Wim Wenders (1945 – )

- German filmmaker, playwright, author, photographer
- His career spanned over 4 decades
- He received some of the highest international film awards
- He was a key figure in **New German Cinema**
  - With **Herzog**, Fassbinder, Alexander Kluge, Syberberg, von Trotta
  - Harun Farocki, Volker **Schlöndorff**, Helma Sanders-Brahms
  - Lasted from late 60s into the mid 80s
- Largely, this movement has now changed to other streams
Some of his Films . . . .

The Goalkeeper's Fear of the Penalty Kick (1972 written by Peter Handke)
Alice in the Cities (1974) (Road Trilogy)
The Wrong Move (1975) (Road Trilogy) (written by Peter Handke)
Kings of the Road (1976) (Road Trilogy)
The American Friend (1977)
Room 666 (1982)
Tokyo-Ga (1985) (A tribute to Yasujiro Ozu)
Wings of Desire (1987) (Written with Peter Handke)
More . . . .

Until the End of the World (1991) (Written with Peter Handke)
The End of Violence (1997)
The Million Dollar Hotel (2000)
Palermo Shooting (2008)
Pina (2011)
The Salt of the Earth (2014 Documentary on photographer Sebastião Salgado)
Everything will be Fine (2015)
But who is Peter Handke (1942 - )?

- Austrian Novelist, Playwright, Scriptwriter and initially, a political activist
- Started controversy when he questioned Gruppe 47’s achievements in a famous meeting in 1969 (see next slide)
- In his early career he was better known as a playwright
- He then concentrated on Fiction (still writing wonderful works)
- Herzog based his *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser* on a play by Handke
- Wenders directed some of Handke’s plays (part of *Slow Homecoming*)
Some Novels by Handke

• The Goalie’s Anxiety at the Penalty Kick
• A Writer’s Afternoon
• A Sorrow beyond Dreams
• Short Letter, Long Farewell
• Slow Homecoming (A tetralogy including a play as part 4)
• On a Dark Night I Left my Silent House
• Absence
• Don Juan: His own Version
• The Left Handed Woman (which he directed as a film)
Gruppe 47

- An influential literary association in Germany (Post WW II) (founded in 1947)
- **Goal**: to inform the German public about democracy after the Hitler era.
- Early authors launched a magazine called *Der Ruf* (The Call)
- The occupational US forces revoked their printing license in April 1947
- The former authors of Der Ruf met in 1947 to start a new magazine: *Der Skorpione*.
- Inspired by the Spanish Group 98 they founded the Gruppe 47.
- **Names**: Gunter Eich, Heinrich Boll, Martin Walser, Gunter Grass, Johannes Bobrowski and Peter Bichsel
Before we start, a few Literary Terms . . .

- Both terms started life in Germany and are now used universally
- **Entwicklung**: development
- **Entwicklungsroman**: a broad category of novels in which an adolescent character grows and develops
- **Bildung**: education and formation and self-cultivation where philosophy and education are linked within a process of personal and cultural maturation.
- **Bildungsroman**: a related category of novels which describes the “coming of age” of a protagonist from youth to adulthood: his/her education, culture and psychological / moral growth. Ends on a positive note after all the ups and down.
Examples of Bildungsroman . . .

- Goethe:
  - Die Leiden des jungen Werthers (1774) (The Sorrows of Young Werther)
  - Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre (1795) (The Apprenticeship of Wilhelm Meisters)
- Defoe’s Moll Flanders (1722)
- Fielding’s Tom Jones (1749)
- Jane Austen’s Emma (1816)
- Joyce’s A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man (1916)
The Handke Script is Based on Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship* (1795)

- A novel of self-realization greatly admired by the Romantics
- The novel highlights the 18th century German reception of Shakespeare
- Wilhelm, a young man living in the mid-1700s strives to break free from the restrictive world of economics
- He seeks fulfillment as an actor and playwright.
- He generally fails in both
- He goes on a long trip with a young actress called Mignon
- On the way, they meet up with others . . Laertes and Philine (Therese!)
- Handke uses the “large” structure but does not use the plot and the text
The Road Trilogy

• Shot from 1974-1976
• All three featured a “traveling” aimless narrative
• All three were shot by cinematographer Robby Müller
• Mostly taking place in West Germany
• Alice in the Cities was in black and white in 16 mm
• The Wrong Move was shot in color
• Kings of the Road was in black and white but in 35 mm
Alice in the Cities (1974)

- German writer Philip Winter has missed his publisher's deadline for writing an article about the United States.
- He decides to return to Germany where he encounters a German woman, Lisa, and her daughter, Alice.
- After Lisa leaves Alice temporarily in Phil's care, it quickly becomes apparent that he will have to look after her for longer than he expected.
- Stuck with Alice, he searched various cities of Germany for her grandmother, whose name and address Alice cannot remember.
- There is only a photograph of her grandmother's front door with no house number and no one in the shot.
The Kings of the Road (1976)

- A projection-equipment repair mechanic and
- A depressed hitchhiker (who has just been through a break-up with his wife and a half-hearted suicide attempt).
- They travel along the Western side of the East-German border in a repair truck, visiting worn-out movie theaters.
- The movie contains many long shots without dialogue
- The film is almost 3 hours long
In 1942, Camus published two books

• The Outsider (L’étranger), a novel
• The Myth of Sisyphus (Le Mythe de Sisyphe), a philosophical twin to the Outsider

• Those became the origin of the term “The Absurd”
• This term was used differently earlier by Sartre, Kierkegaard
• To these, the Absurd was a characteristic of individuals or faith
• To Camus the Absurd came to mean a universal paradox
What is the Absurd?

