



Contents

Gods of the Plague Credits	7
Rio das Mortes Credits	8
The Niklashausen Journey Credits	11
The American Soldier Credits	12
Mother Küsters Goes to Heaven Credits	15
Fear of Fear Credits	16
Satan's Brew Credits	19

**Plagues of the God: Fassbinder's
Torturous Cinema (2021) ... 22**
by Jonathan Rosenbaum

**Marriage Story: On Fassbinder's
Rio das Mortes (2021) ... 32**
by David Jenkins

**"There Are Many Ways to Fight a Battle": The Intriguing
Shapes of Fassbinder's Early Features (2021) ... 42**
by Eric Rentschler

**Fassbinder's Mother Küsters Goes to Heaven (1975)
in a Genealogy of the Arbeiterfilme (2017) ... 70**
by Christina Gerhardt

**Margot's Life of Quiet Desperation:
On Fassbinder's Fear of Fear (2021) ... 96**
by Margaret Deriaz

**Disenchanted Germany: The Limits of Submission in
Satan's Brew (2021) ... 106**
by Earl Jackson

**Fassbinder and the Politics of Everyday Life:
A Survey of His Films part 3 (1977) ... 124**
by Ruth McCormick

About the Restorations ... 134

Production Credits ... 134





Gods of the Plague

Götter der Pest
antiteater 1970
92 minutes

Hanna Schygulla Joanna Reiher
Margarethe von Trotta Margarethe
Harry Baer Franz Walsch
Günther Kaufmann Günther
Carla Aulaulu Carla Aulaulu
Ingrid Caven Magdalena Fuller
Jan George Police inspector

Written and Directed by
Rainer Werner Fassbinder
(with the collaboration of **Michael Fengler**)
Director of Photography **Dietrich Lohmann**
Edited by **Franz Walsch (Rainer Werner Fassbinder)**
Music by **Peer Raben**

Rio das Mortes

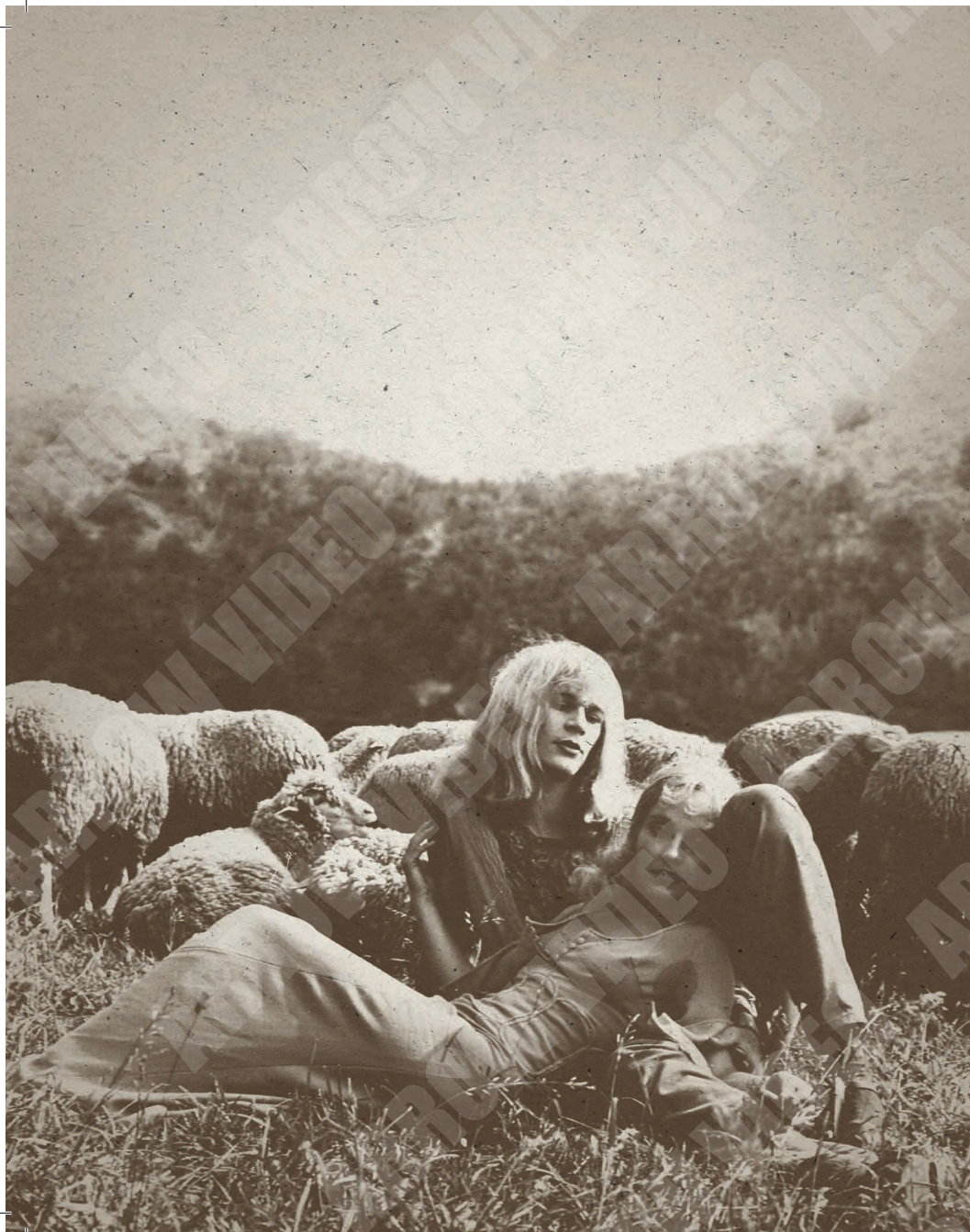
anti-teater / Janus Film und Fernsehen 1970
87 minutes¹

Hanna Schygulla Hanna
Michael König Michel
Günther Kaufmann Günther
Katrin Schaake Katrin, Hanna's friend
Harry Baer Harry, Michel's colleague
Ulli Lommel Car dealer

Written and Directed by
Rainer Werner Fassbinder
Director of Photography **Dietrich Lohmann**
Edited by **Thea Eymèsz** and **Franz Walsch**
(**Rainer Werner Fassbinder**)
Music by **Peer Raben**
Set Design by **Kurt Raab**
Production Manager **Michael Fengler**

¹ - The original runtime, prior to conversion to HD, is 84 minutes.





The Niklashausen Journey

Niklashauser Fart

antiteater / Janus Film und Fernsehen 1970

90 minutes¹

Michael König Hans Böhm

Hanna Schygulla Johanna

Margit Carstensen Magarethe

Michael Gordon Antonio

Günther Kaufmann Leader of the farmers

Kurt Raab Bishop

Franz Maron Magarethe's husband

Walter Sedlmayr Priest

Karl Scheydt Niklashausen citizen

Written and Directed by

Rainer Werner Fassbinder and **Michael Fengler**

Director of Photography **Dietrich Lohmann**

Edited by **Thea Eymèsz** and **Franz Walsch**

(**Rainer Werner Fassbinder**)

Music by **Peer Raben** and **Amon Düül II**

Set Design by **Kurt Raab**

¹ - The original runtime, prior to conversion to HD, is 86 minutes.

The American Soldier

Der amerikanische Soldat

antiteater 1970

76 minutes

Karl Scheydt Ricky

Elga Sorbas Rosa von Praunheim

Rainer Werner Fassbinder Franz Walsch

Jan George Jan

Hark Bohm Doc

Marius Aicher Police officer

Margarethe von Trotta Chambermaid

Ulli Lommel Tony

Katrin Schaake Magdalena Fuller

Ingrid Caven Bar Singer

Eva Ingeborg Scholz Ricky's mother

Kurt Raab Ricky's brother

Written, Produced and Directed by

Rainer Werner Fassbinder

Director of Photography **Dietrich Lohmann**

Edited by **Thea Eymész**

Music by **Peer Raben**





Mother Küsters Goes to Heaven

Mutter Küsters' Fahrt zum Himmel
a.k.a. Mother Küsters' Trip to Heaven
Tango Film 1975
107 minutes

Brigitte Mira Emma Küsters
Ingrid Caven Corinna
Margit Carstensen Marianne Tillmann
Karlheinz Böhm Karl Tillmann
Irm Hermann Helene
Gottfried John Niemeyer
Armin Meier Ernst
Matthias Fuchs Knab

Directed by **Rainer Werner Fassbinder**
Written by **Rainer Werner Fassbinder** and **Kurt Raab**
Director of Photography **Michael Ballhaus**
Edited by **Thea Eymész**
Music by **Peer Raben**

Fear of Fear

Angst vor der Angst

Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR) Cologne, 1975

91 minutes¹

Margit Carstensen Margot

Ulrich Faulhaber Kurt

Brigitte Mira Mother

Irm Hermann Lore

Armin Meier Karli

Adrian Hoven Dr. Merck

Kurt Raab Herr Bauer

Ingrid Caven Edda

Lilo Pempeit Frau Schall

Hark Bohm Dr. Rozenbaum

Directed by **Rainer Werner Fassbinder**

Written by **Rainer Werner Fassbinder**

(based on the short story by **Asta Scheib**)

Director of Photography **Jürgen Jürges**

Edited by **Liesgret Schmitt-Klink**

Music by **Peer Raben**

Set Design by **Kurt Raab**

Produced by **Peter Märthesheimer**

¹ - The original runtime, prior to conversion to HD, is 88 minutes.





