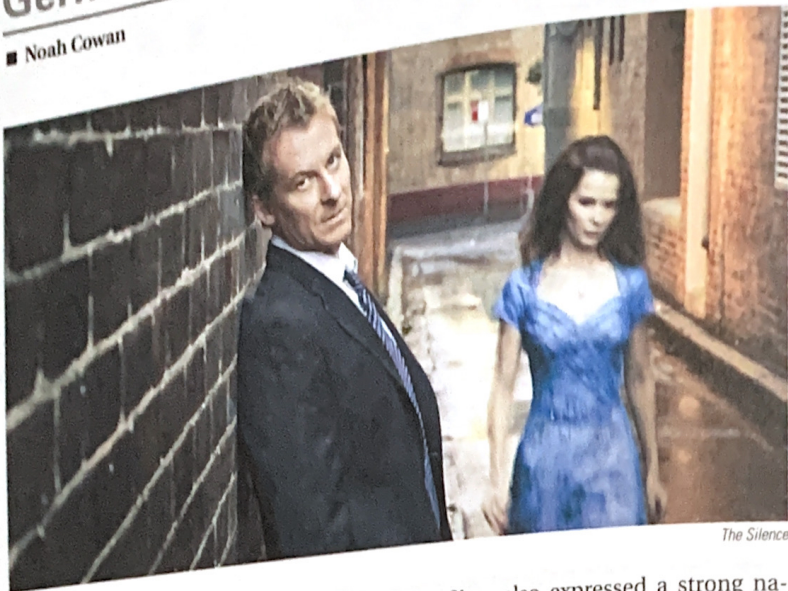


# Germany and Australia: Sleeping Giants Awake

■ Noah Cowan



The Silence



The Lives of Others



Summer Storm

From the early seventies until the mid-eighties, Germany and Australia were film powerhouses, giving birth to top-tier directors and a steady stream of masterpieces.

From (then West) Germany, an incomplete list of filmmaking talent is still awesome. Rainer Werner Fassbinder's sexual provocations and caustic put-downs of the bourgeoisie, Werner Herzog's and Wim Wenders's contrasting male dreamscapes, and Margarethe von Trotta and Volker Schlöndorff's politically charged social critiques all coalesced around a desire to push cinematic language to its limits.

At the same time, Australia was creating a specific kind of realism, tinged with psychological horror and obsessed with landscape, issues of colonial history, Aboriginal culture and self-mythology. Several great storytellers emerged at once, with a bracing urgency: Peter Weir, Fred Schepisi, Bruce Beresford and Phillip Noyce were perhaps the most prominent, but the list ran deep.

The magic in both cases came not only from the sheer volume of exceptional work, but also through a strong sense of shared goals and aesthetic direction.

These films also expressed a strong national sensibility; they were instantly recognizable as German or Australian.

But then things changed. In Germany, Fassbinder died, Wenders and Herzog moved on and the political urgency of the seventies dissipated. Many of Australia's leading lights left for Hollywood, gutting the ranks there.

The last few years, however, have seen the re-emergence of fascinating and unique cinemas from these very different nations, arising from identifiably grouped, like-minded directors.

The boundless energy and punky sexuality of Tom Tykwer's *Run Lola Run* (98) inspired a group of young, male filmmakers to start making commercially minded, culturally adventurous cinema. Wolfgang Becker's *Good Bye, Lenin!* (02) and Hans Weingartner's *The Edukators* (04) are perhaps the most prominent international success stories from this group thus far, but scads of young filmmakers, sharing a similar confidence and dynamism, continue to emerge: Hendrik Hölzemann (*Off Beat*, 04); Marco Kreuzpaintner (*Summer Storm*, 04); Andreas

Struck (*Chill Out*, 99); Maren Ade (*The Forest for the Trees*, 03); and, in this year's Festival, Stefan Krohmer (*Summer '04*, 06) and Chris Kraus (*Four Minutes*, 06).

Much like Schlöndorff, von Trotta and (occasionally) Fassbinder in the seventies, this generation seeks to delineate some form of rebellion, but within the confined constructs of an age that seems less promising politically. Their characters are young and restless, their scripts mostly focused on generation-specific interactions. Many of these films contain dangerous, highly sexualized moments meant to disquiet conventional mores – and no one is seriously punished for crossing these boundaries. You might call this group the “post-Unification punks”; they are wary of what Germany's future looks like, yet they delight in the cultural specificities of their nation and its regions. At any rate, they are currently the only group of filmmakers in Europe presenting a credible cinema for and about young people.

Counterbalancing these “bad boys” is another group, only now coalescing around a very different aesthetic ap-