



FILM
CULTURE

IN TRANSITION

**EUROPEAN
CINEMA**
**FACE TO FACE WITH
HOLLYWOOD**

THOMAS ELSAESSER

AMSTERDAM UNIVERSITY PRESS

European Cinema

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Face to Face with Hollywood

Thomas Elsaesser

Amsterdam University Press

Cover illustration: Nicole Kidman in DOGVILLE

Cover design: Kok Korpershoek, Amsterdam
Lay-out: JAPES, Amsterdam

ISBN 90 5356 594 9 (paperback)
ISBN 90 5356 602 3 (hardcover)
NUR 674

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Preface

The (West) European cinema has, since the end of World War II, had its identity firmly stamped by three features: its leading directors were recognized as *auteurs*, its styles and themes shaped a nation's self-image, and its new waves signified political as well as aesthetic renewal. Ingmar Bergman, Jacques Rivette, Joseph Losey, Peter Greenaway, neo-realism, the *nouvelle vague*, New German Cinema, the British renaissance – these have been some of the signposts of a cinema that derived legitimacy from a dual cultural legacy: that of the 19th century novel and of the 20th century modernist avant-gardes. Both pedigrees have given Europe's national cinemas a unique claim to autonomy, but they also drew boundaries between the work of the auteur-artists, representing the nation, high culture and realism, and the makers of popular cinema, representing commerce, mass-entertainment and consumption.

These distinguishing features were also identity constructions. They helped to mask a continuing process of self-definition and self-differentiation across a half-acknowledged presence, namely of Hollywood, and an unacknowledged absence, namely of the cinemas of Socialist Europe. Since 1989, such identity formations through difference, exclusion and otherness, are no longer securely in place. Cinema today contributes to cultural identities that are more inclusive and processual, more multi-cultural and multi-ethnic, more dialogical and interactive, able to embrace the 'new Europe', the popular star- and genre cinema, as well as the diaspora cinemas within Europe itself. It has meant re-thinking as well as un-thinking European cinema. Has it made cinema in Europe an anxious art, seeking salvation in the preservation of the "national heritage"? Many times before, European cinema has shown itself capable of re-invention. This time, the challenge for films, filmmakers and critics is to be European enough to preserve Europe's cultural diversity and historical depth, as well as outward-looking enough to be trans-national and part of world cinema.

The essays brought together in *European Cinema: Face to Face with Hollywood* present a cross-section of my writings on these topics over a period of some thirty-five years. They re-examine the conflicting terminologies that have dominated the discussion, including the notion of "the nation" in "national cinema", and the idea of the artist as creator of a unique vision, at the heart of the "auteur-cinema". They take a fresh look at the ideological agendas, touching on politically and formally oppositional practices and they thoroughly examine European cinema's relation to Hollywood.

An important aspect of the essays is that they develop a way of thinking about European cinema which focuses on the many imaginary or mirroring relations a nation's cinema maintains with itself and its others. Here I try to extend the concept from specific national cinemas (notably German, British and French) to the political entity we call the European Union, in its national, transnational, regional and local manifestations. Considering how differently politicians, intellectuals, publicists and polemicists "imagine" the European Union, is it possible to find among filmmakers pictures of the kind of Europe that needs to be invented? Something new and vital is emerging, that makes me re(de)fine my idea of European cinema as an overlay of historical imaginaries and want to give priority of analysis to the economic-institutional factors (co-productions, television, national funding schemes, EU subsidies), to the art worlds and to specific cultural politics, as embodied in Europe's international film festivals. Together they illuminate the changing relations with Hollywood, indicative of the altered place European cinema now occupies among a whole archipelago of differently weighted and unevenly distributed film cultures, which in the global mind make up "world cinema."

In putting this collection together I have been helped by many friends, colleagues, and graduate students. Debts of acknowledgement and gratitude are owed to all of them. First and foremost I want to thank those who initially commissioned some of the pieces here reproduced, notably Richard Combs, editor of the *Monthly Film Bulletin*, Philip Dodd, editor of *Sight & Sound*, Don Ranvaud, editor of *Framework*, Ian Christie, Mart Dominicus, Christel van Boemen, as well as the following organizers of conferences: Chris Bigsby, Susan Hayward, Knut Jensen, Barton Byg, Alexander Stephan, Dudley Andrew, Livia Paldi and Yosefa Loshitzky. Furthermore, I want to thank my colleague Jan Simons, whose comments have always been pertinent and constructive.

