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Sophie Scholl and Post-WW II German Film: Resistance and the Third Wave

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Identifying where a film as emotionally gripping as Marc Rothemund's *Sophie Scholl – Die letzten Tage* (2005) fits into the larger framework of German national cinema history is a challenge.¹ It follows the renewed focus of German cinema since 2000 on national themes, a phenomenon not seen with such verve since the New German Cinema of the mid-1960s to mid-1980s. I would position Rothemund's film in what I would term the third wave of post-WW II films that reexamine the fascist German past of the years 1933–45. It constitutes an adjunct to defining a new German national identity. Earlier waves of such films emerged in the late 1940s continuing into the 1950s and in the period around 1980 respectively. Such temporal delimitations often represent mere categorical constructs, particularly for the definition-denying second half of the twentieth and early twenty-first century, yet – like the meridian circles of latitude and longitude in seafaring – they can aid in objectively navigating a complex historical reality.

The first wave encompassed such films as *Die Mörder sind unter uns* (*The Murderers Are Among Us*, 1947), *Lizzy* (1956), Falk Harnack's *Der 20. Juli* (*The Plot to Assassinate Hitler*, 1955), and G.W. Pabst's *Es geschah am 20. Juli* (*It Happened on July 20*), of the same year. The majority of these were produced by what would become the DEFA East German state cinema, though at the outset, with communist cultural policy still oriented toward the «United Front» antifascist agenda, ideological lines were not yet firmly drawn. Wolfgang Staudte, for instance, began as a major contributor to this wave in Babelsberg but later tried to continue his work in West Germany. Harnack's and Pabst's work, and especially Helmut Käutner's *Des Teufels General* (*The Devil's General*, 1955), represent the more conservative West German contributions to this wave, that focused more characteristically on members of the political and military classes. In an attempt to illustrate the three waves, I doubtlessly need to proceed rather selectively; space does not allow me to treat West German war movies such as the *08/15* trilogy (1955), films that tended to project early on an image of Germans as victims.

The second wave revolved around the younger generation New German Cinema of the mid-1960s to mid-1980s. As early as 1966 Schlöndorff's *Der*

junge Törless (*Young Törless*) and Alexander Kluge's *Abschied von gestern* (*Yesterday Girl*) confronted the past of the Third Reich in metaphorical, indirect fashion. But a film like Theodor Kotulla's *Aus einem deutschen Leben* (*Death Is My Trade/Commandant Hoess*, 1977) openly examined the Holocaust and identified Germans as perpetrators. The wave peaked after the American TV mini-series *Holocaust* (1978) was broadcast on German TV and prepared a broader public acceptance of films such as Peter Lilienthal's *David* (1979).

The third and current wave documents an awakening to the German past of a new generation born well after the Third Reich, with filmmakers such as Marc Rothemund, Dennis Gansel (*Napola*, 2004), and Oliver Hirschbiegel *Der Untergang* (*Downfall*, 2004). This wave that began around the turn of the new millennium, however, still has established New German Cinema directors contributing to it, e.g., Michael Verhoeven (*Mutters Courage/Mother's Courage*, 1996, and *Der unbekannte Soldat/The Unknown Soldier*, 2006), Volker Schlöndorff (*Der Unhold/The Ogre*, 1996, and *Der neunte Tag/The Ninth Day*, 2004), Werner Herzog (*Unbesiegtbar/Invincible*, 2001), and Margarethe von Trotta (*Rosenstrasse*, 2003).

If one detects in the first wave an underlying tendency to equate Germans with victims of history, and in the second an inclination to emphasize German guilt, how does the third wave cast the image of the Germans? Should one – in keeping with the «normalization» discourse² – expect a return to the victim image? This essay examines that very question. It proposes that rather than a redux to the victim role of the 1940s and 1950s, followed by a clear New German Cinema rupture projecting Germans as perpetrators, the German self-image just before 2000 and since yields more complex shadings.

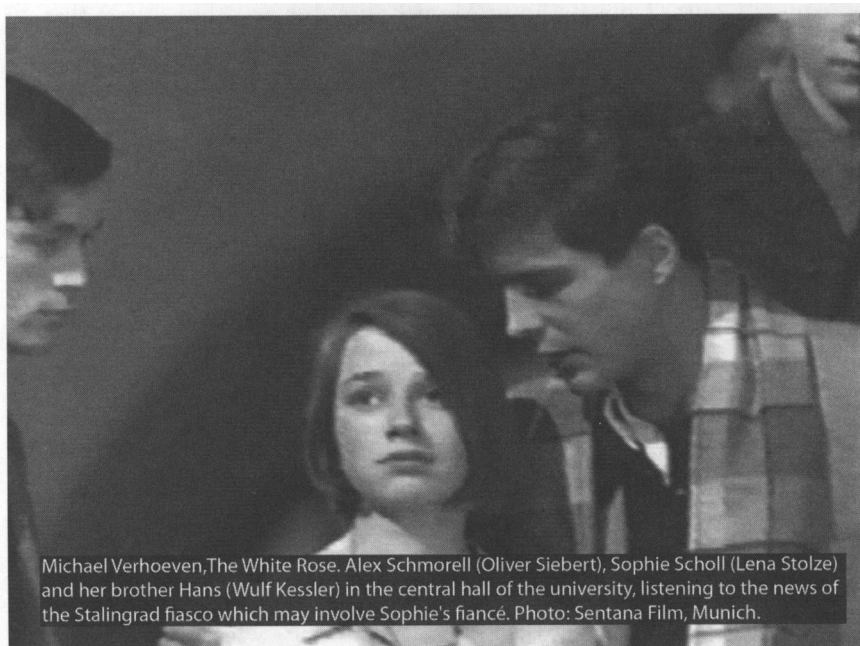
To illuminate the issue, I will undertake a comparison/contrast of three feature films about the «White Rose» resistance to the Third Reich. Marc Rothemund of the third wave is not the first to deal with the title figure of his *Sophie Scholl – Die letzten Tage*; this courageous German student had already been a focus of two films of the second-wave. We know from Michael Verhoeven that Schlöndorff had made an even earlier attempt to realize a film about the White Rose right after completing his *Young Törless* in the mid-60s.³ Verhoeven himself was the first to succeed in bringing Sophie to the screen in his 1982 film *Die Weiße Rose* (*The White Rose*). The same year, within a month, Percy Adlon's *Fünf letzte Tage* (*The Five Last Days*) also premiered. Examining the three White Rose feature films from the 1980s to the present helps clarify German attitudes regarding resistance.

