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Heimat *and* History: Viehjud Levi¹

Johannes von Moltke

We, however, had not lost our country, but had to realize that it had never been ours.

—Jean Améry, “Wieviel Heimat braucht der Mensch?”²

Stage and Screen: The Mise-en-scène of Local Memory

Viehjud Levi, Thomas Strittmatter’s prize-winning debut as an 18-year-old playwright, is a work of imaginative historiography about a Jewish cattle trader. Pieced together from local memories in Strittmatter’s Black Forest hometown, St. Georgen, the basic conceit of the play is both simple and inconclusive. In a rural community suffering from the effects of the economic crisis of the late 1920s and early 1930s, Levi helps the farmer Andreas Horger and his wife Kresenz to make a living. This delicate but traditional economic balance breaks down with the arrival of a group of train workers whose presence revives the local economy, but who compete with Levi for Horger’s cattle. Besides capital and modern technology, the workers also bring Nazi ideology and anti-Semitism, for which they find a fertile ground in the *Schwarzwald*. Levi is ostracized by the workers as well as by the locals, including Horger. He dies after an altercation in the local inn.

In Strittmatter’s account, the purpose of the play was “to find out, even if only in my imagination, what happened to Levi after Hitler’s seizure of

1. I am grateful to Julia Hell, Lutz Koepnick, and Rick Rentschler for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this article.

2. Jean Améry, “How Much Home Does a Person Need?,” *At The Mind’s Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and Its Realities*, trans. Sidney Rosenfeld & Stella P. Rosenfeld (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1980) 50.

power, because nobody knows this anymore, and nobody wants to know anymore.”³ Working against (active) forgetting, Strittmatter assembled what he describes as “wisps of narrative” [*Erzählfetzen*] into a play whose structure reflects the fragmentary nature of how the locals remember Levi’s story. Accordingly, *Viehjud Levi* is episodic at best, its eight brief scenes linked by an elusive temporality that stretches over a number of months. Rather than telling a coherent story, Strittmatter’s play investigates the rise of anti-Semitism in the provinces during the early years of the Third Reich following a principle of reduction. As the author puts it, “one does not create by addition but by subtraction.”⁴ The small cast of four, the unadorned language, short sentences, and the rudimentary structure of the play strip down social relations, emphasizing the disturbing hierarchies and the underlying violence in this provincial hamlet. In his notes, Strittmatter calls for productions of the play to be “characterized by sparseness [*Kargheit*]. Sparseness in language and in the acting, sparseness in lighting and set design.”⁵ The 1982 premiere of *Viehjud Levi* under the direction of Klaus Heydenreich used a minimalist set. Critics described the production as “simple, precise [...] and absolutely artless,” “as unpretentious and ‘primitive’ as few other scenes on any stage in recent memory.”⁶

Didi Danquart’s 1999 film adaptation of Strittmatter’s play opens onto a verdant landscape that stretches into the distance. Mountain ranges covered with forests in different hues of green glow in the sunlight under a vast expanse of sky. A light waltz accompanies the first credits, and the camera moves down to reveal a man sitting in the left foreground, a rabbit cage beside him. Dressed in dark clothes and looking out over the hills with his back to the camera, the solitary figure imbues the composition with a decidedly romantic aspect. The figure/ground relationship with Benjamin Levi (Bruno Cathomas) in the foreground and the Black Forest at his feet turns nature into a sublime spectacle. At the same time, the upbeat music and soft light tame the sublime properties of the image and set the tone for a romantic comedy. Levi tells Jankel, his rabbit, that he has come to the Black Forest for romance as much as for economic gain.

3. Thomas Strittmatter, *Viehjud Levi und andere Stücke* (Zürich: Diogenes, 1992) 8.

4. Quoted in Gunna Wendt, *Der Tod ist eine Maschine aus Eis: Annäherung an Thomas Strittmatter* (Munich: A1, 1997) 91.

5. Strittmatter 9.

6. Gerhard Stadelmeier, “Nix isch passiert! Thomas Strittmatter’s Volkstheater: *Viehjud Levi* und *Polenweiher* — Trauerarbeit im Vergessenen,” *Theater Heute* (Mar. 1983): 5 and 4.

Such carefully composed landscape images recur throughout Danquart's film, and they are but one indication that the filmmaker has chosen not to adopt Strittmatter's aesthetic of sparseness. The film's cinematography, with its saturated colors and its carefully choreographed camera movements, inverts the original's principle of reduction. Likewise, the studied *mise-en-scène*, from the careful blocking of the actors to the use of gleaming period cars and props, gives the film a rich texture. In Danquart's script, Strittmatter's deliberately small cast was expanded, most prominently by Lisbeth (Caroline Ebner), the daughter of Andres and Kresenz and the object of Levi's romantic interest.⁷ With its augmented ensemble, the film's narrative is far more "opulent" than Strittmatter's "sparse" episodes. Where the play featured an elliptical, though didactic, succession of scenes analyzing Levi's violent expulsion from the increasingly anti-Semitic local community, the film provides both more nuance and broader melodramatic strokes. We watch the unfolding love story between Lisbeth and Levi, we take sides in the rivalry between Levi and Paul, and we have ample time to appreciate the compositional mastery with which the film transports the Black Forest locales to the screen.

The film transforms the Brechtian didacticism of the play into a melodramatic objectlesson. Through a complex dramaturgy of identifications, Danquart rewrites Strittmatter's distancing techniques into a form of cinematic address that allows (indeed solicits) emotional empathy.⁸ Lending the figure of Levi an obstinate naiveté that makes him appear unaware of the anti-Semitic climate and his impending ostracism from the community, the film generates a melodramatic hierarchy of information.⁹ As spectators we are aware (both historically and dramaturgically) of the danger facing Levi, while the fictional character himself continues to believe in the good faith of the locals — and, indeed, of

7. The Nazis, whom Strittmatter's play identifies only as "*Bahnmenschen*" [railway people], are individualized in the film, as Danquart introduces the engineer Kohler (Ulrich Noethen), and his enigmatic secretary and fiancée Fräulein Neuner (Martina Gedeck). The film also adds the figure of Paul Braxmeier (Bernd Michael Lade), an unemployed pseudo-communist loafer from Berlin, who unsettles ideological frontlines and competes with Levi for Lisbeth's attention.

8. This is not to say that Danquart knows nothing of distancing techniques. His treatment of character and the often static blocking of the actors led some critics to speak of *Viehjud Levi* as a "Brechtian" film. But it remains important to distinguish between the different registers and degrees of distance and empathy that characterize the play and the film.

9. On the hierarchy of information in melodrama, see Steve Neale, "Melodrama and Tears," *Screen* 27.6 (Nov./Dec. 1986): 6-23.

the Nazis. This naiveté turns Levi's fate into the material for a melodramatic narrative structured around delayed recognition. Levi understands the extent of provincial anti-Semitism only when it is too late.