Satan's Brew

Satansbraten

Albatros / Trio Film, 1976

106 minutes

Kurt Raab Walter Kranz

Margit Carstensen Andrée

Helen Vita Luise Kranz

Volker Spengler Ernst Kranz

Ingrid Caven Lisa

Y Sa Lo Lana von Meyerbeer

Ulli Lommel Lauf

Armin Meier Stricher

Katharina Buchhammer Irmgard von Witzleben

Brigitte Mira Mutter Kranz

Peter Chatel Eugen

Vitus Zeplichal Urs

Written and Directed by

Rainer Werner Fassbinder

Directors of Photography

Michael Ballhaus and **Jürgen Jürges**

Edited by **Thea Eymèsz**

Music by **Peer Raben**

Produced by **Michael Fengler**



Plagues of the Gods: Fassbinder's Torturous Cinema (2021)

by Jonathan Rosenbaum

"Capitalism is the plague. Criminals are its gods."
(Spoken during the German trailer of *Gods of the Plague*)

Rainer Werner Fassbinder was only twenty-four when he made his first four features in 1969, the third of which was *Gods of the Plague*. Years later, when he compiled a list of what he believed were his ten best features, *Gods of the Plague* made it into fifth place. The only other very early film on this list was his seventh feature, *Beware of a Holy Whore* (*Warnung vor einer heiligen Nutte*, 1971) – one of the six feature-length works he made in 1970 – which figured in first place.

An inveterate list maker who plainly enjoyed that somewhat adolescent pastime, Fassbinder also ranked his ten favourite films made by others (topped by Luchino Visconti's *The Damned* [*La caduta degli dei*, 1969]) and his ten favourite actresses and actors, both in the films of others and in his own films: Marilyn Monroe, Hanna Schygulla, Clark Gable, and Armin Mueller-Stahl. He also plausibly put himself at the top of his list of the ten most influential German New Wave directors.

One can argue that early Fassbinder is very much a matter of certain raw and irreducible basics – including the contradictions that would haunt the remainder of his prolific oeuvre, which ended, sadly yet predictably, with his drug-fuelled death in 1982. For starters, his leftist critique of German middle-class culture was both contradicted and inflected by a highly conservative fatalism and defeatism. He seemed convinced that change was impossible, and at times even appeared to relish that fact – a sentiment already expressed in the title of his first feature, *Love is Colder Than Death* (*Liebe ist kälter als der Tod*, 1969), which inevitably suggests the German Romantic notion that death must somehow be even warmer than love. In most of these early features, cruelty in large doses often plays out against tenderness, most often in smaller doses – though one mark of distinction in *Gods of the Plague* is that its doses of affection and tenderness tend to be sweeter and ampler than what one usually expects from Fassbinder. Furthermore, heterosexual flirtation and prostitution play out against homoeroticism in these early crime pictures, and the desire for independence plays out against the brutality and seeming permanence of the System (known as the Syndicate in *Love is Colder Than Death*) – as metaphorically relevant as the commercial film industry and its offshoots must have seemed to Fassbinder and his rebellious stances at the time. Reflecting in an interview on what she thought

Fassbinder wanted to accomplish in his early films, Hanna Schygulla settled on the English word “upset”: his films are indeed upsetting, not only in their design but in their delivery. Even though Marlon Brando is strangely absent from Fassbinder’s list of his favourite movie actors, one often feels that Stanley Kowalski’s comportment at the dinner table anticipates the Fassbinder style of behaviour in more ways than one.

Coupled with Fassbinder’s brutality, and sometimes indistinguishable from it, are the bisexual sadomasochism and bossy power trips of the films themselves. Indeed, every scene of *Beware of a Holy Whore* (a *film à clef* about the making of Fassbinder’s *Whity* [1971] in Italy only five months earlier) qualifies as some sort of power game, often coupled with angry yelling and/or violence, and inflected by a discontinuous rhythm of starting and stopping that tends to dominate the action. The line of dialogue that concludes this action, the same one that’s repeated most often in the film, is “I guess I won’t be content until I know that he’s been completely destroyed,” and the film’s closing motto, from Thomas Mann – which confirms that Fassbinder was fully aware of his own contradictions – is, “And I say to you that I am weary to death of depicting humanity without being part of humanity.”

The formally inclined critics who liked to argue that Fassbinder was the “successor” of Godard, doing for the 70s something comparable to what Godard was doing for the 60s in terms of impact, output, and influence, tended to overlook or sidestep the political implications and ramifications of his sadomasochism. Godard’s early politics were confused, to say the least, before they became doctrinaire for a spell after May 1968, but even though Godard himself would later label *Breathless* (*À bout de souffle*, 1960), his first feature, a “fascist” film, he never succumbed to the sadomasochism that turned Fassbinder’s leftist politics away from a belief in the future and towards a more fatalistic absorption in the ugly past. At best and at most, this made Fassbinder a historian. At worst it made him a cynical defeatist exulting in some form of stalemate – even though this ultimately yielded, for my taste, his most brilliant work, *Martha* (1974), a sarcastic black comedy about what he viewed as the sadomasochistic givens of bourgeois marriage, and a poker-faced Sirkian farce that luxuriates in its own stylistic excess. Indeed, in any tug of war between leftist politics and sadomasochism that might turn up in a Fassbinder film, it is almost invariably his grim sexual politics rather than his ethics that win the day, a kind of loving insult to the audience’s assumed respect for power over virtue. As French critic Luc Moullet

has suggested while writing about such right-wing entertainments as King Vidor’s *The Fountainhead* (1949) and Howard Hughes and Josef von Sternberg’s even campier *Jet Pilot* (1957), conservative movies, thanks in part to their contempt for collectivity and their preference for individual fulfilment, tend to be sexier than their leftist equivalents. Moreover, one could argue that sex seen as painful domination and submission provides a juicier spectacle than most forms of leftist exaltation.

The fact that Fassbinder’s favourite among his own works was his most intertextual exposure of his own practice, in *Beware of a Holy Whore*, only emphasises the self-referential nature of his work as a whole, and also the intertextuality of the subsequent work by others that it would inspire. For his own work, consider the fact that Franz Walsch, the full name of Fassbinder’s hero in *Love is Colder Than Death* and *Gods of the Plague* (and also a less prominent character in his 1970 *The American Soldier*, played once again by the writer-director) served as Fassbinder’s pseudonym for his work as an editor.



The eponymous hero of *The American Soldier* spells out this name as follows, in another Fassbinderian list that seems to illustrate some of the writer-director’s predilections: “W as in war, A as in Alamo, L as in Lenin, S as in science fiction, C as in crime, and H as in Hell.” In the same film, as if to cinch Fassbinder’s identification

with the character, his own mother plays the character's mother, Mrs. Walsch. (One wonders if the surname might have been inspired by Raoul Walsh, whose *The Naked and the Dead* [1958] was listed as his second favourite film after Visconti's *The Damned*, just ahead of Max Ophüls' *Lola Montès* [1955].) At one point in *Gods of the Plague*, Franz Walsch identifies himself as "Franz Biberkopf," thus looking ahead towards his 1979-1980 adaptation for German television of what may have been his favourite novel, Alfred Döblin's doom-laden 1929 *Berlin Alexanderplatz*.

Regarding the films of others, consider that Lou Castel, who plays the director in *Beware of a Holy Whore*, will also play the director who replaces Jean-Pierre Léaud in Olivier Assayas' *Irma Vep* (1996), over a quarter of a century later.

As Thomas Elsaesser pointed out, "*Gods of the Plague* is both a variation on and a sequel to *Love is Colder Than Death*". (In between came his early masterpiece, *Katzelmacher* (1969), at once Chabrolian and Warholian in its sardonic relish for its portraiture of the bad behaviour of its lower-middle-class workers.) In both films, all the major male characters are either gangsters or cops and most of the women are prostitutes, with a key difference that Franz, the gangster played by Fassbinder in the first film, is replaced by Harry Baer in second. (The fact that Fassbinder had no acting part undoubtedly gave him more time to focus on the mise-en-scène and the compositions, which are far more developed and intricate.) Hanna Schygulla again



plays Johanna (this time spelt as Joanna), Franz's girlfriend, whom he soon abandons for Margarethe (played by future filmmaker Margarethe von Trotta), and there's the crucial addition of another male love object, Günther Kaufmann as Günther, another gangster buddy of Franz, despite the fact that he has killed Franz's brother Marian (Marian Seidowsky). Kaufmann (1947-2012) was an actor whom the director was romantically and sexually obsessed with at the time; he had already

appeared in *The American Soldier*, *Whity*, and *Baal* (1970) at this point, and would go on to appear in many more films afterwards, mostly in Germany, including quite a few of Fassbinder's.