It is telling to study the different emphases and perspectives of the three films about the character of Sophie Scholl. Verhoeven's *Die Weiße Rose* rep-

resents the historian's dream: it offers context by establishing why the Nazi rulers perceived the bantam Munich resistance group as indicator of a genuine crisis. The regime considered the White Rose a «große Gefahr für den [...] *Durchhaltewillen*» or German people's stick-to-itiveness with the Nazis in the environment of the Munich students' revolt of mid-January 1943 and the German military collapse at Stalingrad toward the end of the same month.⁴ On January 13, 1943, Nazi prefect, «Gauleiter» Paul Giesler, had challenged coeds at an obligatory university convocation at the Deutsches Museum in Munich to trade academe for motherhood. In addition, he had offered them the sexual «assistance» of his junior officers, an invitation that ultimately led to rioting, with students battling Nazi student leaders and the police, as well. In the wake of this incident and the traumatization of the German population associated with the Stalingrad fiasco, the Nazi regime considered the increasing resistance from the White Rose grounds for setting up a «Großfahndung,» a dragnet for the group, and later for instituting special ad-hoc court proceedings. The Reich's head prosecutor, Roland Freisler, twice moved his infamous «People's Court» from Berlin to Munich, first for no other reason than to provide an object lesson for the populace at large using the example of a paltry trio of Munich students. Step by step, Verhoeven recreates in his film this historical context for the audience. In the way of further contextualization, he also chronicles the medical corps service of the White Rose male ringleaders at the Russian front, where they witness a massacre of Russian POWs.

A central Verhoeven sequence can serve to demonstrate how its approach, too, helps establish the wider historical background. Two thirds into the picture, Verhoeven's portrayal of a conference held at the Munich Gestapo headquarters reveals that White Rose political flyers are now reaching beyond southern German cities to Austrian urban centers. The chief exhorts his staff to redouble its effort to apprehend the responsible parties, ordering that a reward of several thousand Marks be promised to university staff for tips leading to the arrest of underground resisters. A cut takes the viewer from the medium close-up of the Gestapo head engulfed in a haze of tobacco smoke to a two-shot of Professor Huber and his wife in his study. The professor is a role model, mentor, sympathizer, and, ultimately, an activist amid the White Rose. The Huber couple, spatially separated by his desk to imply his wife's reservation about any political activism, intently listens to state radio announcing that the German 6th army has been annihilated at Stalingrad despite its heroic stand. The shot lasts but nine seconds. Continuing with the radio news as a backdrop, Verhoeven leads into a mid-shot of three students entering the stylized, double-winged door to the university lobby, where they begin to climb the stairs. Another cut, to an extreme long shot from the far upper level

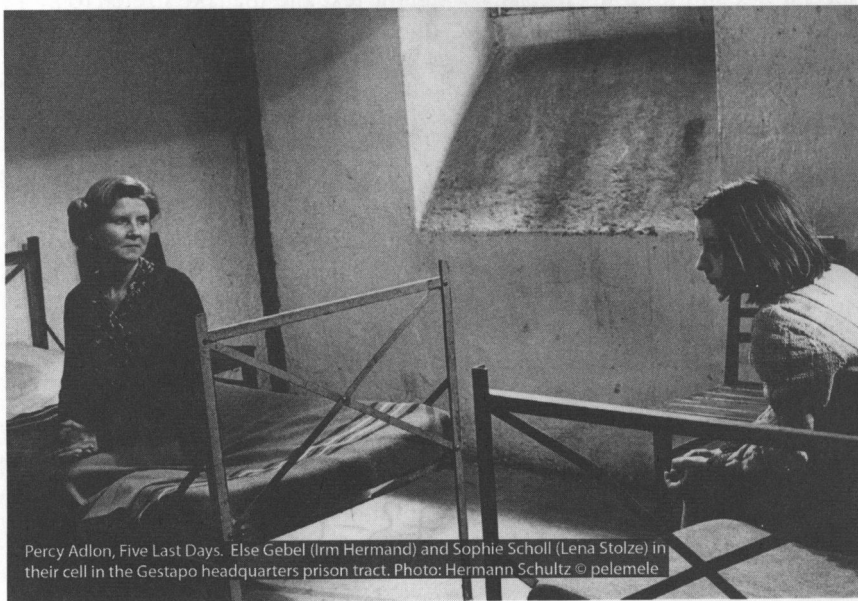
of the same building, captures student groups and individuals on different stairs and levels of the central hall. The incoming student trio continues toward the middle ground of the frame as the camera tilts downward, revealing the spacious atrium filled with pockets and threads of students listening, via the public address system, to the very same battle news as the Hubers. A further cut shrinks the image to a medium long shot with a student group that has Sophie Scholl (Lena Stolze) and her brother Hans (Wulf Kessler) posed center left, Hans now exchanging glances with Willi Graf (Ulrich Tukur), one of the arriving three students. Returning to the Huber study, Verhoeven has Frau Huber in the two-shot turning off the radio, with both adults now bowing their heads in grief. A further cut again portrays the White Rose students who now ring Sophie, as the radio announcer's voice pathetically intones the memory of the vanquished German forces: «Sie starben, damit Deutschland lebe.» Hans, his left arm around his sister's shoulder, consoles her concerning the fate of her boyfriend, Fritz, at the Eastern front: «Das sagt noch gar nichts. Deswegen kann der Fritz trotzdem durchkommen.» (See illustration 1.)



