An agent of the state, and absent without leave, Paul makes an increasingly indirect, almost accidental journey back to his family home. With too forceful a kick – perhaps indicative of the amount of time he has spent away – Paul smashes his front door, and when he misses his brief window to flee to a friend in Berlin, he strips out of his uniform to quietly and half-heartedly masturbate in his childhood bedroom. This, the film's first moment of total privacy, is short-lived. Paul is later joined by brother Max, and Max’s girlfriend Lene, just in time for one to interrupt the plans of the other, initiating a series of passive-aggressive interactions that then encompass the majority of Köhler's film.

Although Paul grows despondent with longing for Lene, his desire is not romantic, but rather a self-destructive impulse. *Bungalow* is considerably more complicated than the love triangle it might seem on its surface. Though the film is not exactly *The Graduate* or *Rebel Without a Cause*, either, Paul aims to provoke reactions from those around him, pushing at the bounds of what is and isn't permissible. With time suspended, and his desire for solitude leaving him at this dead-end, Paul finds himself at neither a point of arrival or a point of departure, and Köhler's film concludes, ambivalently and ingeniously, with an open-ended shrug. 

**Acropolis Cinema presents:**

*Ulrich Köhler's Bungalow*

July 3 - 9, 2020 – Acropolis Virtual Cinema
The pleasures of a weak cinema allow for an endless range of possibilities and outcomes but by stressing what's undetermined and drawing attention to someone with a lack of what the central character wants. McKee/Hollywood ethos demands that, above all, the screenwriter must determine Army trainer—reflective that he doesn't know where he’s going or what he wants. The one of several out of Paul’s mouth—the whopper is that he’s set to go to Africa as an family home, mentions in passing over the phone that he may be coming to Berlin. A lie, none of his features set foot in Berlin, a distant place where characters have come from Bungalow!

unfixed and unmoored. As his characters drift, so too do his films. worlds undergoing definition and in the process-of-becoming, neither here nor there, ff do not satisfy, bring conclusions, or other escape valves; they present characters and and outcomes and mise en scène are open to multiple readings. Köhler’s films defiantly in the project of a “weak” cinema in which desires and intentions are often unknowable, minded films stressing certain convictions and even more certain heroes, he’s engaged of all working German writer-directors. As opposed to the “strong” cinema of single-separation and begin to define Köhler’s cinema. Köhler is possibly the most subversive of all working German writer-directors. As opposed to the “strong” cinema of single-minded films stressing certain convictions and even more certain heroes, he's engaged in the project of a “weak” cinema in which desires and intentions are often unknowable, and outcomes and mise en scène are open to multiple readings. Köhler’s films defiantly do not satisfy, bring conclusions, or offer escape valves; they present characters and worlds undergoing definition and in the process-of-becoming, neither here nor there, unfixed and unmoored. As his characters drift, so too do his films.

Bungalow (2002) is the best of the early Berlin School films; it's typical of Köhler that none of his features set foot in Berlin, a distant place where characters have come from or might go to. Paul, an Army recruit who's deserted his post to return to his small-town family home, mentions in passing over the phone that he may be coming to Berlin. A lie, one of several out of Paul's mouth—the whopper is that he's set to go to Africa as an Army trainer—reflective that he doesn't know where he's going or what he wants. The McKee/Hollywood ethos demands that, above all, the screenwriter must determine what the central character wants. Bungalow opposes this, not by being a “strong” film, but by stressing what's undetermined and drawing attention to someone with a lack of focus.

The pleasures of a weak cinema allow for an endless range of possibilities and outcomes and detours. A strong movie titled Windows on Monday (2006) or Sleeping Sickness (2011) would never allow characters to take over full sequences and sections of the film from other characters, as happens in Köhler's second and third features. A strong movie would insist on applying God-like perspective to take in all characters at all times, with the central character always at centre stage, and direct things in accordance with the rules of centrality. Köhler is interested in the periphery, in the places his characters wander off to from their central place (usually, a home), and how, as that character wanders, the others in their lives recede from view until they're no longer in the movie at all, almost entirely forgotten, or at least pushed so far to the margins that they become phantoms. ♦

The Cinema of Ulrich Köhler
by Ross McDonnell

The following is an excerpt of an article originally published by Sight & Sound, March 6, 2019

Not long after the Berlin School's first wave, which culminated in the early-00s with films by two German Film and Television Academy Berlin graduates – Christian Petzold's The State I Am In (2000) and Angela Schanelec’s Passing Summer (2001) – Ulrich Köhler finished his first film, Bungalow. In the two decades since, Köhler has made just four features, a body of work that, though small, is still singular. His films are distinctive in how they double as provocative and plausible thought experiments, four films that each go one conceptual, microsociological step further than the last. Köhler is one of the Berlin School's most loosely associated members – he studied roughly 250 km removed in Hamburg – and remains one of its more underrated and underrepresented figures. After three back-to-back-to-back premieres at the Berlinale, he broke with tradition in bringing his most recent feature, In My Room, to the Cannes Film Festival last May.

Like those of his compatriot-contemporaries, Köhler's films have been behavioural studies, crafted in a familiar Berlin School style: both slow-burn and low-key, demonstrating a restraint and resistance to any broad or outward dramatisation. Though not Berlin-based, or even urban dramas, these films still explore ideas of anomie and alienation and, are almost in conversation with one another, with characters all in and out of conflict with their surroundings. Köhler's films consider a similar, even shared sense of dislocation from a variety of vantages. As a surprising counterpoint to what has come before, In My Room has its protagonist exist eventually in isolation rather than alienation, outside of society rather than on its thresholds.

At Bungalow's beginning, Köhler’s camera takes its time in finding the film's protagonist, an adolescent or young adult named Paul, who the viewer glimpses first as just one soldier in a group of many. In parallel with the protagonist's own thousand-yard stare, it's a fitting start for a character study that is unusually impersonal, keeping its subject at distance, opaque and unknown to the end.
The pleasures of a weak cinema allow for an endless range of possibilities and outcomes. What's undetermined and drawing attention to someone with a lack of focus. But by stressing what's undetermined and drawing attention to someone with a lack of what the central character wants. Mckee/Hollywood ethos demands that, above all, the screenwriter must determine Army trainer—reflective that he doesn't know where he's going or what he wants. The one of several out of Paul's mouth—the whopper is that he's set to go to Africa as an soldier who's deserted his post to return to his small-town family home, mentions in passing over the phone that he may be coming to Berlin. A lie, or might go to. Paul, an Army recruit who's deserted his post to return to his small-town countryside. Over a few summer days, Paul evades the responsibilities of everyday life and falls in love with his brother's girlfriend, disrupting the lives of everyone in his circle. With Köhler's penchant for deadpan humor and subtle performances, Bungalow becomes a quiet mockery of militarism, familial estrangement, and youthful ennui.

85 min. | Germany | 2002

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