I am deeply indebted to Amy Kenyon's helpful suggestions, to reader's reports by Malte Hagener, Steven Choe, Ria Thanouli and Tarja Laine; to Marijke de Valck's stimulating and innovative research on festivals, to Senta Siewert's spontaneous help with editing and completing the bibliography and to Sutanya Singkhra's patient work on the illustrations and footnotes. Jaap Wagenaar at Amsterdam University Press has, as usual, been a model of efficiency and good cheer. Finally, the book is dedicated to all the members of the 'Cinema Europe' study group, who have inspired me to re-think what it means to study European cinema, and whose enthusiasm and total commitment have made the past four years a rare intellectual adventure.

Thomas Elsaesser
Amsterdam, June 2005

Introduction

European Cinema

Conditions of Impossibility?

An Impossible Project

Any book about European cinema should start with the statement that there is no such thing as European cinema, and that yes, European cinema exists, and has existed since the beginning of cinema a little more than a hundred years ago. It depends on where one places oneself, both in time and in space. In time: for the first fifteen years, it was France that defined European cinema, with Pathé and Gaumont educating Europe's film-going tastes, inspiring filmmakers and keeping the Americans at bay. In the 1920s, the German film industry, under Erich Pommer, tried to create a "Cinema Europe," involving France and Britain. It soon floundered, and Hollywood became not only the dominant force; it also was very successful in dividing the Europeans among themselves.¹ For a brief period in the late 1920s, it seemed the Russians might be Europe's inspiration. Instead, from 1935 onwards, it was Nazi cinema that dominated the continent until 1945. The years from 1945 to the 1980s were the years of the different national cinemas, or rather: the period when new waves, national (art) cinemas and individual auteurs made up a shifting set of references that defined what was meant by European cinema. Geopolitically speaking on the other hand, when looking at Europe from, say, the American perspective, the continent is indeed an entity, but mostly one of cinema audiences that still make up Hollywood's most important foreign market.

Looked at from the "inside," however, the conclusion has to be that European cinema does not (yet) exist: the gap between Central/Eastern Europe and Western Europe remains as wide as ever, and even in Western Europe, each country has its own national cinema, increasingly defended as a valuable treasure and part of an inalienable national patrimony. Since the *nouvelle vague*, French cinema, in particular, insists on its long and proud tradition as the natural home of the seventh art. In the United Kingdom, British cinema (once called a 'contradiction in terms' by François Truffaut) has over the last twenty years been reinstated, re-evaluated and unapologetically celebrated, even if its economic ups

and downs, its many false dawns as an art cinema, as well as its surprisingly frequent commercial successes put it in a constant if often covert competition with Hollywood. Germany, having repeatedly failed to keep alive the promise and prestige attached to the New German Cinema in the 1970s has, since unification in 1990, turned to a policy of archival conservation, where museum displays on a grand scale, encyclopedic databases, anniversary retrospectives and an ambitious internet portal all try to heal the wounds inflicted by unpalatable nationalist legacies from the 1940s and by the political-ideological divisions into "German" and "East German" cinema during the Cold War period. Italy, too, nostalgically looks back to both neo-realism and Toto comedies, while discovering the memory of open-air screenings in the piazza under Mussolini or small-town cinemas run by Communists as the true sites of national film culture. Only in Denmark have the Dogma filmmakers around Lars von Trier come up with innovative and iconoclastic ways to stage a national cinema revival that also has a European outlook. In Southern Europe Pedro Almodovar became for a time a one-man national cinema, before sharing honours with Julio Medem and Alejandro Amenábar. But while Medem stands for "Basque cinema" and Amenábar for a successful navigation of the Hispano-Hollywood connection, Almodóvar not only embodied the radical chic of an outward-looking, post-Franco Spain, but with his stylish melodramas and surreal comedies gave international flair and street credibility to such strictly local habitats as the gay and transsexual subcultures of Madrid.