This sequence, lasting less than two minutes, illustrates Verhoeven's scope and integration of shots and at least three plot strands. The scenes hang tightly together, their cohesion enhanced by the Gestapo's focus on the White Rose group within their academic milieu and a couple, the Hubers, and the group

impacted, at one and the same time, by the turn of the events at Stalingrad. The film conveys: 1. parallel action, 2. simultaneity, and 3. historical truths augmented by the continuing droning and depressing war news.

If Verhoeven's film arguably qualifies amongst the three White Rose feature films as the one with the most visual variety, historical backdrop, and action, Adlon's, by comparison, offers the least. *Fünf letzte Tage*, as the title implies, in its brief span has little time to develop historical context, dealing only tangentially with White Rose group members other than Sophie. It nearly evolves into a bio picture. It does, however, place Sophie into a specific two-person relationship because she is viewed from the perspective of Else Gebel. (See illustration 2.) The Gestapo historically quartered this commu-



nist prisoner with Sophie supposedly to keep Scholl from committing suicide, but Else quickly became Sophie's confidant. Their relationship had to be unique, trust and friendship at first sight. By coincidence, Susanne Hirzel, a close family friend and schoolmate of Sophie's, historically soon thereafter shared Else Gebel's cell and slept in the very bed that had housed Sophie during her arrest. Susanne had placed hundreds of copies of the fifth White Rose pamphlet into Stuttgart mailboxes and was arrested on February 22. But the new inmate and Else remained distant.⁵ Plot-wise and visually, *Fünf letzte Tage* qualifies as the most minimalist of the three films. Visually, it is reminiscent of the early Rainer Werner Fassbinder. Casting recognizable Fassbinder

stock actors Irm Hermand as Else Gebel and Hans Hirschmüller as Gestapo inspector Mahr, Adlon provokes this impression, and the rectangular lines of the mise-en-scene reinforce it.

For a suitable sequence representative of Adlon's cinematic style in *Fünf letzte Tage*, I turn to a scene three quarters into the film. It is the fourth of Sophie's last five days, Sunday, February 21. In her cell, Sophie (again, as in Verhoeven's film, played by Lena Stolze⁶) has just received her indictment. She feels relief that her attempts to limit the Nazi capture of White Rose members to her brother Hans, Christoph Probst, and herself appear to have succeeded. Sophie studies the indictment with her cellmate, Else. Turning the actresses' backs to the audience while Sophie reads the indictment aloud discourages spectator identification, especially when the text and the take stretch to more than one minute in length. Additionally, Else's voiceover of dates and even hours throughout the film further undermines suture between spectator and events and characters.

A similar distancing effect results from an insert soon afterwards, following a brief visit of Gestapo inspector Mahr (the interrogator Mohr in Rothemund's picture). He advises Sophie – not in his official function but strictly privately – at once to write farewell messages to her loved ones. Subsequently, Adlon has Mahr give an account of her farewell letters to her parents, surviving sisters and brother, and her boyfriend, as the official speaks impassively into camera from an office desk. This includes her justification for her own political actions and her vision for Germany's future, as well. Mahr supplements these remarks on Sophie's personal concerns with comments on the official report due the Central Office for the Security of the Reich and on its reaction thereto. The office ordered Sophie's letters to be filed away without delivery for fear of «propagandistic» exploitation. The film presents this entire episode almost uninterruptedly as a long take in medium shot, the only visual change being a slight shrinking of the frame to a medium close-shot of Mahr as he turns from the personal to the official elements of the report. The scene stands outside chronology and narrative flow of the film and strikes one almost as a Brechtian «epic» commentary.

The footage demonstrates that Adlon's film, favoring medium shots to medium long shots, is optically almost claustrophobic. The frame design, with planes paralleling the foreground, through simple, rectangular lines creates static scenes within a shallow depth of field. The bench that accommodates the two women illustrates this pattern, as does their cell table against the wall, or the Gestapo staff's desks. Of the three White Rose film directors, Adlon dramatizes his screen story the least. A particularly cogent example is the way he handles his potentially most suspenseful action, Sophie and Hans Scholl's

capture at the university. Adlon represents this key event as a telephone report to a mid-level Gestapo clerk. The film frequently appears more word-based rather than image-based. The director thus creates a slow, almost theatrically posed, low-budget portrayal of Sophie that, at times, approaches TV aesthetics, yet this film is too deliberately understated and stylized to be close to conventional television.