The most significant revision of Strittmatter's material (and also of Levi's historical fate) occurs at the end of the film. If Strittmatter provides alternative versions of Levi's death, Danquart leaves him a way out. When the Nazis publicly humiliate and force Levi into singing a song at the local inn, Lisbeth fires a pistol into the air and clears an escape route. A series of static tableaux, including extreme close-ups of both Levi and Lisbeth, prolongs the scene's tension. Lisbeth implores and commands Levi to "leave! [*geh!*]... leave already! ... leave!" These are the last words of the film, after which we cut to an extreme long shot of the inn nestled in the dark silhouette of the Black Forest. From the distance, we see Levi exit the inn and start his truck. The final image lingers on the tail lights as they fade into the distance.

Danquart's ending has been the object of some debate, particularly given the fact that he rewrites not just Strittmatter's fiction but also the historical fact of Levi's death.¹⁰ While reviewers by and large applauded the workmanship of Danquart's film, its melodramatic approach irritated a number of critics, who faulted it for being "heavy-handed," for its "artistic cowardice," for its "formal conventionality," and for ostensibly neglecting to "inquire about history, let alone politics."¹¹ While the latter complaint in particular misses Danquart's specific intervention in the contemporary cinematic landscape, it does position the rewriting of Strittmatter's story within a historiographical debate. Unavoidably, Danquart's "poetic postrealism"¹² with its aesthetics of opulence has consequences for the film's politics of history and memory as compared to those of the play. One might well argue that Danquart's film¹³ recasts Strittmatter's historical parable about anti-Semitism as a historically situated love story in which

10. For a probing analysis of this ending, see Lutz Koepnick's essay "Reframing the Past: Heritage Cinema and Holocaust in the 1990s," in this issue.

11. Respectively, reviews by Marc Hairapetian, "Heimat unterm Hakenkreuz," *Berliner Morgenpost* 30 Sep. 1999; Olaf Möller, "Ein Film der keinem wehtun will," *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger* 2 Oct. 1999; Martin Mund, "Der Einbruch des Hasses," *Neues Deutschland* 30 Sep. 1999; Niklaus Habluetzel, "Aktualisierte Wahrheit," *tageszeitung*, 30 Sep. 1999.

12. Georg Seeßlen, "Ländliche Schuld," *Die Zeit* 30 Sep. 1999.

13. Danquart described *Viehjud Levi* as "above all a romance" (quoted in Seeßlen). A reviewer complained: "As a tender love story dressed in historical garb, *Viehjud Levi* is a successful film. But it has little to tell us on the political or historical level" (Silvia Halensleben, "Die Bauern in den Bergen," *Tagesspiegel* 30 Sep. 1999).

rural anti-Semitism plays an important but decidedly reduced role.

Both versions of *Viehhud Levi* engage consciously with German history, and they need to be judged in relation to an ongoing cultural discourse on the Nazi past and its aesthetic representation. Given that this discourse is itself historical and subject to shifts over time, we must historicize the two texts as distinct cultural “events.” Not only do a dramatic text and a film narrative focalize (discourses about) the past in formally different ways. They also respond to markedly different constellations *within* ongoing discourses (in 1981 and 1999) on the representation of the Nazi past. Separated by almost twenty years, Strittmatter’s play and Danquart’s film may have something to tell us about the shifting discursive functions of theater, cinema, and culture in the Federal Republic both before and after unification.

Beyond that, in their shared focus on the insidious transformation of provincial life during the early 1930s, both versions of *Viehhud Levi* also intervene in a discourse on *Heimat*. A German “keyword,” the notion of *Heimat* has long functioned as a synthetic, polysemic, and (therefore) ideologically volatile term in the negotiation of locality, place, and tradition in the face of historical change. *Heimat* cuts across such diverse areas of public and intellectual life as historical beautification societies [*Heimatvereine*], pedagogy, locational politics, historiography, art, literature, and notably the cinema, where the *Heimatfilm* has been canonized as “Germany’s only indigenous and historically most enduring genre.”¹⁴

In the Black Forest of *Viehhud Levi*, *Heimat* meets history. The functioning of the *Heimat* tradition in *Viehhud Levi* is overdetermined by the play’s and the film’s explicit concern with the Nazi past. Although both Strittmatter and Danquart have insisted on some transhistorical universality in their portrayal of the fight between friends and foes, perpetrators and victims,¹⁵ both the play and the film use the trope of *Heimat* to investigate the specific historical situation of the early 1930s. In his introduction to the play, Strittmatter makes explicit the link between *Heimat*

14. Thomas Elsaesser, *New German Cinema: A History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1989) 141.

15. A reviewer of Strittmatter’s play writes that Levi “becomes a victim only because this is the thirties. Later — or earlier — it could be someone else” (Stadelmeier 5). Danquart waters down the historical specificity of his play even more in a comment on its function as a parable of friend-turned-foe. Noting that “the construction of the foreign and the self is the *leitmotif* for the entire film,” Danquart claims that he wished to illustrate “the recognition that the neighbor, the friend can become the other . . . , the enemy, virtually overnight” (as quoted in Moritz Dehn, “Heimatfilm,” *Freitag* 15 Oct. 1999).

and history by claiming that “for me, to tell [this story] meant to approach the past and also the landscape. A reflexion on my notion of *Heimat*.”¹⁶ Stressing the importance of landscape and the past, Strittmatter directs our attention to the historical dimension of place. The investigation of this particular spatio-historical nexus has long been the function of the *Heimatfilm* with its emphasis on the division between inside and outside, local place and foreign space. Linking questions of identity, space, and history, the *Heimatfilm* is concerned with the relation of the local and of tradition to the larger space of the nation-state and to the threat — or prospect — of historical change. It is fitting, then, that Danquart and his producer Martin Hagemann should have set out to turn Strittmatter’s play into a *Heimatfilm*. “We have tried,” claims producer Martin Hagemann, “to aim for a bright and elated narrative style like in a *Heimatfilm*.”¹⁷ Critics in turn called *Viehjud Levi* a “*Heimatfilm* brushed against the grain — perhaps in Fassbinder’s sense,” a “different *Heimatfilm*,” or, in a more sensationalist vein, “a *Heimat* epic under the Swastika.”¹⁸ Such catchy slogans, however, beg a number of questions. If *Viehjud Levi* is a *Heimatfilm*, how does it engage with that genre’s history? And if it is a *Heimatfilm* with a difference, what sets it apart from previous exercises? The following sections explore some answers to these questions. I first discuss aspects of the *Heimat* tradition in film and literature that are particularly relevant to both the play and the film versions of *Viehjud Levi*. I then turn to the way in which Danquart’s film reworks the *Heimatfilm*’s generic concern with self and other, inside and outside. The concluding section returns to the question of *Heimat* and history to suggest how we might understand the specific function of Danquart’s film in the present cinematic context. For the interest of *Viehjud Levi* ultimately lies in its staging of the local at the intersection of *Heimat* and German history.