- The experience of the **Absurd** takes place when a person realizes that the Universe has no intrinsic meaning

- We cannot know everything
- We cannot find “absolute” and “eternal” meaning
- The Universe is alien to us: it does not care about us,
  - On the contrary . . . It can be violent to us
- Death is certain and cannot be explained
So where Does Camus go from here?

- **The Myth of Sisyphus** opens by stating that the most urgent question is that of Suicide (philosophical suicide, of course)
- Once a person recognizes the Absurd, why not commit suicide?
- Why wait till Death?

- Camus says there can be three **3 paths** such a person can consider
3 Possible Paths once the Absurd is Realized

• **Path 1**: avoid waiting for natural death and commit suicide (which is philosophically based and not out of emotional despair).

• **Path 2**: commit what Sartre calls *Mauvaise Foi* or **Bad Faith**
  • Camus calls it a **Leap of Faith**

• The term started with Nietzsche but in a “restricted” definition
• Bad Faith is lying to ourselves.

• It is a way of not being what we are, and to be what we are not.
• It is a dishonest way to arm ourselves against the absurdity of our existence.
More . . .

• Bad faith is the opportunistic sliding from the Absurd to someone else’s system, usually with absolutist principles
• How? by accepting another religion, political system, moral code, etc.
• **Path 3**: stare at the void, the abyss
• Accept the gap between the universe and yourself . . .
• Generate your own meanings . . .

• Albert Camus thus came out with a positive path for generating meaning, or replacing the “lost meaning” in life
How does this relate to the **Wrong Move**?

- Wilhelm is an aspiring writer with more than just a block
- We start the film with Wilhelm frustrated at being “in the absurd”
- He knocks out the window pane with his fist, then the next pane …
- Through his road journey, he hopes to find the “experiences” that will help him write
- He also expects writing to give his life a meaning (Path 3)
- The film addresses these themes:
  - Existential alienation (Remember the PASSENGER?)
  - Meaninglessness of life
And . . .

• Several times Therese complains about the “emotional distance” of Wilhelm . . . The Absurd Man is involved elsewhere

• After the episode when he uses blood in his notebook, note the discussion about the difference between the need to write and writing itself . . . .
  Maybe a person can want to write without knowing what.
  Just like you want to walk.
  Wanting to write is the need.
  Not loving, but wanting to love.

• Writing, then, might not generate meaning, because it is a need.
What can we look for in Film?
1) The Personalities in the Film

- They have “non-realistic” dialog
  - Random / Unrelated to surroundings / Reciting dreams to one another
- They have no or little background
- We do not even know why they gather around Wilhelm
- They come into his life and leave it with the same ease
- Could it be they are more like something from his novel than persons he is really “with”
- Wilhelm and Therese stand between a Tripod/Camera and tourists
  - As if Wenders is saying: these characters are out of the film
  - They do not represent the story
Are these Persons Part of Wilhelm?

- Laertes, the Old Man: the political involvement of a writer?
- Mignon: the child in the writer?
- Therese: the emotional center of a writer (which is mostly shunned)?
- The poet (Landau): the literary element in a writer?
- The Uncle (Suicide): the despair in a writer?
2) Links that Tie the Film Together

- Mignon juggles 3 balls and stands upright like a clown
  - The two tourists who ask Wilhelm to photograph them do the same
- The last announcement about “Parents No 37 who dropped their child, please come and pick it up”
  - Isn’t that a voice over request for Wilhelm’s mother to come and collect her son that she dropped “on the road”
- Blood happens several times
  - Wilhelm cuts his hand crashing the window panes
  - Twice the old man’s nose bleeds
  - The Uncle pushing his ball-point pen into his hand and Wilhelm using that blood to make a “Japanese like” character
And . . .

• The variety of transport:
  • Boats, helicopter, trains, barges, bicycles, cars --- ALL actively part of the narrative.
3) Key Conversations

- Many directors feel the need to explain, verbally, what is going on.
- This is not always a good technique as the film should do it cinematically.
- BUT better to express this inside the film than write about it later.
- In *La Dolce Vita* (Fellini), you feel the whole film can be understood when Steiner talks to Marcello for 3 minutes.
- The Wrong Move has two critical conversations:
  - The monolog of the industrialist (the Uncle in the Chateau).
  - The voice over lines at the end of the film.
4) What is the Voice Over?

• In most films, Voice Over is the “Global” narrator assisting the viewer
• We know Wilhelm is the owner of the Voice Over
• When in time is he doing it?
  • After the last scene?
  • When he finally wrote his novel?
• Does the Voice Over supersede the narrative in the film?
5) Perfect Camera Technique

• The attention to “space” and “filmic geography:
  • The opening **helicopter scene**
  • The uphill climb of the 4 and the changing conversations/plateaus
• The parallel trains when Wilhelm sees Therese in her window
• Camera is smooth and interesting
  • It moves from a narrow angle to a wide one
• The shots are creative:
  • People drop in and out of view
• The last river crossing is in real time, the script fits the river width
6) Cinematics?

- You can see from the end Credits that very few people worked on the film
- A car carries the camera crew and is pushed by two others
  - Scenes are not “perfectly” still and give a warmer feel for the ambience
- Light is used magnificently: very few spots, artificial lighting
- The same with sound: no dubbing
- The large variety of “incidental” objects caught by the camera
  - The TV sets without programs
  - The cat on the car
  - The scenes with the madman, the fighting couple, etc.
And we always leave with a **Question** . . . .

What was the Wrong Move?
Or the False Movement?
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