The main influences on both *Love is Colder Than Death* and *Gods of the Plague* are probably Godard's films with gangsters (*Breathless*, *My Life to Live* [*Vivre Sa Vie*, 1962], *Band of Outsiders* [*Bande à part*, 1964]), although Jean-Pierre Melville's more meditative and minimalist films about gangsters, influenced by American film noir (which also informed Godard's gangster movies), also play a significant role. (The female betrayals to the police in both Fassbinder films seem directly traceable to *Breathless*.)



Love is Colder Than Death is dedicated to Claude Chabrol and Eric Rohmer (the two most politically and formally conservative of the French New Wave directors), Jean-Marie Straub (from whom Fassbinder borrowed a lengthy shot in *The Bridegroom*, *The Comedienne*, and *the Pimp* [*Der Bräutigam, die Komödiantin und der Zuhälter*, 1968] showing street prostitutes in Munich, to which he added guitar music), and "Linio and Cuncho" (the names of two characters in Damiano Damiani's 1967 *A Bullet for the General* [*Quién sabe?*], an Italian western with Mexican gunrunners).

The Bridegroom, *the Comedienne*, and *the Pimp*, a singular short film made up of many seemingly disjointed segments but only 12 shots, uses such sources as poetry by Saint John of the Cross, passages from Bach's *Ascension Oratorio*, and a performance of Ferdinand Bruckner's 1926 play *Pains of Youth* (*Krankheit der Jugend*), which Straub reduced to only 11 minutes, recording it in a single take from a fixed camera. (Fassbinder stars as a pimp; he turns up again at the very end of the film, when his character is shot dead by the heroine.) This version of the play was also performed

live at Munich's Action-Theater, on a programme with Fassbinder's first play, which became the source of his second feature, *Katzelmacher* (in which Fassbinder also stars). A radical concentration and organisation of the Bruckner play clearly had a lasting effect on Fassbinder's work. When the Action-Theater was disbanded in May 1968 – reportedly after one of its founders, jealous of Fassbinder's growing influence in the group, trashed the premises – it was immediately reformed under Fassbinder's full control and renamed the antiteater. By most accounts, including Fassbinder's, his first nine features up through *Beware of a Holy Whore* were antiteater productions – in much the same way that Orson Welles's early stage and radio work and films were all Mercury productions – and the stage set seen in Straub's short is also visibly used in *Love is Colder Than Death*.

Gods of the Plague, far less theatrical in its staging than *Love is Colder Than Death*, with striking uses of deep focus and tilted camera angles, is a noticeable improvement in many respects. The fact that the budget of DEM 180,000 was roughly twice as much as what he had for his two previous features can be felt as well as heard and seen: even Hanna as a character has clearly moved up the economic ladder. And Harry Baer as a much more attractive Franz Walsch than Fassbinder was himself, comparable to Lou Castel playing Fassbinder in *Beware of a Holy Whore*, is another kind of upgrade that affects everything else.

Although the film references tend to be far more overt (Franz, released from prison, finds Joanna in a feathery dress, lip-syncing a Marlene Dietrich song for her male customers in a ritzy nightclub known as the Lola Montez, and a still of Dietrich in Josef von Sternberg's *The Devil is a Woman* [1935] decorates her dressing room), the plot has fewer gratuitous murders and registers much less like a ponderous and diffident stylistic exercise. As Michael Koresky aptly observed, *Love is Colder Than Death* never allowed us to identify with or care about any of its characters, gangsters or victims: "They are like mannequins, posed in static tableaux, often in stark, white rooms."¹ This time we're given more opportunities to react to them less clinically.

Koresky's notes on the sequel/remake seem equally appropriate: "*Gods of the Plague* is a beautiful, even tender, film. There is a newfound adventurousness to Fassbinder's visuals, including tracking shots and zooms; an elegant employment

1 - Koresky, Michael. 'Eclipse Series 39: Early Fassbinder', The Criterion Collection, 26 August 2013. <https://www.criterion.com/current/posts/2880-eclipse-series-39-early-fassbinder> [accessed 11 Jan 2022].



of multiple planes within frames; and an expressive use of mirrors and set design. All of this fluidity, however, is in the service of another study in inertia; *Gods of the Plague* ultimately illustrates the futility of romance and the inevitability and ignominy of death."² Ending with a bloodbath in a supermarket only makes the ignominy more apparent. Joanna's first encounter with Franz is seen in her dressing-room mirror, and their drive to a classy restaurant shows a mastery of high-contrast noir lighting that suggests emulation rather than crude imitation. Fassbinder insisted in his interviews about not having wanted to parody his model – an impression possibly left by some of his faltering techniques, such as the over-recording of many of the sound effects in *Love is Colder Than Death* (e.g., page-turning and footsteps). But Schygulla has noted that the key lesson she learned from Fassbinder's practice and example was that ignorance and an inability to do certain things made it possible to learn how to accomplish other things. Fassbinder's singular cinema was clearly one of them.

Jonathan Rosenbaum maintains a web site (jonathanrosenbaum.net) archiving most of his writing. From 1987 to 2008, he was the principal film critic at the Chicago Reader. His books include *Moving Places: A Life at the Movies* (1980), *Placing Movies: The Practice of Film Criticism* (1995), *Midnight Movies* (with J. Hoberman) (1983), *Film: The Front Line 1983* (1983), *Greed* (1991), *Movies as Politics* (1997), *Movie Wars: How Hollywood and the Media Limit What Films We Can See* (2000), *Dead Man* (2000), *Abbas Kiarostami* (with Mehrnaz Saeed-Vafa) (2003), *Essential Cinema: On the Necessity of Film Canons* (2004), *Discovering Orson Welles* (2007), *Goodbye Cinema, Hello Cinephilia: Film Culture in Transition* (2010), *Cinematic Encounters: Interviews and Dialogues* (2018), and *Cinematic Encounters 2: Portraits and Polemics* (2019).

2 - Ibid.



Marriage Story: On Fassbinder's *Rio das Mortes* (2021)

by David Jenkins

There's something deliciously absurd about the idea of filmmaker Rainer Werner Fassbinder dealing with the institution of matrimony in his work. Given his less-than-idealistic view of love – allied with his oft-stated belief that love is a purely performative pseudo emotion that merely justifies manipulation, domination and abuse – it's certainly surprising to see how often (and how fervently) he lampoons the notion that two people might choose to sanctify a perceived bond in the eyes of God, the state, or whomever else. His commitment to this bit, however, is admirable, and his multifarious and innovative critique of marriage neatly threads its way through his entire filmography. In short: he hates marriage in many different ways.

Numerous Fassbinder films depict marriage as a kitted-out torture basement hidden beneath the floorboards of an opulent mansion. The giddy pleasures of flirtation, romance and sex all suddenly give way to conjugal responsibility and, in many cases, the idea that one has entered into a strict, often painful social pact from which escape is not easy. In 1974's *Martha*, a slick Lothario is revealed to be a tyrannical monster, his transformation triggered by the words "I do". *The Marriage of Maria Braun* (*Die Ehe der Maria Braun*, 1978), meanwhile, charts the personal sacrifices made by a woman in postwar Germany in a desperate bid to keep the flame of her quickie marriage to a soldier from whom she's constantly estranged alive. In the end, her efforts are revealed as pointless in the light of fate's callous machinations. Marriage is framed as a gilded cage that women are locked inside against their wishes in his wistful and harrowing 1974 adaptation of Theodor Fontane's *Effi Briest*.

Yet his deliriously cynical 1971 TV movie, *Rio das Mortes*, is perhaps the film that gets this particular thematic ball rolling as it is, among other things, a stinging satire on marriage as well as the belief that it often takes just the lightest of nudges for a person to walk away from an apparently robust relationship. It initially observes one of the film's three central players, Hanna (Hanna Schygulla), as she secretly pines for the day when her boyfriend will sweep her off her feet and accompany her into a world of sallow bourgeois conformity. Yet this never happens. The context of her desire is never revealed, to the point where it occasionally translates as a dreamy, irrational mania. Through her perfectly calibrated performance, Schygulla excels in tip-toeing the line between misty-eyed fantasy and a serious need to grasp responsibility, respectability and adulthood.