Contexts and Intertexts: Volksstück and (Anti-)Heimatfilm

Of course, *Viehjud Levi* is hardly the only text to explore this intersection. Revising the ostensibly ahistorical *Heimatfilm* of the 1950s,

16. Strittmatter 8.

17. Quoted in http://www.german-cinema.de/magazine/1998/03/prodreport/8-produkt_E.html. Danquart likewise speaks of his film as a “*Heimatfilm* in the sense that it deals with very particular characteristics and formations, which could exist in this form only in one specific area, in this case the Black Forest” (quoted in Dehn).

18. G. Waeger, “Von Heimat und Ausgrenzung,” *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 5 Nov. 1999; Thomas Klengenmaier, “Unser braunes Dorf,” *Stuttgarter Zeitung* 1 Oct. 1999; Hairapetian, “Heimat unterm Hakenkreuz.”

playwrights and filmmakers have repeatedly (re)turned to tropes of *Heimat* as conduits for German history. This cultural re-evaluation of *Heimat* was part of a broader trend in West Germany after 1968. Advocating a “new regionalism,” the New Left espoused a politics of the local that found its most visible political expression in the rise of the Green Party. In a parallel development, historians began to focus on the minutiae of local life in a turn to the history of everyday life [*Alltagsgeschichte*]. Notions of *Heimat* gained new currency; their traditionally conservative connotations became available for reappropriation by the Left. By the beginning of the 1980s, critics diagnosed a “renaissance of *Heimat* feeling.”¹⁹

These developments provided a formative context for the young Strittmatter who, in 1980, had begun work on a projected *Heimat* novel with the warning: “Beware! [This] is supposed to become a *Heimat* novel, or at least a *Heimat* story. That is difficult [. . .] for on the one hand, it is a worn-out genre and on the other, it is currently ‘in’ [modern].” A year later, he initiated a reading and discussion in his hometown of St. Georgen on the topic of “Regional and *Heimat* Literature” under the title “Ganghofer’s Erben?” (“Ganghofer’s Inheritors,” a reference to the popular author of countless conservative *Heimat* novels from around the turn of the century).²⁰ During the same year, Strittmatter’s wrote *Viehjud Levi*. This shift from the *Heimat* novel (which was never published) to dramatic literature also involved a move from Ludwig Ganghofer to Ödön von Horváth and Franz Xaver Kroetz.

With its Brechtian aesthetics of sparseness, *Viehjud Levi* harkens to the rediscovery of the *Volksstück* in the late 1960s. Focusing on the dynamics of exploitation, oppression, and violence in a small rural community, *Viehjud Levi* is clearly identifiable as a critical piece of *Volks theater* in the tradition of Horváth or Marie-Luise Fleisser, a debt explicitly acknowledged by the playwright.²¹ Writing in the 1920s, Fleisser and Horváth had infused the long-standing popular, melodramatic and comedic formulas of the *Volks theater* with social critique. Plays like Fleisser’s well-known *Fegefeuer in Ingolstadt* [*Purgatory in Ingolstadt*] invert the provincial idyll, laying bare an underlying social violence that corrupts

19. Wilfried v. Bredow & Hans-Friedrich Foltin, *Zwiespältige Zufluchten: Zur Renaissance des Heimatgefühls* (Bonn: Dietz, 1981).

20. Volker Michel, “*Ich komme auch vom Lande und bin ganz froh darum*”: Thomas Strittmatter und St. Georgen im Schwarzwald (Marbach: Deutsche Schillergesellschaft, 2001) 9-10.

21. Strittmatter 9.

the very sense of community. In these plays, the principal characters are not so much members of an intact rural *Gemeinschaft* as they are outcasts who suffer under the bigotry of social and religious norms. Situating himself within this tradition, Strittmatter, whom Willi Winkler eulogized as the “rightful heir of the *Volksstück*,”²² also was able to draw on more recent work by Martin Sperr, the author of *Jagdszenen aus Niederbayern* (*Hunting Scenes from Lower Bavaria*, 1968), and especially Kroetz, with whose plays *Viehjud Levi* shares a common conception of dramatic language and theatrical aesthetics more generally.

But for Strittmatter to espouse the critical *Volksstück* in 1981 meant inheriting not only a theatrical tradition but confronting a closely related cinematic legacy as well. As the debut of a playwright who would later collaborate as a scriptwriter with the director Jan Schütte on such films as *Drachenfutter* (*Dragon Chow*, 1987) and *Auf Wiedersehen Amerika* (*Bye Bye America*, 1994), the play *Viehjud Levi* also evokes a number of films produced a decade earlier. As Eric Rentschler has pointed out, the radical *Volksstück* of the late sixties contributed directly to the rise of what he calls the “*Anti-Heimatfilm*.”²³ Adaptations, related plots, overlapping casts, and kindred formal strategies link the plays of Sperr and Kroetz with this cycle of films from the late 1960s and early 1970s. Peter Fleischmann’s adaptation of *Jagdszenen aus Niederbayern*, Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s rendering of Kroetz’s play *Wildwechsel* (*Jail Bait*, 1972), Volker Schlöndorff’s *Der plötzliche Reichtum der armen Leute von Kombach* (*The Sudden Wealth of the Poor People of Kombach*, 1971), and Reinhard Hauff’s *Matthias Kneissl* (1971) all focused on “the disenfranchised victims of German history, poachers and robbers rebelling against social structures that allowed them no other alternative.”²⁴

Viehjud Levi participates in this rewriting of history “from below,” but its story about anti-Semitism in the Black Forest also offers an important corrective to the emerging anti-*Heimat* historiography. The critical history, or *Alltagsgeschichte*, adumbrated by the plays and films of the 1960s and 1970s had revolved primarily around revisionist accounts of class, as in Schlöndorff’s *Kombach*; of the relationship between the individual and

22. Willi Winkler, “Das glückliche Genie,” *tageszeitung* 4 Sep. 1995.

23. Eric Rentschler, “Calamity Prevails over the Country: Young German Filmmakers Revisit the Homeland,” in *West German Film in the Course of Time: Reflections on the Twenty Years Since Oberhausen* (Bedford Hills: Redgrave, 1984) 103-25. Other designations of this phenomenon include “new *Heimatfilm*” or “critical *Heimatfilm*.”

24. Rentschler 111.

the state, as in *Matthias Kneissl*; or of sexuality, as in Fleischmann's *Jagdszenen*. In the words of a reviewer of *Kombach*, these films centered on peasants "who survived the age of Martin Luther but did not live long enough to be energized by the age of Karl Marx."²⁵ This approach to German history is readily attributable to the role of the *Anti-Heimatfilm* in the culture of the New Left circa 1970. But in its focus on "people of humble origins, the lower classes, the exploited, the forever defeated and the rebellious," the critical reappropriations of the *Heimat* genre were surprisingly silent about anti-Semitism and the Holocaust. Given its analytic sympathy for the disenfranchised and the victims of history, the *Anti-Heimatfilm* had had remarkably little to say about the plight of the Jews. Thus, even though Peter Fleischmann claimed that his *Jagdszenen aus Niederbayern* offered an analysis of "everyday fascism" in the Federal Republic of Germany, the history of National Socialism remains markedly absent in Fleischmann's or the other *Anti-Heimatfilm* scenarios.²⁶ In keeping with the sometimes heated rhetoric of the New Left (including Jürgen Habermas's term "left-wing fascism"), Sperr's application of the term "fascist" to the realities of provincial life in 1968 elided the specificity and historical reality of fascism in the Third Reich — and the role of anti-Semitism and genocide in particular.