Rothemund's *Sophie Scholl – Die letzten Tage*, by its very title parallels Adlon's film in its concentration both on Sophie and the short time span preceding her execution. Each of the two films has introductory scenes, but these differ considerably in character. The extreme long shot opening Adlon's film reveals a bare field thinly covered by light snow with silhouettes of three people emerging at the upper border of the frame. As they race across the field toward the foreground, the viewer gradually identifies two young men and a young woman, apparently Hans and Sophie Scholl and Christoph Probst. Intercut into their movements are brief full shots of the three lying face-down on the ground, their heads shrouded by clothes, their bodies strangely anonymous and, in the last such downward full shot, intertwined. There is also a medium long shot with the three standing still, the woman symbolically «washing» her face, and one of the men engaged in some sort of breathing exercise; all three seem to be «craning» their necks and heads skyward. When they begin moving again, the audience still has no clues as to where the trio is heading, except toward the foreground. The scene concludes with the young woman walking straight toward the camera, ending in a medium close-up of her face. At first there is no music, only the barely audible drifting of the wind, then after a pregnant silence, a heavy cello classical piece can be heard. This entire opening is extremely abstract, symbolic, and foreboding. Very little concrete information is provided, and the credits are limited to the title and the names of the two actresses and the director. An abrupt cut switches to the Munich Gestapo headquarters at the Wittelsbacher Palais, and the voiceover of the Else Gebel character announces the date as «Donnerstag, 18. Februar 1943.» (In the English version the subtitles additionally mark the date.) Adlon's film now closes in on the «Erster Tag» of the five Sophie still has to live, and even the time of day is specified: «10 Uhr.»

Rothemund's *Sophie Scholl – Die letzten Tage* opens with two scenes that are more filmically traditional than Adlon's title sequence. They are realistic but, at the same time, subversive. When the equally sparse title credits appear, the voice of Billie Holliday intones the swing number «Sugar.» Sophie Scholl (Julia Jentsch) and a girlfriend are enjoying the program from an Anglo-American radio broadcast; their knowledge of the text and ability to sing along reveals that they have obviously been regular listeners to what the Nazi

regime deemed as «enemy broadcasts.» Following this very brief opening, Sophie walks to an artist's studio nearby, the one that has become the site of the White Rose underground activity. Hans Scholl (Fabian Hinrichs), Willi Graf (Maximilian Brückner), and Alexander Schmorell (Johannes Suhm) are shown printing political pamphlets. Sophie joins them in their clandestine work. They lack sufficient envelopes to mail out all of the flyers. At this point, Hans makes the fateful decision personally to take the remaining pamphlets to the university the following morning. This errand will deliver him and Sophie – who insists on accompanying him – to the Gestapo, and thus begins Rothemund's chronicling of her last days.

Thus the two *Last Days* movies share not only a common title focus and inside locations, but they are also similarly devoid of natural and outside settings – although in both Sophie dreams of freedom within nature, and when soliloquizing from her cell window she reveals her poignant longing for the outside world. The closest either director comes to an outside shot is that eerie, nightmarish opening referenced in Adlon's film. Both treatments then reveal a tendency toward the chamber film.

Like Adlon, Rothemund, a filmmaker of the younger generation, stays close to historical sources. Where Adlon relied on Else Gelen as a major source, Rothemund is able to draw on the additional Gestapo interrogation notes, which in 1982 had not been as publicly accessible because they were in East German Stasi security collections opened to research only after the fall of the Wall.⁷ The Scholl notes, to which we will return, were the record



Marc Rothemund, Sophie Scholl - The Last Days. Sophie (Julia Jentsch), proving her identity to Gestapo inspector Mohr (Alexander Held). Photo: Zeitgeist Film.

of Sophie's interrogation by Gestapo commissar Robert Mohr. (See illustration 3.) In some sense, Rothemund's spectator is thus also provided with another character's perspective of Sophie. Here, too, Adlon's and Rothemund's films resemble one another in that they position Sophie dramaturgically into a close relationship with a second character. With Adlon, this is Else Gebel, with Rothemund, the Gestapo agent Robert Mohr. The essential difference in these juxtapositions is that Else Gebel sympathizes with Sophie; Mohr, by contrast, is her opponent.

Somewhat like Adlon's film, Rothemund's approaches the semi-documentary. But unlike Adlon, Rothemund strives for an emotional, intimate, psychologically complex, and involving portrayal of Sophie (actress Jentsch realizes this involvement to perfection). Rothemund's film occasionally goes beyond the «bio picture» genre form in the interest of dramatic action, taking advantage of the Scholl siblings' arrest at the university and Freisler's People's Court trial for grand visualization and suspense. In these instances, *Sophie Scholl* more closely resembles *Die Weiße Rose* than it does Adlon's film.⁸

To illustrate how effectively Rothemund mines his sources in order to evoke strong feelings, I will briefly turn to two sequences. The first takes place during the night between Friday and Saturday, following the second of Sophie's interrogations. Sophie and Else Gebel are asleep in their cell when screams of tortured prisoners awaken them. Quiet finally returns. Sophie, shown in a medium close shot, is sitting on her cell bed, wearing a sweater of deep red. Positioned in a medium shot on the right side of the frame, she also begins to turn her head to the right, away from the foreground, lying back down so that the viewer notes how her left arm, her back, and part of her mid-torso are positioned under a blanket. She turns further, her body now lying diagonally in the frame from the lower left to upper right where the back of her head is now in the dark. The entire frame signals that she is in a private space of her own. As her left hand and arm start to move in the direction of her head, the director cuts to a close up, showing Sophie's profile now resting against the blue of her pillow. Her folded hands emerge from behind the blanket and her lips move in audible prayer. Until she ends her prayer with an «Amen,» the entire scene is almost devoid of music. Finally, the visible eyelid closes and her head, still in profile, tilts downward to suggest sleep. One line of her prayer is heard: «Nichts anderes kann ich als Dir mein Herz hinhalten.» That is of course the essence of this 30-second scene. With it the filmmaker admits the spectator into Sophie's most intimate space and being, employing toward this end mise-en-scene, shot selection, lighting and color combination.