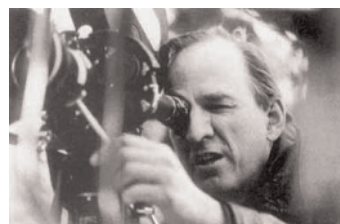
Looked at from outside of the inside, i.e., Eastern Europe, the idea of a European cinema is even more problematic. Knowing they belong to Europe, but feeling all too often left out, filmmakers from Central and Eastern Europe – some of them from the new "accession" countries of the European Union, such as Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary – are perfectly aware of how much they have in the past contributed to the history of cinema, even during the difficult decades of the 1960s and 70s, when repression and censorship followed the brief opening of the "thaw." This so-called "New Europe" (Donald Rumsfeld), however, is often quite particularist: it expects its respective national cinema to be recognized as specific in time and place, history and geography, while still belonging to Europe. Some of these countries' national cinemas are usually identified by the outside world with one or two directors who have to stand in for the nation, even when this is manifestly impossible.

To give an obvious example: Andrzej Wajda was Polish cinema from the late 1940s, into the 1960s and up to *MAN OF MARBLE* (1977), until this role fell to Krzysztof Kieslowski during the 1980s and 1990s. Both worked – and were admired – in France, the country of choice for Polish filmmakers in semi-exile. But this is "our" Western perspective: what do we know about the political tensions underlying Polish directors' opposed ideological positions within their own

country? What “we” perceived as national characteristics or received as part of the international art cinema, may well have struck Polish critics and audiences not as national cinema but as state cinema: official, sanctioned, sponsored. Yet were Polish filmmakers, along with their countrymen, not obliged to negotiate in less than half a century a world war, occupation, genocide, a civil war, communism, economic stagnation, censorship, repression and post-communism? Given such tensions and polarities, where do Krzysztof Zanussi, Jerzy Skolimowski, Jerzy Kawalerowicz or Agnieszka Holland fit into the picture we have of Polish cinema? Easiest for “us” to treat them as autonomous “auteurs.” Similarly, Hungary, for a time, was Miklos Jansco, before it became identified with Istvan Szabo, then perhaps with Marta Meszaros and since the mid-1990s most definitely with Bela Tarr. In the case of former Yugoslavia, which for a time was mostly represented by the brilliant and politically non-conformist Dusan Makavejev, we now have directors carefully advertising their specific ethno-national identity, such as Emir Kusturica’s or Danis Tanovic’s Bosnian identity. Some “smaller” European countries whose cinematic assets, to the outsider, seem equally concentrated around one director’s films, such as Greece (Theo Angelopoulos) and Portugal (Manoel de Oliveira), or countries like Austria, Belgium and Norway prefer to see their outstanding films labeled “European,” rather than oblige their directors to lead a quickly ebbing “new wave” national cinema. Michael Haneke would be a case in point: a German-born director with Austrian credentials, who now predominantly works in France. Lars von Trier, together with his Dogma associates, is at once claimed at home as a quintessentially Danish director, and yet his films hardly ever – if at all – refer to Denmark, in contrast to a director from a previous generation, such as Carl Dreyer. Or take Ingmar Bergman, whose films for decades defined both to his countrymen and to the rest of the world what “Swedish” (cinema) meant.

Zooming out even further, one realizes that neither the individual national cinemas nor the label European cinema conjures up much of an image in Asian countries, Latin America or in the United States. A few individual actors (from France or the UK) are known, and once in while a director’s name or a film catches the attention. Yet for traditions as historically rich, and for the numbers of films produced in the combined nations

of the European continent, the impact of its cinema on the world’s audiences in the new century is minimal and still shrinking. If, in the face of this, there has been something of a retrenchment to positions of preserving the national heritage, and of defending a unique cinematic identity, the question this raises is: defend against whom or what? Against the encroachment of Hollywood and



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the relentless spread of television, as is the conventional answer? Or against provincialism, self-indulgence and amateurism, as claimed by more commercially successful makers of popular entertainment both inside and outside Europe, as well as by those European directors who have moved to the US?

On what basis, then, would one want to put forward a claim for a European cinema, at once superseding national cinemas and explaining their historical "decline" over the past twenty-five years? Several possibilities open up, some of which will be taken up in the essays that follow. One might begin by reviewing the dominant categories that have guided the study of films and filmmaking in Europe, examine their tacit assumptions and assess their current usefulness. Besides probing the idea of the "national" in cinematic production (once one acknowledges cross-national co-productions and the role played by television in financing them), the other categories demanding attention are that of European cinema as an auteur cinema, which as already hinted at, invariably tends to be implied by the argument around national cinema. Thirdly, one could also look once more at the concept of "art cinema" as a distinct formal-aesthetic style of narration, as well as an institutional-pragmatic category (i.e., art cinema encompassing all films shown at "art-house" cinemas, whether government subsidized or independently programmed, and thus potentially including revivals or retrospectives of mainstream "classics").