The film's opening scene offers a close-up of a telephone receiver as it lays on a table. We discover that Hanna's mother is warbling incessantly down the line, while our heroine stands on the other side of the room, preening and looking longingly into the middle distance. When the eye-rolling daughter finally deigns to pick up the phone, she cuts in on a lengthy diatribe about the joys of marriage, more specifically her interlocutor's angry questioning as to why her beloved has yet to tie the knot. Hanna softly bats away her mother's brusque inquiries, the implication being that this young, hip, independently-minded woman would have nothing to do with such fun-stymying frivolity. Yet the opposite is in fact true: her reaction, it transpires, is in response to her boyfriend Michel's (Michael König) lethargy and unwillingness to pop the question. She wants it to happen, but has become tired of waiting. Yet, for her, it seems like a possibility, even one which may materialise in the very near future, if she's just able to hold out and keep her man interested.

Hanna's desire for marriage in *Rio das Mortes* is comically intractable, as Fassbinder surrounds her with people who both directly and indirectly attempt to ward her off any such commitment. She hops to a restaurant dressed in 1940s finery and an opulent fox fur scarf to have steak in horseradish sauce with a pal (Katrin Schaaque) who proceeds to regale her with sordid details of her recent divorce. The horrendous situation sees the friend festering in a loveless marriage and begging for a divorce which the husband will not grant her. Then, he heads abroad and meets another woman, and is now finally willing to unlock the chain. Hanna appears to find the tale quaint and affirmative, happy that her friend is now free and able to be married again. In fact everything in the film relates – either directly or indirectly – to Hanna's thirst for marriage, yet there is apparently nothing that can convince her that seeking this outcome is not in her best interests.

The title of the film literally relates to a sub-plot which drives the central narrative, one which catalyses the dissolution of Michel and Hanna's budding relationship. Once Hanna's amorous aspirations have been firmly established, she and Michel are visited by one of his old friends, Günther (Günther Kaufmann). Initially, a bloody fistfight breaks out as it transpires that Gunther went against a brotherly oath to not join the armed forces, and ended up enrolling in the Navy. Yet things are swiftly patched up, and Michel is now far more interested in the potential promise of a Peruvian treasure map than he is settling down with Hanna. Fassbinder then plays out



all possible iterations of the absurd reality that the attention and drive of these men could be so wholeheartedly drawn to such a madcap scheme. All this duly places the prospect of marriage into an even harsher light.

In the same way that Hanna can't be convinced of her potential folly, so too are Michel and Günther unable to conceive that their planned caper to excavate an area of Rio das Mortes is likely doomed to failure. With very little money in the pot to begin with, it falls to these unimaginative and congenitally lazy dudes to drum up the cash it would take to transport them to Peru and allow them to subsist there for many months. A visit to a travel agent gives them a brutally honest encapsulation of the financial down payment they would require to even secure seats on a flight out of Munich, yet they are almost psychotically unwavering in their mutual obligation to live out this dream. The genial comic hue of the film makes it easy to ignore Michel and Günther's motivations, accepting them as dyed-in-the-wool macho hombres whose destinies are driven by earthy adventure. Yet in Fassbinder's eyes, there's also

perhaps a subconscious desire to untangle themselves from anything that might stifle their personal freedoms, even if that's the love of a good, committed and physically attractive woman.

Signs, omens and malign influences arise from everywhere, and Fassbinder never intends to frame his thesis as an entirely interpersonal affair, one that is driven by subjective predilections and unpredictable psychologies. As so often in his work, the festering Petri dish of society affects how we live and the decisions we make, and our plucky threesome are tested along the way to see if they can be swayed from their righteous path.

There's a sequence early on which takes place in a dance club. Michel and Günther are moping into their beers, bemoaning the hurdles which stand in between them and the possibility of achieving their wacky goal. Hanna, meanwhile, is up on the dance floor sporting a revealing pink minidress and dancing with a random guy to Elvis Presley's "Jailhouse Rock". She bops away with gleeful abandon, while the man (played by Fassbinder in a trademark figure-hugging leather jacket) violently contorts, almost enacting what appears to be an erotic mating ritual, while ogling this blonde beauty as she loses herself to the music. The pair genially part ways, and the



man sits down next to his girlfriend who complains that he never asks her to dance like that. He slaps her, possibly as a sign to Hanna that he could leave this woman for her at the drop of a hat. But it also operates as a harbinger of a relationship gone sour, all joy and happiness reduced to public displays of violence. This is what marriage does to a man.

Everyone in the film has their eyes on something better, but also something that's completely illusive, and this accounts for the fact that there are no contented heterosexual relationships

depicted in the entire film. Everyone is either embittered by the actions of a partner, or desperately wanting to free themselves from the constraints of polite domesticity. Michel and a colleague can be seen during the film's opening chapter retiling a bathroom for a bored housewife. She hops up the stairs to inspect their work while wearing a see-through lace shirt and coquettishly singing Marilyn Monroe's "I Wanna Be Loved by You" prior to questioning Michel about his long, blonde locks. She heads to the lounge to talk about payment with the boss, sitting on the couch like she's in a casting session for a porn film. Hanna is not present for this episode, and it suggests that *Rio das Mortes* isn't a tale about a woman observing and then reacting to the widespread moral decline she sees in society. This is instead Fassbinder saying that society has moved on from marriage, whose anachronistic tenets are no longer compatible with regular human behaviour. Sexual impulses need to be sated, and nothing can get in their way.



It seems understandable that flighty human desire is enough to engulf the concept of matrimony in flames, but Fassbinder leaves his *pièce de résistance* for a sequence in which Michel, now desperate for funds, decides to sell off his car to a two-bit second-hand auto dealer, played with admirable poker face by Ulli Lommel. That he's willing to sell his beloved car for a pittance suggests that even a basic adherence to capitalist reasoning is rejected when it comes to realising an ideal that also happens to extinguish the possibility of marriage. Salt is then rubbed into the wound when we discover via the apoplectic Hanna that the car had sentimental value to her – she and Michel kissed in it, they had sex in it, it was symbolic of their mutual affection and more. And yet Michael parts ways with it for a song, and the dealer is seen trundling the car onto his seedy lot before chalking an asking price onto the windscreen that's over 1,000 marks more than he paid for it.

Underlining everything in the film – all the lovelorn losers, the exploitative skinflints, the depressive confidantes – is something deeper and perhaps more affirmative about Günther and Michel's relationship. The seeds of Hanna's torment are sewn in the explosive scene in which the men first meet. It's the moment where Fassbinder filters in his own ideas about the nature of their relationship, and that there's a chance that the pair may be more than pals (why, indeed, would Michael become so violently angry over such a relatively trifling matter?). Their extremely no-holds-barred tangle even causes Günther's trousers to split right up the seam of his crotch, and there is most assuredly a homoerotic tinge to the breathy, fleshy manner in which they roll across the floor, one man apparently unwilling to yield to the other as their limbs lock and gyrate in tandem. Perhaps the latent sexual tension is not so evident in this initial moment, but it is so by the film's climax, which plays like a pastiche of the finale to Michael Curtiz's *Casablanca* (1942) as the two men stroll contentedly across the tarmac of Munich airport towards escape, renewal and potential (but unlikely) salvation.

From a viewing platform, Hanna, once again dressed like a 1940s moll, pulls a revolver from her clutch purse and points it towards the men. Is she aiming at Michel for abandoning her so blithely? Or is it towards Günther, whose return from the wilderness has ripped her life to shreds? She pulls back, deciding instead to leave the men to their fate. Maybe, in that vital moment, she finally sees the happiness that has been denied to her, and decides to allow this unconventional "marriage" to play out to its probable bitter end, an end where the last laugh is most assuredly hers.

David Jenkins is editor of Little White Lies magazine. He has written about film for most of the current century, and has been published in Time Out London, Sight & Sound, The Guardian and various other outlets. He recently supplied Blu-ray commentaries for releases of Jacques Demy's Les Demoiselles de Rochefort, Takeshi Kitano's Boiling Point and Phil Karlson's 5 Against the House. He has edited monographs on the Coen brothers, Paul Thomas Anderson and David Fincher, and is currently in the process of writing a book about filmmakers and filmmaking.





“There Are Many Ways to Fight a Battle”: The Intriguing Shapes of Fassbinder’s Early Features (2021)

by Eric Rentschler

Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s now legendary critical cinema would assume a plethora of formal shapes. The director wanted to fashion films that would question, unsettle, and ultimately transform how people living in the FRG both thought and felt. Without fail and with justification, commentators have traced the director’s oppositional initiatives to the 1960s, to the rediscovery of Bertolt Brecht’s epic theatre (above all by Jean-Luc Godard) with its penchant for distantiating and refunctionalisation, to the stark minimalism and bohemian flair of Andy Warhol and the restrained yet poignant realism of Jean-Marie Straub and the challenge that their eccentric approaches posed to cinematic convention, and his desire to ignite scandal (invariably generating the description “enfant terrible”), all of which became readily apparent in his earliest endeavours in the theatre and the cinema.