Strittmatter's unique contribution gains even clearer contours if we set it against another cinematic intertext that emerged from the same cultural moment. While Strittmatter was busy organizing discussions on *Heimat* literature in the Black Forest and drafting *Heimat* stories, the filmmaker Edgar Reitz was gathering "wisps of narrative" from locals in the Hunsrück region during the late 1970s²⁷ and writing a screenplay for a television series entitled *Heimat*. The completed film was first shown in Munich's "Arri" cinema in June of 1984, a year and a half after the premiere of *Viehjud Levi* at the *Theater der Altstadt* in Stuttgart.²⁸ As a

25. Peter Harcourt, "The Sudden Wealth of the Poor People of Kombach," *Film Quarterly* (Fall 1980): 63; quoted in Rentschler 118.

26. For a discussion of Sperr's *Jagdszenen aus Niederbayern* in terms of "everyday fascism," see Daniel Alexander Schacht, *Fluchtpunkt Provinz: Der neue Heimatfilm zwischen 1968 und 1972* (Münster: MAKS, 1991) 30-61.

27. This part of Reitz's *Heimat* project, an oral history of sorts, resulted in a documentary entitled *Geschichten aus den Hunsrückdörfern* [*Tales from the Hunsrück Villages*] that premiered at the Berlin Film Festival in February 1982.

28. There is a significant generational difference, however. Strittmatter was only 20 when he published *Viehjud Levi*, whereas Reitz, who was born in 1932, signed the Oberhausen Manifesto at age 30, and turned 50 while working on *Heimat*.

generic intertext for *Viehjud Levi*, Reitz's *Heimat* provides a particularly conspicuous example of the layered generic, historical, and aesthetic stakes involved in any return to notions of *Heimat* in the early 1980s.

Like Strittmatter's play, Reitz's series is fundamentally concerned with the constellation of *Heimat* and history. As Alon Confino argues, *Heimat* remains "one of the most intriguing interpretations of German history in recent years."²⁹ However, to many of its critics, *Heimat* also manifested the political limits of the more general *Heimat* renaissance. Charges of "born-again German nostalgia"³⁰ centered on the fact that, whatever his original intentions, Reitz had taken a revisionist approach to recent German history — including film history. The contested place of *Heimat* in the canon of the New German Cinema was secured, among other things, by Reitz's return to a cinematic genre that had been compromised by its reactionary and ostensibly escapist politics of history and memory in the 1950s. With his lavish, lingering wide-angle shots of the Hunsrück, his selective telescoping of national history into the bucolic rhythms of the rural, and his unmistakable empathy for even the most wayward characters in the historical fiction, Reitz had gone one step too far, some argued, by reviving conventions of the "classical" *Heimatfilm* along with his borrowings from the *Anti-Heimatfilm*.³¹

If such critiques indicate the stakes involved in the return to notions of *Heimat*, historiographical concerns weighed even heavier in the debates about Reitz's film. *Heimat* revisited the history of the twentieth century through the trope of local memory. "Remember, remember, this is a film about what Germans remember,"³² commented Timothy Garton Ash.

29. Alon Confino, "Edgar Reitz's *Heimat* and German Nationhood: Film, Memory, and Understandings of the Past," *German History* 16.2 (June 1998): 185.

30. Gertrud Koch, "How Much Naiveté Can We Afford? The New *Heimat* Feeling," *New German Critique* 36 (Fall 1985): 14.

31. Koch isolates a "dualistic structure typical of almost any *Heimatfilm*: the mean and rich farmer, Wiegand, has a good daughter who marries the poor but good guy, a constellation that derives from the peasant theater." See "That's Why Our Mothers Were Such Nice Chicks," *New German Critique* 36 (Fall 1985): 19. Reitz's debt to the classic *Heimatfilm* arguably goes well beyond the "stock narrative patterns" and his obvious sentimental penchants, although to claim that "the film basically doesn't differ much from the mainstream *Heimatfilm*" is surely to overstate the case and to overlook some of its innovative aspects.

32. Timothy Garton Ash, "The Life of Death," *New York Review of Books* (19 Dec. 1985): 26. Jim Hoberman struck a similarly caustic tone in his review for the *Village Voice*, entitled "Once in a Reich Time": "War casualties aside, [Reitz's] *Heimat* is virtually without victims. Short on irony as *Heimat* is, it's difficult not to marvel at the blatant tokenism with which the film handles the more problematic aspects of German history." The review is reprinted in *New German Critique* 36 (Fall 1985): 9.

“Some things they remember in full color. Some in sepia. Others they prefer to forget. Memory is selective.” Gertrud Koch reiterated this critique in an influential discussion of the symptomatic “fade-outs” that punctuated Reitz’s memory-work. In particular, Koch charged *Heimat* with reproducing “the standard ellipses concerning the extermination of the Jews. Whenever real horror would have to be thematized, the film resorts to these fade-out strategies which are analogous to the defensive mechanisms of experience and as such elude critical reflection.”³³

In response to the criticism that *Heimat* “bracketed” Auschwitz, Reitz argued that “if I had included this aspect the whole story would have taken a different turn.”³⁴ Without belaboring the disingenuous nature of this remark, I would suggest that Danquart’s film provides a far more intriguing response to the criticism leveled at Reitz. A *Heimat* story that “takes a different turn” by placing a Jewish character at its center, *Viehhud Levi* remains one of the few films to engage with the tradition of the *Heimatfilm* for the purpose of investigating anti-Semitism in the historical setting of fascist Germany.³⁵ In particular, where Reitz’s “standard ellipses” could be seen as symptoms of his inability to negotiate the role of difference and heterogeneity within the space of *Heimat*,³⁶ Danquart stages that space as a site for the complex articulation of self and other, inside and outside.

Insiders and Outsiders: The Limits of Heimat

The *Heimatfilm* has functioned historically to negotiate spatial and temporal shifts or disruptions on the limited terrain of provincial space. Without the appearance of a stranger or the confrontation with the “other” [*Fremde*], it is difficult to conceive of a *Heimat* narrative. Once this confrontation occurs, however, it either leads to the exorcism of the threat and the reestablishment of a “geography of exclusion;”³⁷ or the

33. Koch, “That’s Why Our Mothers Were Such Nice Chicks” 16f.

34. Quoted in Koch, “How Much Naiveté Can We Afford?” 13.

35. Jörg Graser’s film *Abraham’s Gold* presents an interesting case in this regard. Though Graser’s semi-fictional narrative is situated not during the Nazi-era but in present-day Germany and Poland, it consciously presents itself as a *Heimatfilm* that deals explicitly with the Holocaust — more explicitly, indeed, than even *Viehhud Levi*.