Here as well as in my next scene selection, Sophie's deeply religious convictions become manifest. This later scene, the third interrogation of Sophie,

constitutes the intellectual centerpiece of Rothemund's film.⁹ The debate between Gestapo commissar Mohr and Sophie touches on the themes of democratic law vs. national socialist «law and order,» on the freedom of modern religious faith vs. the enforced Nazi ideology, and on the genocide against Jews vs. the pretense that they are voluntarily emigrating. Sophie attacks the official for the Nazi euthanasia of mentally ill children, when she details how trucks rounded them up from mental institutions with the lie that they were departing for heaven. When Mohr contends that this was only an action against the lives of undesirables (*unwertes Leben*), Sophie counters «dass kein Mensch ... berechtigt ist, ein Urteil zu fällen, das allein Gott vorbehalten ist.» Mohr urges Sophie to realize that a new era has dawned and that her arguments bear no relation to reality. In further contrast, she insists that her view of conditions is grounded in conscience, morals and God. Emotionally, the commissar blurts out that God doesn't exist.

Visually, in this scene the filmmaker places Sophie in the left center of the frame in a medium close-up. The shot originates from over the opponent's left shoulder; his dark contours hovering at the right border of the frame. A cut shows Mohr in right center position, with the shadow of Sophie's head and shoulder now at his left. Alternating shot-reverse-shots in medium close-shot format now accompany their dispute. At times, the camera retreats to display, in a more distanced medium shot, more of the antagonists together, as well as of the surface of the desk separating the two speakers. The entirety of the third interrogation is also devoid of music, as the filmmaker relies on the simple dramaturgy of the dispute and trusts solely in the power of words. Where there's a potential of lapsing into «overdialoguing,» the filmmaker uses the clash of forces within the frame of the dispute to evolve into the film's forte. In order to achieve this strength, Rothemund, in his characterization, had to present Mohr's qualities as simultaneously diabolical and, in the Gestapo official's unique way, even caring. Both Mohr and Sophie share their own conviction, dedication, and intensity.

When, for a second time, Sophie confronts Mohr with the topic of God he appears visibly agitated and stands up behind his desk. A cut now shows a side view of the desk, with Mohr still in the process of rising to his feet. The adversaries are backlit by the natural light of the dawning new day as it filters through two office windows. In the same take, Mohr walks to the right window and stands in front of it, with his back to the spectator. Another cut returns the viewer to a medium shot of Sophie still sitting at the desk, defiantly looking in the direction of the Gestapo commissar. Mohr turns to her, and after an exchange of mutual glances, he endeavors to persuade her to sign an affidavit that would attribute her participation in the White Rose group

solely to the heavy influence of her older brother, Hans. But Sophie will have none of this temptation; she insists on her truth, taking full responsibility for her actions.

In the adversaries' discourse, Rothemund places Sophie's bearing and disposition center frame, even in the metaphysical disputes with Gestapo investigator Mohr. She functions as the system's victim and its critic who battles it with mere strength of certitude, intellect, and faith, becoming the three White Rose films' most idealized central character. She can, however, also be the most vivacious one, such as in *Sophie Scholl's* opening scene when she enthusiastically sings along with Billie Holiday.

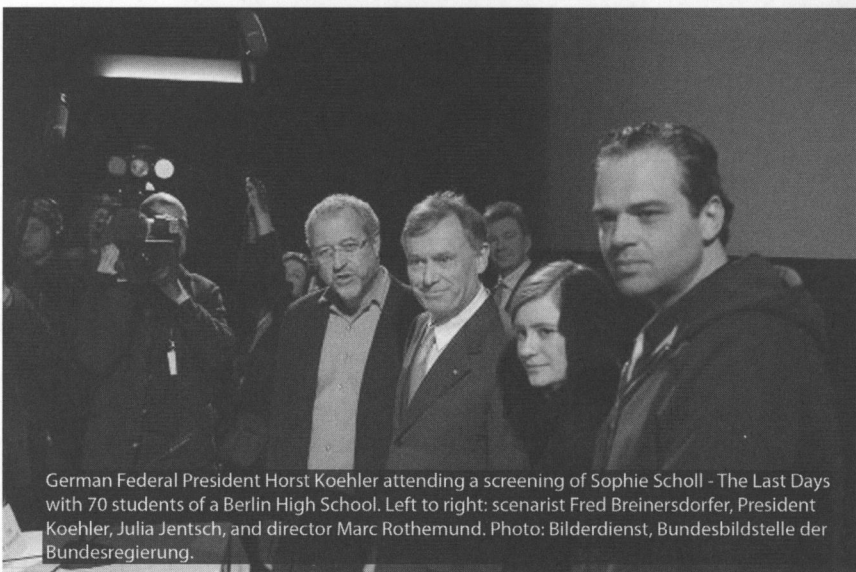
In terms of the contrast between the two generations responding to the White Rose resistance, Verhoeven's and Adlon's response during the 1980s on the one hand, and Rothemund's more recent one on the other, I find that all three want to revive the memory of the students' opposition to the Nazis. All three directors accomplish their goal with hard-hitting films and strong actors, above all Lena Stolze and Julia Jentsch in the role of Sophie Scholl. Notably, different perspectives characterize the films: Verhoeven's film in its historical and narrative complexity provides a powerful introduction to the background and interaction of the resistance group. Adlon and Rothemund focus on Sophie Scholl and just her last five days, mainly via the face-to-face relationships with another individual, the sympathizing Else Gebel in Adlon's case, and the Gestapo adversary, Mohr, in Rothemund's. In his portrayal, Adlon favors a more materialist, direct, understated, even detached style; Rothemund, in contrast, a more personalizing one. Characteristics here are the heroine's individual sensibility, deep religious conviction, and private space, even for one under such Gestapo pressure as Sophie. A significant element of Rothemund's personalizing approach is, however, also a partial humanization of Sophie's interrogator.