Amidst Fassbinder’s numerous hallmarks, many of his first films remain to this day only partially apprehended, in decisive regards understudied, and, as a result, relegated to a secondary status. They have become buried within the inordinate profusion of activity between April 1969 and the end of 1970, during which time he completed ten feature films, two radio plays, two stage productions, and a television adaptation of *Das Kaffeehaus* as well as playing the lead role in Schlöndorff’s adaptation of Bertolt Brecht’s *Baal* (both 1970).¹ For most critics to date, Fassbinder’s early works at best function as previews of coming attractions, points of departure for assessments of the director’s more significant subsequent output. Ultimately it would be the revamped melodramas that arose after his often-elucidated exposure to the films of Douglas Sirk in the winter of 1970-1971 and the historical tapestries (especially *Berlin Alexanderplatz* [1980] and *The BRD Trilogy*) with their incisive studies of modern German sociopathology which would come to serve as the privileged sites of meaning and importance in Fassbinder’s oeuvre. To be sure, the director in retrospect referred to his first features as naive and ephemeral, throw-away films that he had “made in a certain situation in response to a certain matter and which one... could quickly leave behind.”² For a variety of reasons, *The American Soldier*, *The Niklashausen Journey* and *Rio das Mortes* have been left behind by film history. Even if these films are lesser-known Fassbinders, they abide as compelling endeavours and in this way arguably not lesser Fassbinders.

1 - Wolfgang Limmer, *Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Filmemacher* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Spiegel, 1981), pp. 16-17.

2 - Wilfried Wiegand, “Interview I”, in *Rainer Werner Fassbinder*, ed. Peter W. Jansen and Wolfram Schütte, 5th rev. ed. (Munich: Hanser, 1985), p. 81.

The exercise in noir, *The American Soldier*, is a retrospective affair; almost every gesture and intonation come from out of the past. It reviews the history of gangster films from *M* (1931), *White Heat* (1949), and *Pickup on South Street* (1953) to *Le Samourai* (1967) and his own *Gods of the Plague* (1970); it partakes of quotations from *Vivre sa vie* (1962) and Batman comics; it includes deadpan characters with names like Franz Walsch, Rosa von Praunheim, and Magdalena Fuller; it visits a nightclub called Lola Montez where a back alley Marlene sings "I was sitting at the river." It is a world of walking anachronisms and studied quotations, of weary gazes and well-worn phrases. Fassbinder's eighth feature spirits the viewer into a time warp, the haunted screen of a phantom republic.

It is also a ritualistic replay of all those afternoons and evenings that the young Fassbinder spent in Munich movie houses, echoes and emanations from the cinephile's and filmmaker-to-be's *Bildungsjahre*. The mise-en-scène, likewise, reworks motifs and constellations from his epigonal early endeavours. Fassbinder, from the beginning, was an avid pasticheur and cannibaliser, a director whose films insistently revisited the cinematic past, not only recollecting fond moments and guilty pleasures, but reflecting on their meaning for his own person and his present place. In matters of film history, Fassbinder may have been a time traveller, but he never was a tourist.

The American Soldier is driven by mixed and (therefore all the more) powerful feelings, equal measures of cinephilia, narcissism, and impatience: a love of the cinema, a yearning to stage and act out one's movie-derived dreams, the intimation of a desire to work closer to home, to craft films mindful of a Federal Republic in the state of becoming. What stands out here are images and poses, the determined yet undeniably awkward self-styling of young German actors straining to emulate Hollywood studios' low-lives and heavies. Fassbinder's imaginary Munich is a void and a vacuum, a locus without an everyday, where sidewalks, streets, and stores are all but empty and unpeopled. In this cineaste's dreamscape there is no such thing as mundane reality. Without question, the film is derivative and spare, under-narrated and undramatic, more a function of citation than inspiration. On the other hand, it is chocked full of stylistic ambitions and striking compositions, decidedly personal in its emphasis and most certainly in its trajectory.



In this enclosed and self-referential cinematic world, we even get a preview of coming attractions: the maid (played by Margarethe von Trotta) tells a sad story that will become the film *Fear Eats the Soul* (*Angst essen Seele auf*, 1974). It would be tempting to see these effusions as camp and pastiche, but that would be short-sighted. For *The American Soldier* transcends postmodern playfulness; it consciously discloses a historical situation of impasse, reflecting on the strained relationship between American dreams and German fantasies.

No moment makes this impetus more evident than the bizarre final sequence. Ricky Murphy, the hired gun from out of town, has wandered through the story like a spectre, hopelessly antiquated and out of place in a humdrum postwar Germany, a killer dressed in a double-breasted white suit, a hard guy who wolfs steaks and swills Ballantine's, a personage with a minimal vocabulary and near-zero affect. Gunned down in the end by crooked cops in the basement of Munich Central Station, the protagonist tumbles to the ground. His mother and brother, their presence only



modestly motivated, suddenly arrive on the scene. With frenetic and perverse insistence, the brother rolls onto and over Ricky's limp body, kissing him, caressing him in a protracted Liebestod captured in slow motion, an act of incest and necrophilia accompanied by Günther Kaufmann's song, "So Much Tenderness," which goes on for almost four minutes and seems like forever.

The disturbing scenario, to be sure, betrays the director's own ambivalent feelings. Fassbinder himself had preyed

upon the carcass of a legacy embodied by foreign gangsters and Hollywood movies. The brother's fierce lovemaking enacts, even parodies, West Germany's (and Fassbinder's own) embrace of American mass culture and celluloid fantasies. This encounter is incestuous, because the relation of young Germans to this American heritage, especially in matters of cinema, has in crucial ways been a family affair. To revisit the privileged spaces of the film noir is to recall the street films of the twenties with their nocturnal phantasmagorias of dread and anxiety. And, beyond that, how could one possibly imagine the film noir without thinking of the contributions of German and Austrian emigrants in Hollywood from Fritz Lang to Billy Wilder, Edgar G. Ulmer, and Robert Siodmak?

For Fassbinder and young German peers like Wim Wenders, Roland Klick, and Klaus Lemke, America and its filmic legacy provided escape and enchantment. But there arose a discomfort with that dependence, the realisation that cinephilia can be a form of necrophilia, that the studied hallowing of films from the past might indeed be tantamount to the worship of dead bodies. In this crucial moment at the start of the 1970s a young filmmaker reckoned with his own attachment to foreign dreams, presenting it as an obsession and a compulsion, an endless (and ultimately absurd) repetition of the ever-same motions and emotions, staging the tableau as an exorcism and a catharsis. For all its undeniable playfulness, *The American Soldier* is dead serious. Above all, it enacts an auteur's taking of leave. (One might call it Fassbinder's

Abschied von gestern.) It acknowledges, to be sure, "so much tenderness" for the cinema that had sustained his youthful dreams, but more than that, it recognises the need to move beyond this tender and desperate identification if he and his work were ever to come of age.



The filmmaker's desire to move on emanated from a larger generational discontent among West Germans born after World War II. Indeed, this Oedipal fury is essential to prevailing notions of New German Cinema in general and fundamental to the founding declaration of 1962, the famous Oberhausen Manifesto that laid to rest the cinema of the fathers and proclaimed that "The old film is dead."³ The filmic effusions of angry young men and women, especially their critical confrontations with the Nazi past (with its mass violence and mass murder) and their fierce awareness of how that past had been both whitewashed and refurbished by their elders during the Adenauer era, become of a piece with the FRG's student movement (*Studentenbewegung*) and its vendetta against the powers that be. Filmmaking became a tool of political action; one consciously shot films in an attempt to strike back. "I don't throw bombs," Fassbinder was quoted as saying on the posters for *The Third Generation* (*Die dritte Generation*, 1979), "I make films."⁴

More than any of his peers, one might argue, Fassbinder embodied the hope, irritation, and disenchantment of his generation. Indeed, his work is perhaps the most exemplary instance of the post-1968 desire to challenge the status quo, to craft popular art with a critical inflection, to defuse affirmative culture by infusing it with subversive content. He is, without a doubt, one of the most definitive and, as such, dominant presences of the 1970s and, for this reason, someone we can study with a mind to understanding a generational uprising and the various oppositional strategies and critical energies which sought to create an alternative cinema, especially in the Federal Republic of Germany.

3 - "The Oberhausen Manifesto", in *West German Filmmakers on Film*, ed. Eric Rentschler (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1988), p. 2.

4 - See also Helma Sanders-Brahms' recollection, "New German Cinema, jeune cinéma allemand, Good Night: A Day in Oberhausen 1982 (1982)", in *West German Filmmakers on Film*, p. 222: "One makes films - one can also say: one shoots them. It follows... that the film camera is a weapon. In class struggle. 'When the oppressors have finished speaking, then the oppressed will speak,' we knew this from Brecht, and we thought that the oppressors had spoken much too long and because we now wanted to have our say, it was logical that we identified with the oppressed whose turn it was now to speak. Shooting. Shooting films."

