Snowdrops Bloom in September

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Before this film was shown on television, there were already a hundred advance and retrospective explanations tactically justifying its *smoothness*, *commercialism*, and *conventionality*.

Just two minutes in, the axis was being crossed so much that one at the very least lost one's sight.[1] The dialogue was full of the funniest expositions. "Only yesterday, Dad, I told you to dress warmer, and just now you coughed again." Dramaturgical functions stuck into husks of sentences like the dressed-up math problems in school. Then there came a shot with workers walking through the factory yard that lasted longer than ARD functionality requires for embodying workers' power (idealization), and when the workers arrived at the workers council building, the camera zoomed out as if it wanted to show them the door. But it wanted to show only the "Workers Council Office" sign. More about the music accompanying this later. Here, therefore, the zoom was overfunctional in a hilarious way. Soon a car with two men drove up and stopped, the camera zoomed a bit toward it, and you saw, as was already clear, two men; then the camera traveled back again, and, as the men got out, the camera moved back toward the car—all as if the staging was ashamed that nothing was going on. Nor was there. The zoom had nothing functional about it before; now it was something gestural. Whatever is needed. To show rally races, Ziewer and his adviser use long focal lengths so that, along with music by Lokomotive Kreuzberg—more on this later—it achieves the worst kind of poeticism.

A lens with a long focal length makes it possible to magnify a distant object. If one wants to film a lion that has escaped, it may be the right lens.

If one films things that one can control, like a car in the woods, there is no reason to use a long lens; it means one is too lazy to consider where to successively position the camera. The long lens is nonphysical; camera and viewer are not exposed to what is happening. It is nonradical; it blurs the expressive means of the wide (distance) and close shot (isolation). Pushiness without risk. Since, with longer focal lengths, the depth of field is smaller and every movement looks slow due to the distance between object and lens, this type of lens lends itself to only the cheapest "idealization" (cf. slow motion in "modern" films). The stalks of

grass and leaves in the foreground become flecks of pastel colors, the music swells. Where nothing is to be seen, one can at least become contemplative.

For Ziewer's worker rally-racer that means the story of a forest through which one speeds does not exist, but neither does the measly Grunewald in which one stands as a car drives through the background. Ziewer neither wants to become involved with the events, nor does he want to deny them; he does not want to lose his influence; he talks about the beauty of rally racing like clever parents talk the jargon of their twelve-year-old children.

The compression of foreground and background with a lens into poetry is also a completely nonmaterialistic intervention. Unlike a change in framing, for instance, from "raw wide shot" to "composed close-up," our eyes and sensation cannot selectively perceive the components as components of a transformation. Showing how a forest changes through auto racing would be something Brechtian: today, intertitles in Letraset typeface remind us more of health magazines than of Brecht.

Nothing can be seen through the windows besides the always similar, colorless mud. If one cannot see the Berlin summer, why isn't the entire film performed in a room? We know just as much about the work at the end as at the beginning; the good folks always make the obligatory three hammer blows before they say their lines again—they let the hammer drop and say, "You know, I recently told you . . ." No one ever hits themselves on the finger. The Berlin actor who is known for playing workers, Nikolaus Dutsch, even throws his head defiantly back when someone asks him for the time.

Everything they say is ensured through Ziewer and Wiese's worker empiricism. The working-class child is good in natural science (as working-class children always happen to be; see Lazarsfeld, Behringbaum, Lammotin, and Ganuschi, and Salzer's memoir). "We received confirmation of this in 68 discussions with workers," Wiese and Ziewer say. Then something exciting at the workers meeting: fortunately the TV pro who would have suggested recording a second track of wild sound of murmured assent and grumbled disapproval was missing here. So we hear the acoustics of the meeting hall and the muffled sound of a distant interjection. But next time Ziewer will certainly do it like Beauvais.

It would be completely false to say the film is like television. In true television there still remains a dash of adventure capitalism, but not in the new Berlin sectional sofa realism. It was surely only on didactic grounds that Ziewer did the scene where a man grabs a woman's breast and talks about steaks that are "sizzling" in the pan, as one says, and only on didactic grounds should we kick him in the

ass for this. On my TV set, and hopefully everywhere, there was a glitch at this moment and the color image became black-and-white.

At the end of the film, a worker who has just done something in the class struggle for the first time immediately turns this new strength against his colleagues. This is a noteworthy invention. I'll ask the respective organs from *FAZ* to *KINO* to interpret the remaining "content." O. Negt wrote a text in the WDR program booklet that is worded in so scholarly a fashion that it seems meant to make *Snowdrops* pass a technical inspection. "That Ziewer and Wiese place a group of workers at the beginning of the film in fact corresponds to the typical workers situation in large, industrial firms. It is therefore unimportant whether it is about a group that cooperates hierarchically or as a team; if I'm seeing correctly, the group of pieceworkers works as a team." Thus it is very important that one can see correctly how much cooperation there is when one lets people continuously stand around in a factory hall. If I'm seeing correctly, this claim about what is typical lies at the core of all attempts at self-justification: because Ziewer is describing or pretending to describe things here that are often supposed to exist, it must be true. In this way, it does not depend on the ratio of the narrated to the narratable but on the ratio of the narration to the narrated.

Ziewer has no language. He neither directs and cuts images, nor does he direct and cut information. He tries to present what is found as a construction, and what he constructs is supposed to look like something found.

He neither has a language, nor does he lack any.

As though he had sent someone off and said, shoot something 'bout machines today, he sends himself off. The gesture of his work: completely that of soulless work, dull, secure, conscientious on the surface, and somewhat bungled as well.

With the same movement that assigns meaning to his images and sentences, one assigns living space to people, divides the work, selects children at school.

The movement of bureaucratic terror.

It's bad that there are so few people who sense the political aspect in film language.

What now still remains to be said about Lokomotive Kreuzberg: every pastor and leader of a juvenile shelter has already wished for such a "beat." Today young people gladly listen to something like this, and our music is not loud, not aggressive. The lyrics are even thoughtful.

Although something like this is played in youth shelters, more and more youth shelters are being stirred up.

Notes

This review of *Schneeglöckchen blühn im September* (1974), a film written by Klaus Wiese and Christian Ziewer, and directed by Ziewer, was originally published as Harun Farocki, "*Schneeglöckchen blühn im September*," *Filmkritik* 219 (March 1975): 138–40.

1. Farocki is presumably referring to what is known in English as the "180-degree rule" of film continuity, in which the camera always remains on one side of an imaginary axis connecting two or more characters in profilmic space. The axis functions similarly to the "fourth wall" in proscenium theater; obeying the rule of not crossing the axis provides a stable viewpoint for the spectator and coherent spatial relationships among the characters, even when editing together multiple shots from different camera positions.—*Eds.*