Underlying all three films, and unmistakably foregrounded in Rothemund's dispute between Sophie and Mohr, is the perpetrator/victim issue so dominant in German coming-to-terms-with-the-past narratives. The image of the German official is clearly that of the perpetrator, seen most unambiguously in Verhoeven's and Rothemund's portrayals of Roland Freisler, the infamous top Nazi State Prosecutor. Compared to him, Rothemund's Mohr almost shows rare shades of pity, e.g., when he suggests almost a plea bargain and its benefits to Sophie. Adlon, depicting more of the lower-level Gestapo clerks and staff than the Nazi big fish, appears to make the persuasive point that the *Mitläufer/-täter*, as cogs in the brutal Nazi system, are no less oppressive.

Insofar as they project Germans as inflictors of harm, Verhoeven's and Adlon's White Rose films concur with the majority of New German Cinema

films. In this respect, they differ from the national screen image of the German as the victim in the movies of the 1940s and 50s. Moreover, these films from the late phase of the New German Cinema period, like Rothemund's, also feature the victim, Sophie, even though one that is not passive but, rather, in active opposition.

Might this coupling of Germans as perpetrators and Germans as fighting victim explain the relative box office success of two of the three Sophie Scholl films? Both Verhoeven's and Rothemund's motion pictures achieved a relatively broad reception in Germany. (See illustration 4.) The response of moviegoers to Rothemund's *Sophie Scholl* is perhaps most easily explained. In addition to its emotional pull, it also touches on issues of self-identity dealing with the very concept of a Federal Republic of Germany and its citizenry, even six decades after the end of WW II. The dispute between Sophie and Mohr



evokes topics which even today dominate political and moral debate. That discourse, for instance, intersects at critical points with core aspects of the historians' controversy (*Historikerstreit*), raging in the Federal Republic during the mid-1980s and revived to a degree in the mid-1990s. Three major topics of this controversy are the Nazi genocide, the Reich's armed conflict with Stalin's USSR, and the German resistance against the Hitler regime. Above all, the historical, patriotic, and ethical prioritizing of any of these issues over the others in political philosophy creates inescapable questions involving vic-

tims and perpetrators. All three films about the White Rose by choice of their subject matter and specific portrayals of Sophie Scholl in particular legitimate political resistance.

Shifts in the German political climate or prioritizing of these three political issues from Germany's post-WW II period to the beginning of this century as well as in the filmmakers' generations become apparent if one inspects the emphasis or genre orientation of Verhoeven's and Rothemund's films. The audience's receptivity was, after all, regulated by attitudes such as whether defense of the Reich against the Red Army was a value superior to the one of undermining the Nazi regime. As Thomas Assheuer reminds us, «Nach dem Krieg dauerte es lange, bis die Öffentlichkeit die Mitglieder der Weißen Rose nicht mehr als Landesverräter verachtete, sondern als Widerstandskämpfer ehrte.»¹⁰ As late as 1981, Verhoeven's experience confirms this public perception. When his actors on location at the Munich Feldherrnhalle stenciled the slogans «Freiheit» and «Nieder mit Hitler» on a wall, they were repeatedly reported to the police who began to arrest them. One sturdy man insisted that they be arrested and attempted to prevent them from continuing, even though the producer showed the police a filming permit. When the police hesitated, the man insulted everyone and finally left shouting: «Der Hitler hätt' euch alle aufgehängt!»¹¹ The cultural climate in Germany around 1980 thus forced Verhoeven to develop a historical context for the initial film treating *Die Weiße Rose*. After Verhoeven's and Adlon's films,¹² after Daniel Goldhagen¹³ and the 1996 and 2002 exhibits on the German military's atrocities in the East,¹⁴ Rothemund has now been able to «update» the motif to the new awareness level of his own audience. He also is of a generation of Germans far removed from the Third Reich. Hence, he was able to focus on «die menschliche Seite des Widerstands,» on Sophie.¹⁵ Verhoeven, by contrast, in 1982 created *Die Weiße Rose* with a different awareness – «Damals musste man das Ganze zeigen» – although privately he had already seen the Gestapo protocols of Mohr's interrogation of Sophie to which historians and Rothemund and his scenarist did not gain access until after the fall of the Wall.¹⁶

What the three films have in common is that they essentially highlight the story of unique historical antifascist students in the Third Reich. Have they thus distorted the big picture and contributed to the «normalization discourse»? Daniela Berghahn in her article «Post-1990 Screen Memories» reminds us that «Narratives of Miraculous Jewish Survival» are anomalies «that construct an ambiguous memory of Jewish suffering that allows us to forget while ostensibly inviting us to remember.»¹⁷ By analogy, some detractors might want to critique the White Rose films. There may, however, have been more complex issues at play, such as the effect the Allies may have had in the

slow change of the German public's attitude. The Allies at the end of the war may have screened or filtered out awareness of any German resistance to play upon the public's sense of collective guilt. As cited by Uwe Siemon-Netto in «The Legacy of a Philanthropist,» Robert Lochner, who was U.S. post-WW II Chief Control Officer for Radio Frankfurt, in November 1948 referred to this sort of censorship: «an ordinance that July 20 [...] must not be mentioned [...] if one mentions July 20, people might get the idea that there were a few who were not Nazis, and that is not permissible.»¹⁸ Moreover, soon thereafter, during the Cold War, Germans in both East and West of the divided nation were dissuaded from examining their own lives and history openly and in public. It was the generation of 1968 within Germany that persistently confronted (West) Germans with their past. And it was a movement in film, the New German Cinema, that was central to this process of confrontation; Verhoeven was part of just this movement.