New German auteurs reacted against the abuse of film under Hitler and cinema's affirmative status as a stabilising force and a vehicle of political legitimation during the 1950s, its collusion with the reactionary establishment and its deference to American capital. They intervened as well against a nation's all-too eager willingness to forget the past and proceed with business as usual, to fall in with the dictates of Allied foreign policy and to become a Cold War bastion. Nonetheless, West German feature films from the late 60s and early 70s offered precious few images of the student movement's quite familiar iconography, the experiments in communal living and sexual liberation, the strategy sessions in smoky apartments and the mass meetings in university auditoriums, the street demonstrations with expressive transparencies and slogans chanted in chorus, the bloody altercations with the police and testy responses from government officials. The political conflicts and public controversies of the late 1960s would rarely find direct expression in the features of the so-called



Young German Film. One looks in vain for a contemporary West German counterpart, for instance, to Jean-Luc Godard's *La Chinoise* (1967), Lindsay Anderson's *If* (1968), Michelangelo Antonioni's *Zabriskie Point* (1970), or even Hollywood's *The Strawberry Statement* (1970) and *Getting Straight* (1970). The opening sequence of Volker Schlöndorff's *Man on Horseback* (Michael Kolhaas – der Rebell, 1969) was exceptional in its topicality, in its direct linkage of

student demonstrations from around the world (which we see in newsreel footage) with the grand refusal of Heinrich von Kleist's implacable protagonist.⁵ If one seeks West German films that chronicled and represented the events of 1967 and 1968, one is best advised to view the shorts, essay films, and agitprop documentaries produced by Harun Farocki, Helke Sander, and other members of their cohort at the Berlin Film and Television Academy (dffb).⁶

5 - Peter Zadek's *Ich bin ein Elefant, Madame* (1969) depicted unruly high school students in Bremen and a variety of exercises in political provocation. Michael Verhoeven's Brechtian reworking of American violence in *Vietnam, O.K.* (1970), provoked extreme reactions and, in fact, ignited a scandal that closed down the Berlin Film Festival.

6 - See Hans Helmut Prinzler, "Filme der Studentenbewegung", in *Deutschlandbilder*, ed. Gabriela Seidel (Berlin: Freunde der deutschen Kinemathek, 1997), pp. 117-142; also *Kino-Fronten: 20 Jahre '68 und das Kino*, ed. Werner Petermann and Ralph Thoms (Munich: Trickster, 1988).

The Niklashausen Journey resides in film history as the most conspicuous embodiment of Fassbinder's dismay regarding the student movement. No other West German film of the time, argues Wilhelm Roth, dealt so directly with the experience of 1968.⁷ Commentators consider it to be a reaction to the demise of the *Studentenbewegung* as well as a recognition of the aporias inherent in the uprising's misguided continuation as a politics of terrorism.⁸ Beyond that, it has been seen within a wider "debate of the New German Cinema about the failure of the radical left, and the filmmakers' resolve not to make 'political' films."⁹



Shot over 20 days in May 1970 for 550,000 DM (at the time about \$165,000), it premiered five months later on ARD, West Germany's first television station. It then altogether vanished from view until 2002, at which time, due to the endeavours of Taurusfilm (Munich) in cooperation with the Fassbinder Foundation, a restored version came out on DVD with English subtitles.¹⁰ (A German release would follow three years later.) This was Fassbinder's seventh feature and his first collaboration with WDR, a TV station that would become a crucial (and, on several occasions, frustrating) site of operations during his career.¹¹ People did not like the film much, and neither did Fassbinder, claimed the producer Günter Rohrbach; it was an unabashed catastrophe. Nonetheless, it still lingered in the director's mind many

7 - Wilhelm Roth, "Kommentierte Filmographie", in *Rainer Werner Fassbinder*, ed. Peter W. Jansen and Wolfram Schütte, 5th rev. ed. (Munich: Hanser, 1985), p. 141.

8 - *Ibid.*, p. 141.

9 - Thomas Elsaesser, *Fassbinder's Germany* (Amsterdam: U of Amsterdam P, 1996), p. 272. *The Niklashausen Journey*, Elsaesser argues suggestively but somewhat elliptically, can be compared to contemporary Young German films like *Signs of Life* (Lebenszeichen, 1968), *Even Dwarfs Started Small* (Auch Zwerge haben klein angefangen, 1970), *San Domingo* (1970), *Scarabea* (1969), *The Artist in the Circus Dome: Clueless* (Die Artisten in der Zirkuskuppel: Ratlos, 1968), and *Cardillac* (1969).

10 - According to Wilhelm Roth, only one very poor copy of the film remained in existence after the television screening; it was stored in the WDR's Cologne archive. See Roth in *Rainer Werner Fassbinder*, p. 141.

11 - Fassbinder's subsequent collaborations with WDR included the TV series *Eight Hours Don't Make a Day* (Acht Stunden sind kein Tag, 1972), *World on a Wire* (Welt am Draht, 1973), and *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1980) as well as the films *Martha* (1973), *Like a Bird on a Wire* (Wie ein Vogel auf dem Draht, 1975), *Fear of Fear* (Angst vor der Angst, 1975), *I Only Want You to Love Me* (Ich will doch nur, dass Ihr mich liebt, 1976), *The Marriage of Maria Braun* (Die Ehe der Maria Braun, 1979), and *Lola* (1980).



years later, so much so that he reportedly contemplated shooting some additional footage and recutting it.¹²

Commingle rural locations in contemporary Bavaria and period settings redolent of both the feudal Middle Ages and the Rococo era as well as modern Germany, the film chronicles the journey of a young shepherd (played by Michael König), a preacher with a mission. Modelled on the 15th-century Franconian peasant leader, Hans Böhm, the charismatic visionary seeks to overcome class injustice in the name of social equality; he calls for the end of the privileges of the clergy and the upper class as well as the systematic redistribution of property and wealth.¹³ His handlers, with even more radical socialist intentions, urge him on. Böhm finds resonance among the impoverished masses and gains a substantial throng of followers. Ultimately, though, his hoped-for cleansing of society comes to naught. Indeed, his political

12 - *Das ganz normale Chaos*, ed. Juliane Lorenz (Berlin: Henschel, 1995), p. 187.

13 - The historical Böhm had a mass following; in the spring of 1476, more than 30,000 peasants from across Germany followed him to Niklashausen.

designs alienate even well-meaning members of the church and antagonise the hysterical Bishop of Würzburg. In the final reckoning, the preacher's disciples are brutally slaughtered and Böhm carried away by the bishop's soldiers (who appear as German policemen and American military police), crucified in an auto junk yard, and burned at the stake to the accompaniment of a church choir.

The first two shots introduce the film's dynamic formal alternation of motion and stasis. We open onto a figure in a leather jacket seen in close-up from behind; the script identifies him as the black monk.¹⁴ This camera setup has often served in German film history, from *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (*Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari*, 1920) and *Dr Mabuse, the Gambler* (*Dr. Mabuse, der Spieler*, 1922) onwards, as a means to introduce power figures. It is Fassbinder himself, appearing in the inimitable tough-guy pose that he had assumed during his first appearances before the media as well as in the leading role of Bertolt Brecht's *Baal* in Volker Schlöndorff's television film (which had aired in January 1970). "Who needs the revolution?" he asks an interlocutor dressed exactly like the bounty hunter from Glauber Rocha's *Antonio das Mortes* (*O Dragão da Maldade contra o Santo Guerreiro*, 1969),¹⁵ a film that enjoyed an iconic status among the West German student left, a hallmark of the Brazilian Cinema Novo, whose protracted use of spectacle and what Dennis Lim termed "Brecht-like blocks of ritualized action" both expanded and exploded the language of cinema.¹⁶ The figure, explicitly referred to in the screenplay as Antonio, replies, "The people." Dietrich Lohmann's camera tracks left, then right, as the two figures, joined by a third cell member, Johanna (Hanna Schygulla), walk back and forth and reflect on the necessity for revolution and the proper role of the party. Despite the mix of period costumes (Fassbinder dons sunglasses, Schygulla a cocktail dress, while Antonio wears Third World peasant garb), everything is carefully coordinated (the precise spacing within the depth of field, the choreography of moving bodies, the rhythmic exchange of dialogue) in this protracted shot set in a bare and minimalistic brick-walled locus. Walking back and forth intriguingly enacts the play of possibility and, in this regard, resembles Fassbinder's contemporary antiteater staging of Goethe's *Iphigenia in Tauris* (*Iphigenie auf Tauris*, 1779), where characters, portraying "the open conflict of developed and developing stances,"¹⁷ spoke more to the audience than to each other. These guerrilla warriors muse about the mise-en-scène of

14 - See *Fassbinders Filme 2*, ed. Michael Töteberg (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag der Autoren, 1990), p. 128.