36. This is one of the central claims of Eric Santner’s careful critique of *Heimat* in *Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory, and Film in Postwar Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1990) 57-102.

37. See David Sibley, *Geographies of Exclusion: Society and Difference in the West* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

confrontation results in a negotiated settlement between the inertia of *Heimat* and the pressures coming from outside. While critics have by and large considered the *Heimatfilm* of the 1950s to operate in the exclusionary mode, the function of *Heimat* as “safe” place in which to selectively and conservatively embrace the “other” is far more prominent during the classical era of the *Heimatfilm* than has generally been acknowledged. Films as diverse as *Die Landärztin* (*The Country Doctor*, 1958), *Die Trapp-Familie in Amerika* (*The Trapp Family in America*, 1958), or *Waldwinter* (*Forest Winter*, 1958) use the trope of *Heimat* to generate imaginary compromises between progress and tradition, between the seemingly immutable customs of rural *Gemeinschaft* and the economic demands of the *Wirtschaftswunder* [economic miracle].

Viehjud Levi presents an intriguing variation on this often formulaic structure by multiplying and splitting the position of the outsider. Offering us three different figures as variable “others” to the complacent *Heimat*, Danquart elaborates an overdetermined web of identification and distance in which the viewer is periodically forced to redistribute her/his sympathies and thus to reflect on the historical dimension of the unfolding story as well as on the limits of *Heimat*. Arguably the most ambiguous of the three outsider figures is Levi himself. Hailing from a town called Sulzburg where, he says, “they’re all like me,” Levi defines himself exterritorially when he explains to Lisbeth that he has been doing business “outside in the Rhine Valley.” Associated throughout the film with various vehicles, on which he travels and transports his goods, Levi is an itinerant figure.

Even though Levi visits the unnamed village in which the film takes place only once a year, he is familiar with its inhabitants and their customs. As someone whose position in the village is simultaneously one of familiarity and of difference, and whose spatial radius is defined both by dwelling and mobility, Levi embodies the “synthesis of nearness and distance which constitutes the formal position of the stranger.”³⁸ As such, Levi is not only tolerated in the village, but in his role as trader, he is essential in maintaining a delicate system of exchange. Although Levi is (over)identified socially, gesturally, linguistically, and especially by

38. See Georg Simmel, “The Stranger,” in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, trans. Kurt Wolff (New York: Free Press, 1950) 402-08. Simmel defines the stranger in terms of a dialectics of inside and outside, as belonging to a social group yet remaining different from it. For Simmel, the “classical example” of the stranger, who “everywhere appears as the trader, or the trader as stranger” inheres in the history of European Jews.

his fastidious clothing as an outsider to the rural community, Andres Horger depends on him for his livelihood. Their relation, structured in terms of economic transactions, is nevertheless precarious. The barter over a “golden calf”³⁹ (which opens the play and is preserved, albeit modified, in the film) appears to be as good-natured as a sporting match, but it has no stable standard of value. On the mutual assumption that they will eventually reach an agreement, Horger and Levi haggle over a price between 190 and 200 marks, but part ways before settling. In the meantime, a railway crew arrives from Berlin and initiates an ideological realignment and a change of economic relations. Asked to supply a calf for the Nazi engineer’s party, Horger abruptly transfers his loyalties, even though he is forced to sell the animal for 150 marks.⁴⁰

When Levi finally offers the full price, he learns with great surprise that the calf has been sold. Horger tells him, blankly, that “the railway is state-owned.” “When an idiot holds the cow by its horns,” Levi retorts, “a smart person can milk it.” The spectator understands well that Levi is the brunt of his own proverb, as he holds onto the “horns” of his standing in the village even as it is being undermined by the arrival of fascism. Using Horger as its medium, the railway-as-state reaches into the local economy to undersell Levi and to eliminate him from the circuit of exchange. The scene thus catalyzes Levi’s transformation from stranger to outcast, a development rendered especially poignant by a cut to Levi reassuring himself (once again in “conversation” with his rabbit) that he remains a respected figure in the community, a cattle trader in the third generation, whose verbal agreement to a deal suffices to seal an exchange. Levi clings to the illusion that “the railway will leave and Levi will stay.” Eliciting sympathy for Levi through both melos (the generally wistful soundtrack will often carry a tune that Levi sings onscreen into the extradiegetic register) and drama, the film also positions us “above” Levi in the hierarchy of knowledge. Conversely, while the character’s studied naiveté, his excessive stereotyping as an (Eastern European) Jew keeps the spectator aware of the constructedness of the fictional figure and of ethnic identity more generally, melodramatic ploys such as the romance with Lisbeth constantly reinforce the spectator’s investment in

39. This designation is taken from the title of scene 1 in Strittmatter’s play.

40. In a departure from Strittmatter’s version, Danquart renders this economic parable even more forceful and didactic. Whereas the Nazi buys the calf for the same price that Levi offers in the play, the film version further indicts Horger for selling out by having him accept an offer far below Levi’s.

Levi's survival — even against better historical knowledge.⁴¹

Before his ostracism, Levi shares the position of the stranger with Paul Braxmaier, who comes from Berlin and refuses to dirty his hands with agricultural (or any other kind of) labor. Paul is the outsider as *Aussteiger*, a social dropout who appears to have fled the metropolis but who does not fit into the village. He nonetheless seems to have settled and (like Levi) has designs on Lisbeth. Played by Bernd Michael Lade with a conspicuous Berlin accent, Paul is a key figure in the trio of outsiders. His lack of ambition places him outside of the economics of exchange. A stranger *like* Levi in the sense that he combines relations of proximity and distance to the locals, Paul, more than his rival, epitomizes the stranger's objectivity, which Simmel defines as his "freedom." Not fully part of the in-group, the stranger as an "objective individual is bound by no commitments which could prejudice his perception, understanding, and evaluation of the given."⁴²

Towards the end, the film will analyze the flip-side of this "freedom" and lack of commitment by demonstrating how easily Paul slides from renegade to anti-Semite. Danquart, however, is careful first to align us with Paul. The character's frank disgust at the arrival of the Nazis ("Something smells of brown shit," he declares as the engineer takes a seat in the local inn), his flippant remarks ("Nothing's too hard for an engineer"), and a practical joke involving the substitution of shit for a white rabbit, which publicly embarrasses the engineer, all serve to align Paul with Levi against the threat of the Nazis. Indeed, where Levi fails to see what the audience already realizes, Paul serves precisely as a figure who stands in for the spectator. He resists the demands of the Nazis and articulates the oppressive logic that governs the local community. Particularly his exchanges with Horger lay bare the economic and power relations that govern human interaction in the hamlet.