A recent cultural controversy alerts us to the significance of who controls memory; it reminds us that it is not just German film that contributed to «normalization» tendencies. Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List*, as early as 1993, portrayed both brutal Nazis and Oskar Schindler, the «better German.» Will Tom Cruise along with director Bryan Singer now follow along those lines? Almost a year and a half after the Scholls, Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg likewise was executed for his resistance against the Nazis. He attempted to assassinate the Führer in the plot code-named «Operation Walküre.» Cruise will reenact Stauffenberg's role in «Valkyrie» (aka «Rubicon») set for shooting in Berlin during late Summer 2007. The heated public debate following the announcement of the Cruise project ranged from Berlin cabinet members to local police, and all across the political and media spectrums. Oscar-decorated filmmaker Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck pleaded on behalf of letting Cruise «cast his Superstar light on this rare resplendent moment in the most gloomy chapter of our history.»¹⁹ By contrast, Stauffenberg's son Bertold objected strenuously against Cruise playing his father's role.²⁰ Berlin authorities refused the use of Bendlerstraße, site of Stauffenberg's execution, and another Kreuzberg site as locations. Ultimately, the film will start shooting elsewhere in Berlin and receive more than 5 million dollars of German DFFF state film subsidy.²¹ Memory and its sites are contested.

Can there be a benefit in restoring to memory, as the three films have attempted, German resistance such as that of the White Rose? Exiles from the Third Reich evidently thought so. In a cautious way, German victims of Hitler such as Douglas Sirk with his 1958 Remarque adaptation *A Time to Love and a Time to Die* and Konrad Wolf with his 1959 *Stars* projected a «better German.» In their films, these film exiles, like their literary fellow artists,²² pointed

to a political ideal, a model for a new German identity, as do the three White Rose screen renditions. Modern neuroscience suggests that man's dreams are a form of learning. Movies are sometimes interpreted as collective dreams. Can the White Rose films enhance historical learning on the part of German citizens? The narrow treatment of so rare a historical phenomenon such as German resistance to Hitler and of the motif of the «better German» during the fascist period retains its relevance. Sophie Scholl's bearing and disposition occupy center stage of the powerful Rothemund film. International White Rose societies now actively espouse her cause.²³ Owing to her courage, her intellect, and her fearless political commitment, this one woman has become a model not only for young, activist German and American women to identify with, but also for politically committed, idealistic students in general.

Notes

- ¹ I am indebted to my colleagues George Lellis, Laurence A. Gretskey, and Sheila Johnson for constructive criticism and suggestions. Acknowledgement is also due to Percy Adlon and Michael Verhoeven for generous help with illustrations.
- ² Cf. Bill Niven, ed. *Germans As Victims* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), especially with its discussion of Jörg Friedrich's *The Fire and Sites of Fire*, and Joachim Perels, *Wider die Normalisierung des Nationalsozialismus. Interventionen wider die Verdrängung*, 2nd. ed. (Hannover: Offizin, 1996).
- ³ Michael Verhoeven, «Annäherung,» *Die Weiße Rose*, ed. Michael Verhoeven and Mario Krebs (Frankfurt/M.: Fischer Tb. 1983) 189–211, here 190.
- ⁴ Gerd Ueberschär, «Die Vernehmungsprotokolle von Mitgliedern der Weißen Rose.» *Sophie Scholl – Die letzten Tage*, ed. Fred Breinersdorfer, 2nd. ed. (Frankfurt/M.: Fischer, 2005) 339–51, here 347.
- ⁵ Sibylle Bassler, *Die Weiße Rose. Zeitzeugen erinnern sich* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 2006) 208–09.
- ⁶ Indeed, in «Speak, I'm listening,» his account of the origin of his *The Last Five Days*, Percy Adlon relates actress Lena Stolze's describing to him «how almost surreal it was to her to be offered the part a second time in another movie before she had finished the first one.» *Süddeutsche Zeitung* 3 Oct. 1982. Online English version: www.percyadlon.com/second_pages/five_last_days_pg3.htm.
- ⁷ Scenarist and director question «ob wir es uns zugetraut hätten, die Geschichte von Sophie Scholl so verdichtet und emotional zu erzählen, wie wir es getan haben, wenn nicht noch zusätzlich die neue Faktenlage, hauptsächlich die unterschiedlichen Protokolle, so spannend und detailreich gewiesen wäre.» «Inspiration durch Fakten.» *Sophie Scholl – Die letzten Tage*, ed. Fred Breinersdorfer, 316–30, here 322. This book reprints Gestapo official Mohr's narrative record of his interrogation of Sophie (359–89). Cf. also Rothemund, «*Sophie Scholl – Die letzten Tage*: Ein Gespräch mit Regisseur Marc Rothemund,» Interview des Internet-Portals kino-zeit.de. www.kino-zeit.de/filme/artikel/2513_sophie-scholl---die-letzten-tage-ein-gesprach-mit-regisseur-marc-rothemund.html.