Besides a semantic investigation into the changing function of these traditional definitions, the case for European cinema can also be made by pointing out how persistently the different national cinema have positioned themselves in opposition to Hollywood, at least since the end of the first world war, and increasingly after the second world war, when their respective mainstream film industries began progressively and irreversibly to decline. Indeed, in the set of binary oppositions that usually constitutes the field of academic cinema studies, the American cinema is invariably the significant (bad) Other, around which both the national and "art/auteur"-cinema are defined. As my title implies, this more or less virulent, often emotionally charged opposition between Europe and Hollywood exerts a gravitational pull on all forms of filmmaking in Europe, notably in France, Britain, Italy and Germany. Yet if European national cinemas are held together, and in a sense united by their anti-Hollywood stance, there are nonetheless markedly varying degrees of hostility observable in the different countries at government level or among the film-critical establishment. France is more openly hostile than the Netherlands, and Denmark more successful in keeping its own share of domestic production in the nation's cinemas than, for instance, Germany. No country in Europe except France has a quota system like South Korea, but both countries have come under intense pressure by the WTO to reduce or even abolish this form of protectionism. The US cinema is felt as a threat economically and culturally, even though economically,

European cinema-owners know (and let it be known) that they depend on Hollywood movies for bringing in audiences, week in week out. Economically, European films are so weak that they could not be shown on the big screen if the machinery of the blockbuster did not keep the physical infrastructure of cinema-going and public film culture going. This is the germ of an argument that reverses the usual claim that Hollywood hegemony stifles national cinema, by maintaining that Hollywood's strong global market position is in fact the necessary condition for local or national diversity.²

The legal ramification of Europe's ingrained anti-Americanism in matters cinema are the various measures taken by successive EU initiatives, intended to bolster the audiovisual sector and its affiliated industries within the European Union. The economic framework that initially tried to regulate world trade, including the rivalry between US and the EU, were the GATT (General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs) rounds, in which audiovisual products featured as commercial goods, no different from any others. While notably France insisted on the cinema's cultural character, and wished to see it protected, that is exempted from particular measures of free trade and open access, the World Trade Organization has never been happy with these exemptions and reprieves. The consequence is that the status of the audiovisual sector remains an unresolved issue, bleeding into questions of copyright, subventions, ownership and a film's nationality. The French, for instance, are proud of their *droit d'auteur*, which gives the director exceptional rights over a film even by comparison with other EU countries, but Jean Pierre Jeunet's *UN LONG DIMANCHE DE FIANÇAILLES* could not compete for the best French film award in 2005 because it was co-financed by Warner Brothers. Initiatives taken within the European Union to strengthen cinema and create the legal framework for subsidizing the audiovisual industries, include the various projects supported and administrated by the successive "MEDIA" programs of the Council of Europe, which created such European-wide institutions and enabling mechanisms as Eurimages, EDN (European Documentary Network), Archimedia, etc.³ These, too, despite their bureaucratic character, might be the basis for a definition of what we now understand by European cinema, as I try to argue in a subsequent chapter.

Historicizing the Now

European Cinema: Face to Face with Hollywood implicitly addresses and often explicitly discusses the question of Europe as a political entity, as well as a cultural space, from the distinct perspective of cinema. For instance, the book as a whole stands squarely behind the preserving and conserving tendencies manifest in

most European countries with respect to “their” national cinema. Films are fragile, perishable and physically impermanent. They need institutional and financial support; they require technical but also intellectual resources, in order to maintain their existence. Until only a few decades ago, before the videotape and the DVD, a film’s presence was limited to the moment of its theatrical release, and for some, this fleeting existence is still part of the cinema’s essence. But however passing, transitory and seemingly expendable a particular film may be in the everyday, and however one may feel about the aesthetic implication of such an art of the moment, the cinema is nonetheless the 20th-century’s most precious cultural memory, and thus calls forth not only a nostalgic but also an ethical impulse to try and preserve these moments for posterity.

