004) <i>Alasdair King</i>	257
	Bibliography	279
	Index	301

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1.1	Perspectives on the <i>Gesamtkunstwerk</i> .	30
Figure 1.2	Descent of the Pachydermata.	36
Figure 2.1	Hitler as human – shedding a tear.	43
Figure 2.2	Uncle Hitler – Hitler and the Goebbels children.	46
Figure 3.1	Mohr offers Sophie the 'golden bridge'.	65
Figure 3.2	Sophie draws on her faith.	70
Figure 4.1	Soli Sorowitsch reacts dismissively to the accusation that he is a criminal.	85
Figure 4.2	Adolf Burger shares a sympathetic moment with a uniformed survivor of Sachsenhausen.	90
Figure 5.1	Challenging <i>Ostalgie</i> ?	107
Figure 5.2	Feeding <i>Ostalgie</i> ?	108
Figure 6.1	Wiesler mesmerised at the theatre.	125
Figure 6.2	Dreyman approaches as Wiesler withdraws from the frame.	126
Figure 7.1	Along for the ride with Baader.	139