- ⁸ In their internet press kit, the filmmakers of *Sophie Scholl – Die letzten Tage* state that «Verhoeven's film [...] ends with the arrest of Sophie Scholl.» <http://www.zeitgeistfilms.com/films/sophiescholl/sophiescholl.presskit.pdf>. [p. 5]. Captured 7/12/2007. This claim overlooks and overly plays down the fact that *The White Rose* also portrays Sophie's interrogation, the Freisler trial, and the guillotine killing of Sophie.
- ⁹ The dispute between Sophie and Gestapo agent Mohr in its intensity and structure is reminiscent of Schlöndorff's intellectual centerpiece in his 2004 *The Ninth Day*. There Abbé Henri Kremer also has his part-diabolical, part-sympathetic nemesis, Gestapo agent Gebhardt (August Diehl), and the adversaries' debate drives the discourse on Nazi ideology.
- ¹⁰ *Die Zeit* 24 Feb. 2005. Compare also Frank Schirrmacher, editor of *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, «Erst nachdem ein Großteil der Kriegsgeneration abgetreten ist, hat die Gesellschaft [of the German Federal Republic] ihren Frieden mit den Attentätern des 20. Juli [1944] gemacht.» www.faz.net/s/RubCF3AEB154CE64960822FA5429A182360/Doc~EF9345612FFA444F4866EFDFF4CC3FB15~ATpl~Ecommon~Scontext.html captured Jul 7 2007. Also www.spiegel.de/kultur/kino/0,1815,493153,00.html, captured July 16, 2007.
- ¹¹ Michael Verhoeven and Mario Krebs, *Die Weiße Rose* (Frankfurt/M.: Fischer Tb., 1982) 202.
- ¹² Historians like Joachim Perels regard Verhoeven's *White Rose* movie as a key mover for the unanimous 1985 resolution of the lower house of the German parliament «daß der Volksgerichtshof «kein Gericht im rechtsstaatlichen Sinne, sondern ein Terrorinstrument zur Durchsetzung der nationalsozialistischen Willkürherrschaft war» (*Wider die Normalisierung des Nationalsozialismus* 76). As late as July 1, 1998, the Bundestag again sees the need to invalidate by law «alle noch bestehenden Unrechtsurteile aus der Zeit der nationalsozialistischen Herrschaft.» The German federal legislature makes specific reference to «Urteile des Volksgerichtshofes.» «NS-Unrechtsurteile per Gesetz aufgehoben,» *Blickpunkt Bundestag*. Juni 1998, Nr. 1/98, 21. See www.bundestag.de/bp/1998/bp9801/9801021b.html.
- ¹³ Daniel J. Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997). In addition to publishing the German translation *Hitlers willige Vollstrecker* (Berlin: Siedler, 1996), the author involved himself in a book tour and debates in Germany which found an eager audience, especially with younger Germans.
- ¹⁴ Cf. Michael Verhoeven's 2006 documentary *Der unbekannte Soldat*.
- ¹⁵ Marc Rothemund, «Warum erneut ein Film über Sophie Scholl?» Interview with Margret Köhler for kinofenster.de on 20 Apr. 2005. www.bpb.de/themen/18NZBK,0,0,Warum_erneut_ein_Film_über_Sophie_Scholl.html.
- ¹⁶ Telephone interview with the filmmaker on 18 Sept. 2007. According to Verhoeven, Anneliese [Knoop-]Graf, the sister of White Rose member Willi Graf, as a citizen of Saarbrücken was given special access to the papers by fellow Saarbrückenite Erich Honecker, the head of the GDR from 1976 until 1989. In turn, she made the material available to the filmmaker before he created *Die Weiße Rose*.
- ¹⁷ «Post-1990 Screen Memories: How East and West German Cinema Remembers the Third Reich and the Holocaust,» *GL & L* 59 (2006): 294–308, here 302.
- ¹⁸ *The Atlantic Times* July 2007: 20.
- ¹⁹ «Deutschlands Hoffnung heißt Tom Cruise,» *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 3 July 2007: 33, 35, here 33.

- ²⁰ «Interview» with Martin Zips. *Süddeutsche Zeitung* 22 June 2007. Online version: www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/artikel/18/119870/9/. Captured 17 July 2007.
- ²¹ «Deutsche Millionen für Cruise-Film,» FAZ.NET Kino-Feuilleton 7 July 2007. www.faz.net/s/Rub8A25A66CA9514B9892E0074EDE4E5AFA/Doc~E281F694531... Also «Cruise kriegt deutsche Fördergelder,» *Spiegel* online 5 July 2007. www.spiegel.de/kultur/kino/0,1518,492511,00.html. German filmmakers like Volker Schlöndorff, Hans-Christoph Blumenberg, and Jo Baier like von Donnersmarck also voiced opposition against the official refusal of permission to shoot at historical Berlin sites. Cf. Andreas Kilb. «Posse peinlichster Art,» *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 4 July 2007: 38.
- ²² Beginning in 1943 with Thomas Mann's «Brave, magnificent young people!» *Politische Schriften und Reden*, ed. Hans Bürgin, vol 3 (Frankfurt/M.: Fischer Bücherei Moderne Klassiker, 1968) 254–56, here 256, and continuing with Alfred Neumann's novel *Es waren ihrer sechs* (Stockholm: Neuer Verlag, 1944, Berlin: Habel 1947, engl. transl., New York: MacMillan, 1946). Carl Zuckmayer also reportedly pondered writing about the group in the late 1940s but did not consider German culture of the time ready to appreciate the sacrifice of the White Rose group. Detlef Bald, *Die Weiße Rose. Von der Front in den Widerstand* (Berlin: Aufbau, 2003) 10.
- ²³ At the University of Texas, Austin, a student group started an organization under this name in 2003. It considers itself a legacy of the Munich resistance group, espousing activism against repression and persecution in general and against specific current political genocidal practices, such as in Darfur. Cf. also «Wofür würde Sophie kämpfen? ... 13 junge Frauen machen Vorschläge.» *Emma März/April* 2005, and www.deheap.com/white%20Rose%20Studies.htm.