The book, however, does not endorse the view that Hollywood and television are the threats that cinema in Europe has to be protected from. The first section sets out a broad horizon and sketches an evolving situation over the past two to three decades, which includes the asymmetrical but dynamic relationship of cinema with television, re-appraising the division of labour between cinema and television in giving meaning to the “nation”. The section on authorship and the one entitled “Europe-Hollywood-Europe” are intended to show how much of a two way traffic European cinema has always entertained with Hollywood, however uneven and symbolic some of these exchanges may have been. What needs to be added is that relations are no longer bi-lateral; the film trade and its exchanges of cultural capital have become global, with reputations even in the art cinema and independent sector rapidly extending across national borders, thanks above all to the festival circuit, discussed in a separate chapter below. Hal Hartley, Richard Linklater, Paul Thomas Anderson, Alejandro Amenábar, Tom Tykwer, Fatih Akin, Wong Kar-Wai, Tsai Ming-Liang, Kim Ki-Duk, Abbas Kiarostami and Lars von Trier have, it sometimes seems, more in common with each other than with directors of their respective national cinemas, which paradoxically, gives a new meaning to regional or local attributes. The argument will be that a mutation has taken place; on the one hand, there is an international art cinema which communicates similar concerns across a wide spectrum of settings, but within an identifiable stylistic repertoire. Partly determined by new film technologies, this style repertoire adjusts to the fact that art cinema directors share with their audiences a cinephile universe of film historical references, which favors the evolution of a norm that could be called the international festival film. On the other hand, the lowering of cost due to digital cinema has meant that films – both feature films and documentaries – are fulfilling functions in the domestic space and the public sphere that break down most of our conventional, often binary categories: first and foremost those between art and commerce, into which the opposition between Europe and Hollywood is usually pressed. But the mutations also change our assessment of the

local and the global: in the chapter on festivals, I also argue that signifiers of the regional and the local are often successfully marketed in the global arena, while a more ethnographic impulse and purpose can be detected behind many of the films made in Europe, registering the fact that cinema has become part of culture as a resource for the general good: shared, prepared and feasted upon like food at the dinner table, rather than valued only for the uniquely personal vision of the artist-auteur.

As a collection of essays, the earliest of which were written as film reviews, *European Cinema Face to Face with Hollywood* combines two seemingly contradictory impulses. Writing as a critic, I tried to record the moment and address the present, rather than this or that film's or filmmaker's possible posterity. Other pieces, also addressing the present, set out to develop a perspective of the *longue durée*, or to provide a context that could mediate and historically situate a filmic work or directorial oeuvre. In both cases, therefore, the essays were carried by the conviction that the cinema had a history, which was happening now. The implication being that history might even change, to adapt the catchphrase from *BACK TO THE FUTURE*, although at the time, I was more under the influence of T.S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent," a seminal text in modernist literary history. Perhaps no more is intended than to convey the sense that each film entered into a dialogue with, contested and thereby altered not only those which preceded it, but did so by changing the here-and-now, whenever it brought about a revelatory moment or was an event, usually the reason that made me want to write about them. This makes the book, despite its omissions and selectivity, a history of European cinema since the 1960s, although not in the conventional sense. It does not deal systematically with movements, auteurs, national cinemas, significant films and masterpieces. Rather it is a discursive history, in the sense that the essays carry with them their own history, often precisely because they either directly address the historicity of the present moment, or because they self-consciously place themselves in the position of distance that historians tend to assume, even when they write about the now. Discursive history, also because this historicizing reflexive turn was the *raison d'être* of many of the articles. Several were commissioned by *Sight & Sound* (and its sister publication, the *Monthly Film Bulletin*) for instance, with the brief to step back and reflect on a new phenomenon, to take the longer view or to contextualize a change. Finally, a history of European film studies because the essays also trace a history of discourses, as the critic in me gave way to the academic, and the academic felt obliged to address fields of debate already constituted, not always avoiding the temptation of the meta-discourse.

Shifting the Discourses and Re-aligning the Paradigms

The more the essays reach into the new century, the more they take reflexive as well as retrospective turns. Not because of any disappointment in the state of European cinema or a nostalgic sense of regretting past glories. There is much to



AGNÈS VARDA

love and admire about the films being made by European directors. With talents as diverse and controversial as Pedro Almodóvar, Lars von Trier, Mike Leigh, Agnès Varda, Danny Boyle, Roberto Benigni, Catherine Breillat, Nanni Moretti, Emir Kusturica, Tom Tykwer, Fatih Akin, Claire Denis, and Jean Pierre Jeunet (to name just a few), the last two decades cannot but strike one as a period where it is exciting to be a working critic. But as my task changed from reviewing films to assuming the role of teacher at a university, establishing film studies degree and research programs, certain

constraints imposed themselves about whom one is addressing also when writing, and to what pedagogical end and purpose. Some of the later essays had their origins in lecture notes and position papers, others were given at conferences, and some emerged out of discussions with colleagues and graduate students. Especially crucial were the last three years, when I headed a research group on "Cinema Europe" of about a dozen members, where the issues of European cinema were intensely discussed, sometimes taking a shorthand form, in order to quicker reach a new insight or perspective.