Paul's anti-Semitic turn is thus all the more disconcerting given that he had been positioned so sympathetically. After the engineers brutally revenge Paul's practical joke by forcing him to undress, beating and kicking him, and throwing his motorcycle into a pond, Levi finds him pushing the bike in the forest. When he hails Paul to inquire how his bike got wet, Paul accuses Levi of wanting to extort the motorcycle.

41. As Koepnick points out, Cathomas's Levi is a "hyper-Jew, an extremely stylized and extraterritorial presence" in the provincial setting of the film. Koepnick, "Reframing the Past: Heritage Cinema and Holocaust in the 1990s," in this issue.

42. Simmel 405.

Assuming a mock Yiddish accent, he tells Levi to “go make your deals somewhere else” and to “keep your Jewish hands off my bike.” The brief scene ends with Levi’s characteristically uncomprehending expression. In the final scene, Paul will enter the inn like a cowboy striding into a saloon. Wielding an axe, he threatens first Horger and then Levi before Lisbeth stops the violence.

The third “other” is the engineer Fabian Kohler, who personifies Nazism as a metropolitan force that unbalances rural life. The film introduces Kohler in front of the same panoramic vista where we first encounter Levi, complicating the relationship between “*Heimat*” and “*Fremde*” by aligning the Nazi and the Jew as strangers. Like Levi, whom he undersells by bidding for the same calf, Kohler brings goods and currency to the village. He is a trader who offers the locals not nails and difficult-to-obtain yellow sewing yarn, but technological and ideological updates in form of a *Volksempfänger* [people’s radio], the train, and aggressive anti-Semitism. The stranger Kohler and his corps of engineers constitute a presence that is shown to be far more invasive than Levi’s. They are the archetypal “others” in this *Heimatfilm*, upsetting the balance of local exchange and personal relations and “dislocating” the traditional sense of place. Associated, like Levi, with travel and transportation, the railway workers inaugurate the “new age” by introducing a radio into the inn. As in Edgar Reitz’s *Heimat*, which elaborates a sustained reflection on the spatial transformations wrought by communication technologies, the radio opens up an enclosed place on the periphery (in this case the dining room of an inn tucked away in the Black Forest) and connects it to the metropolitan center. The Black Forest becomes available to the Nazi project of “reshaping the German.”⁴³ No longer self-contained as a provincial idyll, the town participates in a topographic shift, a kind of spatial *Gleichschaltung* where the distinction between place and space collapses.

Given this colonizing logic, Koepnick is certainly right to point out that one might read *Viehhud Levi* as an antimodern parable. Against the backdrop of *Heimat* tradition, National Socialism is portrayed and criticized as an agent of modernization and as the “harbinger of history itself — a history which obliterates the fragile compromises and multiplicities that had previously structured the fabrics of the everyday.”⁴⁴ The

43. This is the topic of a speech of which we hear snippets during a close up of the *Volksempfänger* that begins a scene at the inn.

44. Koepnick, “Reframing the Past.”

film's politics of identification and its conception of *Heimat*, however, ultimately complicate such a reading. For the anti-Semitic "education" of the villagers by Kohler is all too easy: the generally silent inhabitants (some farmhands, regulars at the local inn, and the innkeeper himself) are not simply the hapless victims of history, but also its agents, or in any case its willing bystanders. The figure who most clearly represents the ease with which *Heimat* accommodates fascist modernity, is undoubtedly Horger, who turns on Levi the minute he sees a profit. In the local currency of exchange, friendship and anti-Semitism are two sides of the same coin. In other words, the figure of Horger illustrates the fact that the idyll established by the opening image is already precarious before the arrival of the Nazis.

In this sense, Danquart's adaptation of Strittmatter's play remains indebted to the *Anti-Heimatfilm* with its construction of "illusory idylls," where "the apparent peacefulness [of these films' opening sequences] only momentarily conceals an abiding unrest and anxiety."⁴⁵ The opening scene that contains the romantic image of Levi surveying the Black Forest concludes with a hint of things to come as the camera moves in for a tight close-up of the caged rabbit Jankel. Even as the credits continue to roll, Danquart cuts from this premonitory image to a low angle shot of a rat scurrying for cover under some railroad tracks. Reversing the movement of the film's first image, the camera tilts up to reveal the length of a tunnel that suddenly caves in right in front of the camera. As the dust clouds the image, we cut back by a dissolve to the forest, now covered in mist. In a few symbolic images, the film establishes that all is not well.

Danquart does not go as far as the early *Anti-Heimatfilm* in its "rejection and animosity towards the characters and their milieu."⁴⁶ But neither does *Viehjud Levi* imagine *Heimat* as a realm of purity and innocence, to be "polluted" by modernity, fascism, and history. The foreboding image of the railway tracks, the irritating details of the *mise-en-scène*, and an early dialog between Lisbeth and Paul about the "dumb peasants [*Bauernsäcke*]" at the inn establish the threat as internal to the idyll from the very start. Although fascism is undoubtedly portrayed as the key catalyst in the anti-Semitic transformation/modernization of

45. Rentschler 104.

46. See Hans Günter Pflaum's review of *Jagdszenen aus Niederbayern* quoted in Schacht 61.

Heimat, it would be too simple to see history as intervening exclusively from the outside, contaminating the timeless realm of the local. Just as in Strittmatter's play, the Black Forest of Danquart's film is depicted as a particularly fertile breeding ground for fascism.

Staying and Leaving: Post-Fascist Love Stories

Ultimately, questions about the film's politics of history require reframing the inquiry and placing Danquart's melodrama within its particular strategies of identification in its institutional context. Premiering in 1999, *Viehjud Levi* intervened in a cinematic landscape where the alignments of history and *Heimat* had undergone major shifts since Strittmatter's play and Reitz's *Heimat*. The latter had still been in active dialogue with the New German Cinema, including the *Antiheimatfilm* and its "historical imaginary."⁴⁷ *Viehjud Levi*, by contrast, participated in German film's return to history after the lackluster 1980s. Aesthetically, Danquart's film overlapped not so much with the work of Fleischmann, Fassbinder, or Achternbusch as it shared the limelight with such popular fare as *Aimée & Jaguar*, *Comedian Harmonists*, *Marlene*, or *Meschugge*. Koepnick has written extensively about the generic function of these and other films in terms of what he calls the "German Heritage Film." In what amounts to both a reversal and a trivialization of the New German Cinema's representations of German history, heritage films have offered audiences "sweeping historical melodramas that reproduce the national past, including that of the Nazi period, as a source of nostalgic pleasures and positive identifications."⁴⁸ Directed by Joseph Vilsmaier, whom Koepnick identifies as a "German Merchant-Ivory," such films contribute the historiographic image-track to the postwall "cinema of consensus," a development whose origins Eric Rentschler traces to the 1980s and the yuppie comedies of the 1990s. Pursuing fantasies of a German film empire and a national German tradition, Rentschler suggests, the "cinema of consensus" has attempted to reconnect with the

47. Elsaesser, "The New German Cinema's Historical Imaginary," in *Framing the Past: The Historiography of German Cinema and Television*, ed. Bruce Murray and Christopher Wickham (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1992) 280-307; and Anton Kaes, *From Hitler to Heimat: The Return of History as Film* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1989).

