

Transit [12A] 2018 | Germany/France | 101 mins

UK release date	16th August 2019
Director	Christian Petzold
Screenplay	Christian Petzold
Cinematography	Hans Fromm
Music	Stefan Will
Cast	Franz Rogowski (Georg); Paula Beer (Marie); Godehard Giese (Richard); Lilien Batman (Driss)

Adapted from Anna Seghers' 1944 novel *Transit*, *Transit* is even more ambitious than Christian Petzold's earlier films *Barbara* and *Phoenix* in its treatment of history, conflating past and present to articulate a mournful, urgent appraisal of the contemporary European psyche.

The intermingling of epochs isn't immediately apparent. In the intense, terrifically orchestrated opening stretch, it seems like the film might be an exercise in speculative fiction or a dystopian thriller à la *Children of Men*. A man enters a Parisian bar and tells the protagonist, Georg (Franz Rogowski), that the city is sealed off. They discuss their respective plans of escape in hushed tones, getting increasingly nervous as police vans keep racing past the window, sirens blaring. Their talk of foreign occupation, forged documents, tip-offs and deportations, along with the sight of Paris streets teeming with uniformed men on patrol, immediately recall the Second World War, except that it's clearly the present day. Those familiar with Petzold's early work might assume that the director has taken one of his favoured themes to its logical extreme, conceiving a parallel reality in which the surveillance state has evolved into a literal fascist regime, instigating the return of WWII-style persecution.

The oppression is dispelled – or, rather, complicated – when Georg tries to deliver some letters to a writer who is in hiding and, after discovering that the writer has killed himself, takes possession of his German Reich passport. With the introduction of this blatant anachronism, suddenly other subtler ones become apparent. Once Georg manages to flee to Marseille, which has yet to be seized by the undefined enemy and where he hopes to acquire a transit visa for a ship passage to Mexico, Petzold's temporal strategy is gradually clarified.

In Marseille, Georg befriends a North African woman and her young son who are also 'illegal' and appear to be refugees in the contemporary sense. It thus becomes clear that, rather than transposing the characters and action from Segher's novel to the present day, Petzold has combined the two temporalities and allowed them to coexist, formulating a forceful comment on the recurrence of history.

The mother and son soon disappear and the film shifts gears, abandoning the hectic pace and constant threat of the beginning for a more contemplative mode. Forced to linger in Marseille until the departure of his ship, Georg falls in love with the writer's wife Marie (Paula Beer) and tries to convince her to come to Mexico with him, seeking salvation in Marie's love as much as in his escape to Mexico.

Symbolic ghosts, liminal spaces and fluid identities are recurrent motifs in Petzold's oeuvre and here they are brought together in an overwhelmingly sad meditation on the repeated moral failures that make up the history of refugees in Europe. This sadness accumulates into a potent plea for genuine, collective introspection and a concomitant change of course, underlined by the lyrics of the Talking Heads song that accompany the closing credits: "Well we know where we're going / But we don't know, where we've been..."

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