15 - The character first appeared in Glauber Rocha's *Black God, White Devil* (1964).

16 - See Chris Fujiwara, "Brazil '66 to '99: Taking a Tour of 'Cinema Novo and Beyond'", *Boston Phoenix*, 25 February 1999.

17 - David Barnett, *Rainer Werner Fassbinder and the German Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005), p. 87.

revolution, realising how theatrical effects might raise one's interventions to a higher expressive power, an insight that will be central to the operations of the RAF (Red Army Faction) and key to the ploys of the media-savvy terrorists in Fassbinder's *The Third Generation*. Concluding with a repetition of the initial question and answer ("Who needs the revolution?" - "The people."), the opening tableau is both emphatic in the frontality of its assault and insistent in the terms of its political onslaught.

A cut moves the film outdoors to an extreme long shot from the bottom of a stairway at the top of which the preacher, whose garb resembles that of a hippie, addresses a circle of onlookers in front of a church, accompanying his sermon with the measured beating of a drum.¹⁸ The inspired speaker relates his vision of the Holy Maria and the message she has passed on. The religious sign becomes a political appeal: "The days of retribution," he announces, "have arrived." Unlike the first shot, the camera does not move, although as in the opening view there is an unceasing expressive fluidity because the image in fact does change scale. Throughout the long take, a gentle zoom-in conveys us ever closer to the group at the top of the stairs, where those gathered sing a *Marienlied* ("Holy Mary, deliver us, Mother of God, so sweet") well known to religious pilgrims in Southern Germany. The image provides a colourful, even picturesque, tableau, a composition that is at once precise and ornate, framed by a gate and an arch, neatly symmetrical in its play of colour and shadow and its positioning of figures across the frame, with gazes suggestively splayed over the visual



field, all the while accompanied by the wind that blows in the trees.¹⁹ The figures

18 - Michael König, whom Fassbinder had met in the fall of 1969 at the Bremer Theater during a production of his drama, *Das Kaffeehaus*, would later play the plagued and possessed visionary writer in George Moore's *Lenz* (1971), a figure that would be reborn in a contemporary West Berlin incarnation as the disenchanting student activist in Peter Schneider's influential novel, *Lenz* (West Berlin: Rotbuch, 1973).

19 - The third shot, likewise, surveys a sweeping and picturesque field over which the wind flutters. In the following take, we see changes of light as clouds shift across the sky over the sea of green. Such atmospheric scenes are decidedly atypical in Fassbinder's work, which would almost without exception eschew natural settings.

in the shot remain nearly static, the most vigorous movements being the preacher's drumming and the black monk's occasional exhalation of cigarette smoke. As the preacher ends with an appeal for a mass gathering in Niklashausen, the camera, with a sudden jerk, zooms back to the initial point of departure.



Dress, design, and decor from a number of periods coexist in the carnivalesque weave that is *The Niklashausen Journey*. As a collection of tableaux and a heteroglossia of historical voices, it is both a cinema of attractions and a station drama which depict the march of a rebel on his rise to renown and his path to perdition. It is also an anthology of quotations from film history, wide-ranging, eclectic, and idiosyncratic. In its commemoration of the student movement, *The Niklashausen Journey* revisits films that had fuelled the political activists, working through the past in the form of various pasts, the privileged form of pastness being the cinema and its history. Often noted have been the formative importance of Godard's *Weekend* (1967, the multiple diegeses and the shared "structure of a picaresque journey through the countryside that ends in violence") and, as mentioned, that of *Antonio das Mortes*. Both films, as Thomas Elsaesser points out, "mix declamatory rhetoric and readings from tracts with staged scenes."²⁰ The set pieces of Godard's *Sympathy for the Devil* (1968) come to mind as well, especially scenes of Black Panthers proclaiming their political objectives as well as backgrounds with piles of junked cars. Essential to the extreme stylisation of image and affect in *The Niklashausen Journey* (which many critics chided as tedious and pretentious) is the intense stasis of tableaux, so self-sufficient that they retard, and at times undermine, narrative continuity. Beyond that, the studied use of rich colours and the intricate choreography of gestures and gazes which catalyse a variety of emotions, are all impulses that figure strongly in the early work of Werner Schroeter, in which,

20 - Elsaesser, p. 272. The dark interiors and the sadomasochistic excesses of the domestic scenes between the errant wife (played by a possessed Margit Carstensen) and her cuckolded invalid husband seem to be modeled after similar encounters in *Antonio das Mortes*.



as the director later acknowledged and as *The Niklashausen Journey* confirms, Fassbinder “made decisive discoveries.”²¹ The elaborate rituals, opulent palaces, and scenes of mass upheaval likewise bring to mind H. W. Geissendörfer’s vampire film *Jonathan* (1970) as do the depictions of a decadent court and a plundered rural landscape. The atmospheric and even painterly takes of country settings, utterly rare in Fassbinder’s work as a whole, lend a poignance to the film’s depiction of the harsh material conditions in these spaces. This coexistence of sylvan beauty and bitter poverty, as well as the awareness of how political oppression weighed heavily on most people living in the German

provinces, is seminal to the so-called “anti-homeland films” made by West German directors at the time, particularly Schlöndorff’s *The Sudden Wealth of the Poor People of Kombach* (*Der plötzliche Reichtum der armen Leute von Kombach*) and Reinhard Hauff’s *Matthias Kneissl* (both 1971).²²

The blend of past and present in the musical quotations is in keeping with the film as a whole. We hear various folk songs that praise the Virgin Mary (for instance the *Marienlied*, “Meersterne, ich dich grüsse”); a peasant performs the *Bittgang*, “Earth, sing your song of joy loudly and strongly.” Böhm delivers a rendition of “Bandiera rossa,” a famous tune from the Italian workers’ movement that eulogises the red flag. Written by Carlo Tuzzi in 1908, the song gained popularity among German socialists and communists in the 1920s, and recirculated in post-war covers by the West German rock stars Hannes Wader and Konstantin Wecker. The most striking and expressive music interlude in the film is a prolonged scene with live music by the experimental rock group, Amon Düül II.

21 - Rainer Werner Fassbinder, “Chin-up, Handstand, Salto Mortale – Firm Footing: On the Film Director Werner Schroeter, Who Achieved What Few Achieve with The Kingdom of Naples”, in *The Anarchy of the Imagination*, ed. Michael Töteberg and Leo A. Lensing, trans. Krishna Winston (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1992), p. 102. For a useful English-language analysis of Schroeter’s films, see Michelle Langford, *Allegorical Images: Tableau, Time and Gesture in the Cinema of Werner Schroeter* (Bristol: Intellect, 2006).

22 - Fassbinder played cameo roles in both films.

Equally elaborate are the film’s citations from German cultural history; its veritable *Zitatenschatz* ranges from passages out of Marx and Engels to a scene from Kleist’s *Penthesilea* (1808, performed by a trio of raging maenads, one of whom is Magdalena Montezuma, the crowning diva of Schroeter’s features), and the tagline from Brecht’s *The 3-Penny-Opera* (*Die Dreigroschenoper*, 1928). Indeed, at the end of the fourth shot, Fassbinder delivers the quotation with a knowing smirk, “Only he who lives in riches, lives in pleasure.” The intertextual network also includes lines from the Colombian activist Camilo Torres, and from Eldridge Cleaver’s *Soul on Ice* (1968), as well as a lengthy newspaper reportage about the assassination of Fred Hampton, the founder of the Black Panthers, and the fellow soldier, Mark Clarke.

This chronicle of a failed revolution replays ways of speaking and showing, offering a compendium of gestures, voices, and initiatives. The rhetoric of the preacher and his followers provides a catechism in leftist politics and recalls the conceptual frameworks of West German student activists. For this reason, Elsaesser sees in the film Fassbinder’s “most explicit look at both the rhetoric and the sentiment behind radical activism and ultra-left militancy.”²³ Such claims were in fact common in contemporary reviews of the film. The free-handed appropriation of *Antonio das Mortes* as well as the film’s ultimate martyrdom of a revolutionary leader surely were reflective of the student left’s great fascination with Latin America and the legacy of Che Guevara. The Althusser student, Régis Debray, travelled to Cuba and other Latin American countries, collecting his experiences in a widely read book entitled *Revolution in the Revolution?: Armed Struggle and Political Struggle in Latin America* (*Révolution dans la révolution ? : Lutte armée et lutte politique en Amérique latine*, 1967). Here Debray called to mind the lessons that might be learned from Castro’s revolution, how the Cuban long march might function in other countries and how it might also serve as a model for students in Europe, who would become urban guerrillas and continue Third World struggle against dictatorship and autocracy on the streets of the First World and, with the deployment of subversive means and forms, militate against state hegemony and pseudodemocracy.²⁴

The Long March figures seminally in the final tableaux of *The Niklashausen Journey* and is central to any assessment of the film’s politics. After the crucifixion of the preacher, a group of rebels carry on the struggle. An activist, speaking with a heavy

23 - Elsaesser, p. 27.