48. Koepnick, "Amerika gibt's überhaupt nicht!" Notes on the German Heritage Film," in *German Pop Culture: How American Is It?*, ed. Agnes Müller (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, forthcoming).

Ufa tradition in its search for “ways of saying ‘we’ in its address to German audiences.”⁴⁹

In its similar effort to provide Germany with a “chimera of national normalcy” (Koepnick), heritage cinema poses a further variant of this development. However, in its guise as heritage cinema, the cinema of consensus raises a number of specific questions regarding the role of national cinema as a site for the production, representation, and recycling of national history. This is not the place to pursue these questions, to which Koepnick has already supplied many answers. Rather, in concluding, I would offer two key scenes from films identified by Koepnick as part of the heritage genre, as a way of situating Danquart’s specific intervention within the overlapping generic horizons of the heritage film and a postwall cinema of consensus.

As Koepnick notes, Jewish figures play a seminal role in the heritage cinema’s strategies of consensus and nostalgia. Many of these films go back to the stories, images, and even sounds of successful German-Jewish cooperation in the 1920s and early 1930s in order to “reconstruct the nation’s narrative and reintegrate German Jews into hegemonic definitions of German cultural identity.”⁵⁰ “Cooperation” here may indeed be too weak a term, given the films’ all-out efforts to mend the irrecuperable rupture in the “German-Jewish symbiosis” brought about by fascism. It is only fitting, then, that rather than some general notion of cooperation or friendship, romantic love arguably functions in these melodramas as “the model for understanding the dynamics of history,” and of German-Jewish relations in particular. In this view, the heritage film contributes to the transmutation of historical trauma with its emphasis on ruptured temporalities into transgenerational continuities whose representation often takes the form of love stories. As Sigrid Weigel argues in a recent article on this topic, film and literature of the eighties and nineties demonstrate an irrefutable and obsessive “eroticization and sexualization in the representation of perpetrators and victims or their interrelations.”⁵¹

No film confirms this claim better than Max Färberböck’s *Aimée &*

49. Rentschler, “From New German Cinema to the Post-Wall Cinema of Consensus,” in *Cinema and Nation*, ed. Mette Hjort and Scott MacKenzie (Routledge: London, 2000) 260-77.

50. Koepnick, “Amerika gibt’s überhaupt nicht!”

51. Sigrid Weigel, “Télescopage im Unbewußten: Zum Verhältnis von Trauma, Geschichtsbegriff und Literatur,” in *Trauma: Zwischen Psychoanalyse und kulturellem Bedeutungsmuster*, ed. Elisabeth Bronfen, Birgit R. Erdle, and Sigrid Weigel (Cologne/Vienna: Böhlau, 1999) 71.

Jaguar. Based on the recollections of Lilly Wust, which were first published in 1994 by Erica Fischer,⁵² the film uses period costume and wartime settings to tell the story of a passionate love between Lilly (nicknamed Aimée) and Felice Schragenheim, a Jewish woman living under cover in the Berlin of 1943. Although the viewer quickly understands the improbable prospects of this German-Jewish liaison, Lilly is kept in the dark about Felice's Jewishness for much of the film. While there is considerable tension regarding the survival of Felice in the hostile wartime environment, this tension is amplified by the way in which the film holds Felice's revelation of her Jewishness to Lilly in suspense. When Felice's "confession"⁵³ finally takes place, it functions in many ways as the climactic scene of the film.⁵⁴

In the days of the failed assassination attempt on Hitler in July of 1944, Felice had remained in hiding with friends. She returns to Lilly's dark apartment after an Allied bombing raid to find her lover completely disheveled. As Lilly busies herself with a cup of tea, she begins an agitated tirade, berating Felice for having left her and accusing her of infidelity. Lilly's lines are scripted to ironically heighten her ignorance of Felice's plight, as she asks, "who the hell do you think you are?" She complains that "I didn't even know whether you were still alive." She knows Felice is withholding something and misinterprets this as a sign of her unfaithfulness. During this exchange, Felice stands in the doorway, unable to respond (though the *mise-en-scène* takes care to establish her unconditional love by dressing Felice in a black shirt featuring two white doves flying towards each other). In the end Lilly apologizes for interfering with Felice's life ("I'm sorry that all of this happened") and asks her to "forgive me." Felice takes a deep breath and says, "I'm a Jew, Lilly."

The book version relates Lilly's reaction to Felice's revelation as "*betäubt*" [anaesthetized] and "*gelähmt*" [paralyzed]. Juliane Köhler's expression similarly conveys a sense of shock and utter incomprehension ("How could you love me?"). What is significant, however, is

52. Erica Fischer, *Aimée & Jaguar: Eine Liebesgeschichte, Berlin 1943* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1994).

53. This is the term which the DVD uses to identify this moment in its "scene selection" menu.

54. The book version also emphasizes the importance of this revelation for the relationship between Lilly and Felice, but Fischer chooses not to use it for narrative suspense in the same way as *Färberböck*. Most of the story of *Aimée & Jaguar* is told *after* the exchange in which Felice tells Lilly "ich bin Jüdin" on page 62 of the 300-page book.

Lilly's behavior "after the paralysis subsides."⁵⁵ In the book, Lilly reaffirms her love for Felice by whispering "*nun erst recht*" ["now more than ever"]. The film script calls for her to say "Felice, don't leave me!" before the two women unite in a tearful embrace. This sentence surely bears a historiographic burden in the context of the film, and of German heritage cinema's love affair with Jewish characters more generally. Färberböck uses Lilly Wust's autobiographical account to stage a German-Jewish romance for the big screen and a popular audience. In doing so, he restages German history as a melodrama in which the non-Jewish German first begs the Jewish woman for forgiveness⁵⁶ and then implores her not to leave. Although the film follows Lilly's and Felice's story to Jaguar's death in the concentration camps and Aimée's survival to old age (a narrative framing device shows her circa 1994 in a retirement home), Lilly's reaction puts the onus on the Jewish woman. It is Felice who must offer reconciliation and heal Lilly's narcissistic wound by responding to her desire to be loved.⁵⁷ Although the spectator has no reason to indulge Lilly's self-pity in the monolog preceding Felice's revelation, the general tone of the scene (emotionally heightened precisely because of Lilly's profound misreading of the situation) ultimately positions Lilly, not Felice, as the victim in need of consolation and reassurance that the Jew will not leave.