There is, however, one common thread or master-trope that seems to run through many of the essays brought together under the various headings. It has to do with an abiding interest in European cinema as it stands in dialogue with the idea of the nation in the political and historical realm, and on the other, with the function that I see the cinema serving in the spectators' identity-formation. This master trope is that of a historical imaginary, but which in the present essays is mostly elaborated around the idea of the mirror and the image, the self and the other. Like a fractal structure, its can and does reproduce and repeat itself at micro and macro-level, it can be analyzed in specific scenes, it shapes the way a national cinema tries to address its national and international audiences, and it may characterize, at the macro-level, the way that the European cinema has been, and perhaps continues to be "face to face with Hollywood."

A few words about this historical imaginary: I am well aware of how contested a notion it is; how it places itself between film theorists and film

historians, without necessarily convincing either. I have defined it elsewhere at some length, and given some of the heuristic as well as pragmatic reasons why I employ it as a middle level concept, which allows me to hold in place what I see as related issues.⁴ These have to do with my view of the European cinema as a *dispositif* that constitutes, through an appeal to memory and identification, a special form of address, at once highly individual and capable of fostering a sense of belonging. Spectators of European cinema have traditionally enjoyed the privilege of feeling “different”, but in a historically determined set of relations based on highly unstable acts of self-definition and self-differentiation implied by the use of terms such as “auteur”, “art”, “national cinema”, “culture” or “Europe”. As discussed in more detail in a subsequent chapter (Impersonations: National Cinema, Historical Imaginaries), there seems to be some common ground between my “historical imaginary” and the justly famous concept introduced by Benedict Anderson, that of *Imagined Communities*. While I would not even presume to claim such a comparison, an obvious point of difference can be mentioned nonetheless. My idea of a cinematic historical imaginary (first set out in “Primary Identification and the Historical Subject” [1981] and then again, in “Film History and Visual Pleasure: Weimar Cinema” [1984]) was intended to rely on the distinct properties of the cinematic medium, such as composition and *mise-en-scène*, the architecture of the optical point of view, on-screen and off-screen space, depth of field, flatness and frontal shots as the key indices of a formal inscription that could be read historically. They formed the basis on which to elaborate the properties of a representational system that enabled an individual film, a genre or a body of work to address the spectator as a national or art cinema subject. My topic being initially films and filmmakers from Germany making up a national cinema (in the 1920s and again, in the 1970s), the representational system I identified seemed to me to function across relations of mirroring, *mise-en-abyme* and the figure of “the double as other”, in which the self is invited to recognize itself.

Some of the terms were owed to the then dominant psychoanalytical film theories (notably Fredric Jameson’s reading of Lacan’s concept of the imaginary) and to feminist theory, while the historical-political part came from Frankfurt School-inspired studies of social pathology and the analyses done by Alexander Mitscherlich on collective “personality types”. To this already eclectic mix was added an ethnographic dimension. For instance, the mirroring function of such a “historical imaginary” had parallels with Michael Taussig’s reading of Walter Benjamin (in *Mimesis and Alterity*); it was influenced by Marcel Mauss’ theories about intersubjectivity as a process of asymmetrical power-relations, by Cornelius Castoriades,⁵ as well as by Jean Baudrillard’s concept of uneven exchange. At the same time, it was never meant to be systematic, but to help answer a particular set of problems: those encountered when trying to ex-

plain the repetitions and parallels between two classically European instances of a national cinema, Weimar Germany and the New German Cinema, across the gap and rupture of fascism. In both cases, the significant other was Hollywood, with which this national cinema, in two quite different phases, had established mirror-relationships, in order to work through the displaced presence of an uncannily familiar other: the popular cinema of the Nazi period, framed by two catastrophic histories of self-inflicted national defeat, of humiliation and shame, that of WWI and then WW II. Revisiting Siegfried Kracauer's study of post-WWI films as a national cinema (a term he never uses) had thus to do with a parallel interest in the New German Cinema, in order to derive from it the idea of a historical imaginary, i.e., a concept that was both cinematically specific and historically grounded. This eventually resulted in two books on German cinema, and a monograph on R.W. Fassbinder – all exploring these shifting relations of identification and self-differentiation.

