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Einzelhaft, an episode in the popular Schimanski series, is all on its own among the work made for TV. Here Kotulla showed, without betraying himself, that he was capable of mastering action scenes in total contrast to his usual gentle and reflective directorial style. He owed that job to Götz George, the star of the highly popular series, since the actor who played the Auschwitz commandant was to become a celebrity in German cinema and television as the future Schimanski. George remained eternally grateful to Kotulla for a part that is to be seen as one of the most important in his career.

Kotulla's filmography is unique and characteristic of his generation's conflicts, which he in turn filmed with extreme discipline. The news of his death could lead to re-evaluation of his work.

Daniel Sauvaget
Documents,
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The "International Forum of New Cinema" at the recent Berlin Film Festival presented a selection of new films from China. The following text has exerted a huge influence on what is known as the "Sixth Generation" of Chinese film-makers. Its author, Jia Zhangke (b. 1970), is viewed as a key figure, a link, in new Chinese cinema. His first feature *'Xiao Wu'* aroused great interest at the 1998 Berlin Festival because the Western public was presented for the first time with cinematic realism from China, offering unfamiliar and amazing insights into everyday life. This film was a low-low-budget production made with amateur actors from Jia Zhangke's home town of Fenyang. "Xiao Wu" is still banned in China up to the present day, and its international success, now combined with publication of this text, is viewed by many Chinese film-makers as a bone of contention. Young directors above all – many of them amateurs – were inspired to take up a camera and make underground films and videos, both documentary and fictional, concerned with the immense social upheavals in the "Kingdom of the Centre". Zhangke's text first appeared on the film page of the South Chinese weekly *Nanfang Zhoumo*. The translation is slightly shortened here after consultation with the author.

The Amateur Film's Time Will Soon Come Again

Recently I was cheerfully talking to a European film critic at a big Korean film festival – about nothing less than the past, present, and future of the cinema. We were almost on our way home when the rising tide gradually became louder outside. I cannot explain why such conversations about cinema frequently end in a very melancholy way. To re-establish our cheerfulness my film critic friend asked me what I thought the new driving-force for film-makers might be.

Without reflecting on this I answered that the age of the amateur film would soon return. I am

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serious about that. Every time I am asked this question, that is what I say. And I thus intentionally, and automatically, call in question so-called professional film-making. All those people who think that the film industry's commercial rules and laws are an inviolable canon and do not hesitate to vaunt their market skills have long lost their capacity to think. They take pedantic care that their works accord with "professional standards".

This kind of film-making is only concerned that images should be as subtle as oil paintings, that the camerawork should perhaps accord with Antonioni, and that a light might be reflected, as if by chance, in the main male actor's face. They unceasingly ponder over what new subtleties might please the professional spokesmen and decision-makers on the film scene, and forbid themselves any experiments, any film language of their own, for fear of infringing the generally recognized rules. Such experiments are seen as being amateurish. The outcome is that what I believe a film really needs – an ethic and truthfulness – is pushed into the background.

However those values do not exist in the world of professional film-making where people cling to empty, stupid concepts and supposedly safe values. Most professionals are unreceptive to innovations and incapable of judging "different" films impartially. Nevertheless they untiringly warn predominantly younger filmmakers not to repeat themselves and to change constantly.

And yet there are a good number of directors who have always been critical of that kind of professionalization. Kryzstof Kieslowski was certainly not being coquettish ten or more years ago when he called himself "an amateur director from Eastern Europe". In that cautious description of himself there is a form of power embodying self-reliance and self-assurance. Or Akira Kurosawa who throughout his life said that he might have made many films but still did not know what film is. He had always sought the beauty of film.

A very great deal has certainly happened in Asian film production during the past ten years. By now many Asian countries produce films that accord with international standards – but many retrograde steps must be conceded with

regard to the film as an art form. Huang Ailing, who long worked on the selection committee for the Hongkong Film Festival, believes that glorification of high budget productions conceals a lack of cultural assurance. Hollywood plays a central part in that connection, since globalization is also taking place in cinema at present. Many Asian films directly confront this trend towards levelling down, which means that in a few years time young people all over Asia will sing the same songs and wear the same clothes. Young women will have the same make-up and the same handbags. Today already you see almost the same programme on Korean and Chinese TV. Oh what a wonderful world that will be!

Against that background I believe that the independent film could become very important in the future in terms of preserving a country's special cultural aspects. I increasingly incline towards the thesis that there can only be real understanding and equality of rights between peoples if cultural differences are respected. However globalization leads to a levelling down and monotony. It is just because the film industry experiences recession and lacks "cultural confidence" that the golden age of independent film-making is getting under way. A basically critical attitude, self-awareness, and undogmatic creativity are the forces most needed in cultural reorientation.

That is why I am certain that the age of the amateur film will soon come. The future will belong to directors who are full of passion and have an unstoppable wish to make films for the cinema. They do not accept judgements according with the industry's current conventions – just because their films do not fit into such narrow confines. Their cinematic language is innovative and aims at emotionality. Independent film-makers are not concerned about professional conventions because that is the only way they can establish the freedom for their creative work. They reject traditional criteria and are thus receptive to ideas, stimuli, and values beyond the narrow world of the film studio and film colleges. Professional boundaries do not apply to their work, and they operate beyond traditional laws and conventions. They are honest and bound to reality because they wish to uphold their intellectual ethos.

Such directors as Godard, Buñuel, Rohmer, and also Fassbinder (once rejected by a film college) belong in this artistic tradition. Polanski once said that the New Wave films were amateurish. This conceited professional failed to take into account that these amateur works of genius created innumerable possibilities for the cinema.

And what is the situation today? No-one knows whether there may not be a Chinese Quentin Tarantino among the many customers at special shops for pirated VCDs. Or whether a genius might not be discovered among DVD

directors. Film must not be viewed any longer as the privilege of a small group of people. Cinema always belonged to the masses. Recently I met a group of young cineastes in Shanghai. They earn their money as aircraft mechanics or poster-designers, but perhaps they are China's future film-makers? I have always felt antipathy for the inexplicable arrogance of "professionals". I feel close to amateurs.

Their way of working lives from belief in equality and justice; they are sincerely interested in life and have genuine sympathy for normal people.

Jia Zhangke/Frankfurter Rundschau