This revisionist personalization of larger historical questions regarding guilt, forgiveness, and consolation gets reversed in Danquart's film. Although Danquart, too, solicits the viewer's emotional engagement with German-Jewish relations under fascism by introducing the romance between Levi and Lisbeth, the film's resolution to its climactic encounter contrasts sharply with the embrace that unites Aimée and Jaguar. Although this scene does not treat Levi's Jewishness as a "shocking" fact to be revealed at a highly charged melodramatic moment, the aggressive anti-Semitism of the villagers marks Levi as Jewish more strongly than any previous scene, outweighing even Kohler's earlier description of Levi as mere "nothingness" in its tangible brutality: Far from nothingness, the Jew

55. Fischer 62.

56. On the problematic implications of even the request for forgiveness, see Ulrich Baer, "The Hubris of Humility: Günther Grass, Peter Schneider, and German Guilt after 1989," unpublished manuscript.

57. Thanks to Julia Hell for pointing out the role of narcissism in this German-Jewish love affair. Lilly's desire to be loved arguably represents a departure from an earlier form of historical revisionism, in which the non-Jewish German claimed the status of the victim without necessarily linking this to a demand to be loved by the Jew.

is the other against whom the villagers and the Nazis define themselves.⁵⁸ Unlike Färberböck's conciliatory scenario, the non-Jewish character's love for the Jew is affirmed through an act of negation. Rather than asking Levi to stay, Lisbeth demands that he leave. The historical vista that concludes Danquart's film is not (yet) the Holocaust, nor is it one of post-Holocaust forgiveness. For all its melodrama, *Viehjud Levi* remains a sober account of the exclusionary logic of fascist community, which leads from the precarious integration (not to say symbiosis) of the Jew within the non-Jewish "*Heimat*" into an unnamed exile.

The question of exile provides the key to another film from the recent spate of heritage productions that can serve to contextualize Danquart's version of *Viehjud Levi* and mark its specific difference in the contemporary cinematic landscape. Joseph Vilsmaier's *Comedian Harmonists*, winner of the 1998 German Film Award for best feature film, chronicles the rise to fame of the eponymous a capella sextet through the year 1934, when the group is forced to disband because three of its members, including the founder Harry Frommermann, are Jewish. The issue of exile receives remarkably sustained attention, particularly in the sequence that takes the group to America, where Harry tries to convince the non-Jewish cofounder Robert (Bob) Biberti to cancel the return trip and pursue a career in the USA. However, the group returns intact to Nazi Germany for a variety of reasons, not the least of them personal. *Comedian Harmonists* imagines German-Jewish relations not simply in terms of artistic cooperation between men, but also as heterosexual romance — complicated, in this case, by the triangulation of the love affair between Erna, a non-Jewish student working in a Jewish-owned music shop, Bob, and Harry. The tensions within this triangle come to a head and are resolved, of course, toward the ending of the film that reaches its climax not in the *Casablanca*-like farewell scene at the Berlin train station,⁵⁹ but in the melodrama of the group's last public appearance in Germany.

At the beginning of the performance, a heel-clicking Nazi reads a letter announcing the ban of the group and offering to reimburse spectators who would prefer to leave. As he is about to note that this marks

58. Asked by Paul to sing, Horger simply asserts, "Ich bin kein Jud." By identifying himself as "non-other" Horger hopes to rejoin the anti-Semitic community that had suspected him of association with "the Jew."

59. See Koepnick, "Reframing the Past," for an insightful reading of this scene and the historiographic implications of the film's final crane shot of the train as it carries the three Jewish members of the group out of Germany.

the last appearance of the *Comedian Harmonists* “in unserer deutschen Heimat” [in our German *Heimat*], Harry pushes him aside and continues to read the letter. As if on cue, the Jewish leader of the group thus appropriates the concept of “our German *Heimat*” and subverts its intended anti-Semitic meaning. By iterating the Nazi rhetoric in front of the theater audience, Harry divests *Heimat* of its exclusionary logic and reclaims it as an inclusive concept. In its highly melodramatic mode, the film retroactively empowers the Jew at the very moment of his expulsion from the national community.

This revisionist impulse is only amplified by the dramaturgy of the ensuing performance, which aligns the audience-as-public with the victimized performers and against the Nazi state. The handful of people who choose to leave the performance upon learning of the mixed ethnic composition of the group are loudly booed by the loyal fans. As the performance proceeds under an oversized swastika flag, we are invited to witness the Harmonists’ leave-taking (“Give me the last farewell kiss”) from a variety of perspectives, including that of the general audience, but also that of a torn and tearful Erna and of the performers on stage. Together, these views produce a powerful suture that erases difference and celebrates community. At the end of the song, “our German *Heimat*” is united in a powerful series of tableaux, in which the audience remains silent in their seats for six shots, then rises and waits for the duration of another four different images of the hall before a thundering applause commences. To the degree that this audience under the swastika functions as a metonymic representation of the German people under Hitler, the scene is by far the most troubling in the historical fiction. The Germans of 1934 are avid philo-Semites who spurn the ban and stand united in their loyalty towards the Jewish stars. In Vilsmaier’s revisionist account, the mass of non-Jewish Germans were cheated out of their German-Jewish patrimony by the Nazis.

Although this reading makes its way into at least one review of *Viehjud Levi* as well,⁶⁰ Danquart’s treatment of the relationship between Jews and Germans in the Black Forest offers an entirely different scenario. *Heimat* here is decidedly not a space that thrives on difference. Instead, it functions as an allegorical site that discloses the workings of anti-Semitism in the microcosm mapped out by Horger’s farm, the inn,

60. Silke Kirsch, “Parabel auf den Naziterror,” *Deutsches Allgemeines Sonntagsblatt* 1 Oct. 1999.

and the forest. In Vilsmaier's film, the philo-Semitic gesture of the performance sequence is recapitulated in the final train station sequence which brings Erna back into Harry's arms. Choosing to go into exile with the Jewish performer, she leaves her non-Jewish admirer. Love, it appears, conquers all — including exile. Danquart's film, by contrast, can only end by severing whatever ties held the precarious "symbiosis" together — including those ties that remain the most important ones in these melodramas, the ties of homo- or heterosexual love.

Heimat has traditionally been a place where abstract entities like nation and history take on concrete form. *Viehjud Levi* critically inherits this tradition and turns the Black Forest into an allegorical space of German history. In this respect, Danquart shares a central representational gambit of the "heritage film" that appears to have captured the imagination not just of his fellow filmmakers, but also of popular audiences in Germany. Among contemporaneous productions such as *Aimée & Jaguar* and *Comedian Harmonists* (which are every bit as allegorical as *Viehjud Levi*), Danquart's film stands out by dint of its careful reworking of the *Heimat* tradition and its explicit concern with the construction of local communities across the divide that separates "inside" from "outside." Transforming the authentic story of Hirsch Levi and Strittmatter's play, Danquart's *Heimatfilm* both analyzes and takes stock of momentous disturbances in German-Jewish relations. Where Färberböck's and Vilsmaier's films revise this historiographic dynamic (as well as the historical stories on which they draw) by romantically joining self and other together in improbable love affairs and philo-Semitic public spheres, the final sequence of Danquart's film takes leave from audiences by reenacting the very speech act that would exorcise the Jew from the German community: "Geh!"