Parallel to this work on German cinema, and in some cases preceding it, I published essays analyzing what in retrospect now appear as similar sets of mirror-relations and over-identifications in France ("Two Weeks in Another Country – Hollywood and French Cinephilia", 1972) and Britain ("Images for Sale", 1984), as well as other essays on new waves, "national identity" and the national self-image. In two more recent contributions, one on "German Cinema, Face to Face with Hollywood: Looking into a Two-Way Mirror" (written in 2002), as well as one about films from the Balkans (from 2003) the same trope appears, differently contextualized and further developed: putting forward the idea of a national cinema (as a theoretical construction) always existing face to face with an "other". Although initially developed in response to a "demand" coming from the "other," namely universities in the United States asking me to lecture on these subjects,⁶ I should perhaps mention that much of this work on Weimar cinema and the New German cinema was done while I was teaching at the University of East Anglia, where I had the pleasure of discussing my book on *New German Cinema* with my then colleague Andrew Higson, who went on to write his own essay on national cinema, "The Concept of National Cinema" (1989), which soon became the standard point of reference for all subsequent contributions to this debate.⁷

My own involvement in the national cinema debate, as well as my conscious, but often also unconscious adherence to the trope of the "historical imaginary" and its theoretical configuration, have thus largely determined the selection of the present essays and may explain some of the more glaring omissions, such as a discussion of Jean-Luc Godard, possibly the most "European" director working continuously over the whole of the historical period here considered. The sequence and the structure of the different sections of the book are not chronological. They partly retrace the formation and repercussions of the three

dominant discourses that have until recently defined European cinema in the academic realm: “national cinema”, “auteur cinema”, “art cinema”. One could call these the paradigms of autonomy: *National cinema* (the choice of making an auteur cinema represent the nation, rather than the stars-and-genre commercial cinema of a given country). Most national cinemas are (re-) defined as a consequence of self-declared movements or schools (the “new waves”, which in Europe started in Italy with neo-realism of the late 1940s, includes Britain’s kitchen sink films of the 1950s, the French *nouvelle vague* and other “new” cinemas throughout the 1960s and early 70s in Poland, Germany, the Czech Republic). *Auteur cinema* (the director as autonomous artist and representative of his country) usually goes hand in hand with *art cinema* (the formal, stylistic and narratological parameters which distinguish art cinema from classical i.e., Hollywood narrative, but also the institutional contexts, insofar as art cinema is made up of those films normally programmed in “art houses”, a term more at home in the US and in Britain than in continental Europe, where cinemathèques, “*art et essai*” cinemas or the so-called “*Programmkinos*” fulfil a similar function). The second half of the collection re-centres and de-centres these paradigms of autonomy. “Europe-Hollywood-Europe” shows how productively dependent the national cinemas of France, Britain and Germany have been on their implied other, while “Central Europe looking West” tries to give some indication of what acts of looking and being looked at have been excluded when defining “European cinema” in terms of its Western nations. “Europe haunted by History and Empire” de-centers “auteur” and “nation” by re-centering them around history and memory, as Europe’s colonial past, political debts and troubled ethical legacy are gradually being transformed by the cinema into cultural capital: commodified, according to some into a “heritage industry”, capable of creating new kinds of identity, according to others. In either case, by dwelling so insistently on the (recent) past, European cinema distinguishes itself from Hollywood and Asian cinemas. In the essays brought together under this heading, the origins of the new discourse on history in the cinema are traced back to the 1970s and 80s. The section on “Border-Crossings: Filmmakers without a Passport” further de-centers “national cinema” without abandoning the “auteur” by highlighting the efforts – not always successful or recognized – of individuals who have tried to make films either in Europe or addressed to European audiences, from transitional and transnational spaces, including explicitly political spaces. Notably the essays on Latin American filmmakers or on European directors using Latin American topics and settings lead to the final chapter, which traces some of the intersections of European cinema with Third Cinema and World Cinema.

The national cinemas discussed are those of Britain, Germany and to a lesser extent, France. One might object that this hardly justifies the words “European

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