24 - For a description of the formative influence of the Long March within the West German student movement, see Wolfgang Kraushaar, *1968 als Mythos, Chiffre und Zäsur* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2000), pp. 83-87.

foreign accent as his compatriots make Molotov cocktails behind him, insists that “there is only one way out of this situation and that is social world revolution, a worldwide civil war.” Either we will live as human beings or “the world will be razed in our attempt to create a better life.” Transforming a well-known slogan of the student movement into a terrorist punchline, he concludes, “Macht kaputt, was euch kaputt macht!” (“Destroy that which destroys you!”).²⁵ In the film’s penultimate scene, the protesters-turned-terrorists confront the police in a prolonged gun battle that recalls the rooftop shootout at the conclusion of Lindsay Anderson’s *If*. Fassbinder pulls out all the stops in what is unquestionably the feature’s most dynamic sequence, a sustained tracking shot that records the desperate onslaught and the pyrotechnic altercation, replete with running bodies, loud explosions, burning cars, and numerous casualties. Many died in the attack on a police station, Fassbinder, speaking in voice-over, reports in the film’s final moments. The rebel leader, he reports, “did not yet realise that there are many ways to fight a battle.” Three years later, other soldiers would return and, in a renewed invasion, almost all of them would die. And yet that is not the end, for the narrator continues. “But he and his comrades had learned from their mistakes” and retreated to the mountains. “Two years later,” the voice-over concludes after a brief pause, “the revolution succeeded.”

These closing signs seem to be clear. Or are they? One wonders: defeat or victory? Almost all previous commentators have in fact maintained that the film ends with the revolt’s demise.²⁶ Let us recall what has happened: Böhm is executed and his uprising fails; the remaining rebels in their desperation take recourse to more radical ploys, but their terrorist tactics have no success as we know from having witnessed in graphic detail the bloody downfall of the insurrection at the hands of the police.²⁷ This is, however, not the film’s parting shot. For the closing sentence would seem to leave open the possibility of a more upbeat and less lethal outcome. In a very conspicuous, perhaps even perverse, act of withholding, Fassbinder’s voice-over verbalises a hope (“the revolution succeeded”) without visualising what this happier ending might look like. The final scene allows at best a utopian prospect vested in a still-to-be-developed awareness. He embraced the 1968ers’ desire for renewal even if his work would not share their rhetoric. More than anyone else among New German filmmakers,

25 - The battle cry would later be used by the proto-punk Berlin rock band Ton Steine Scherben and serve as an anthem for West Berlin house squatters and activists during the 1980s.

26 - Cf. Elsaesser, for instance, who claims that “the surviving followers regroup, take to the hills, in order to lead, Che Guevara style, a revolutionary army to – one presumes – certain defeat” (p. 272).

27 - This is, without question, the most galvanising and elaborately mounted sequence in an otherwise largely static and highly stylised film.

Fassbinder would take to heart Godard’s eschewal of political films in favour of making films politically.



The conclusion of *Rio das Mortes* is far less downbeat than that of *The American Soldier* and *The Niklashausen Journey*. Among Fassbinder’s 40-some features, the film (shot in January 1970 and first shown that year at the Berlinale in July before its subsequent screening on West German television six months later) has received very little attention. To this day it abides as one of Fassbinder’s most rarely studied features. Thomas Elsaesser views it within the structural rubric of the director’s early exercises in noir, with their “stark schematism” of narrative shape and character motivation, scripts in which “a male friendship, thwarted by a jealous woman, ends in deception and violent death.”²⁸ Upon closer analysis, however, *Rio das Mortes* is not so readily or easily comparable to *Love is Colder than Death* (*Liebe ist kälter als der Tod*, 1969), *Gods of the Plague*, and *The American Soldier*. It surely is not a gangster film; its protagonists are more dreamers than schemers; its tone is far more playful, its atmosphere, despite a grey winter’s cold, much less grim, and its outcome anything but violent. For these reasons, it cannot be comfortably cubby-holed among Fassbinder’s low-budget neo-noirs. The film remains something of an anomaly, not easily placed within the early productions or within the director’s work as a whole. If anything, the bumbling male protagonist recalls the lackadaisical and feckless good-for-nothing played by Marquard Böhm in Rudolf Thome’s *Red Son* (*Rote Sonne*, 1969) or the idle would-be hipster (Werner Enke) from May Spils’ *Go For It, Baby* (*Zur Sache, Schätzchen*, 1968). *Rio das Mortes* has many comic touches and, one might even say, constitutes a young German *Dumb and Dumber* (1994).



28 - Elsaesser, p. 269.

Fassbinder related that the story idea came from Volker Schlöndorff, who generously agreed to let him use it. Janus Film provided 135,000 DM in a co-production with antiteater-X-Film. Shot over 20 days, the film reworked many of the routines that Fassbinder's troupe of players had learned to date, but otherwise, as the director later observed, it was not of particular importance, neither in general nor for his own development. Nonetheless, he was happy with the look of the film and in fact even retained a certain fondness for it. In retrospect he considered it to be far more serious and well-crafted than was thought at the time. (The producer called the script "verspielt," i.e., whimsical.) Fassbinder above all appreciated how the film presented "a very naive and simply told story in a naive and simple and cheerful or sad way, no matter how you want to look at it."²⁹ The plot is easily summarised. Two old schoolfriends, Michel (who does home repair work) and Günther (a door-to-door travel agent) run into each other by chance in the Munich apartment of Michel's girlfriend, the student Hanna. Having rediscovered what they take to be an ancient map that shows the way to a treasure hidden near the Rio das Mortes, the two, with great persistence, seek financial support for their planned expedition, the fulfilment of a childhood dream.³⁰ After a number of false starts and dead ends, and to the dismay of Hanna, who has domestic designs on Michel, the pair surprisingly find a backer. The film concludes at the Munich airport where a distraught Hanna, seduced by Günther and abandoned by her lover, contemplates murder, but in the end desists, looking on as the two friends board a morning plane for South America.

Like the other early films, arguably even more lavishly, *Rio das Mortes* abounds with borrowings and references. The choice of music is, as ever, distinctive in its eclecticism, a singular mix of high (including Albion's Adagio in G Minor and an aria from *Madame Butterfly*) and low (which evidences Fassbinder's intimate knowledge of contemporary pop culture).³¹ *Rio das Mortes* opens in Hanna's apartment. While she talks on the telephone with her mother,³² the sounds of "Morning Song" from the

29 - See Corinna Brocher's long interview with Fassbinder, "Die Gruppe, die trotzdem keine war (1973)", in *Fassbinder über Fassbinder*, ed. Robert Fischer (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag der Autoren, 2004), p. 160.

30 - When they meet unexpectedly, Michel exclaims "Wahnsinn!" ("This is crazy!") They begin to brawl, much like long-lost comrades from an early Howard Hawks film (for instance, *A Girl in Every Port* [1928]) and also similar to the surprise encounter of the ex-foreign legionnaires, Hans and Harry, in Fassbinder's *Merchant of Four Seasons* (*Händler der vier Jahreszeiten*, 1972). As Michel and Günther roll around on the floor, their physical aggression is indistinguishable from homoerotic intimacy. A prolonged take shows them tumble about before settling into an embrace suggestive of exhausted lovers. The tableau is also very reminiscent of the *Liebestod* finale between the two brothers in *The American Soldier*.

31 - *Beware of a Holy Whore* (*Warnung vor einer heiligen Nutte*, 1971), for instance, mixed materials from Elvis Presley, Leonard Cohen, Spooky Tooth, and Gaetano Donizetti.

32 - The telephone conversation with the mother rehearses the very similar opening dialogue of *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant* (*Die bitteren Tränen der Petra von Kant*, 1972).

album 'One Nation Underground' by the American psychedelic folk group Pearls Before Swine, already audible during the credit sequence, continue. A glimpse at the LP cover to the album on the floor confirms that the music now issues from an onscreen source. Later Hanna and the two friends visit a discotheque, which is decked out for carnival season in the most uninspired way. As Michel and Günther resume their deliberations about how to fund their expedition, Hanna (in a slinky red dress) dances with an unidentified character (played by Fassbinder) as Kenny Rogers' "Ruby, Don't Take Your Love to Town" emanates from the jukebox. A prolonged pan around the dance floor yields little of interest; nothing much is going on, the place is staid as can be and hardly a site of revelry. The music changes to Elvis Presley's "Jailhouse Rock" and the camera follows Hanna and her partner as the room comes alive while they rock out with great abandon. The music over, Hanna smiles with pleasure and effuses, "That was really lovely."

Cross references from films and books well known to contemporary audiences offer a unique glossary of the time's cultural preferences, be it the pop art colour play of the credit sequence with its stark blue background redolent of Godard, the expressive use of a Buster Keaton poster (which hangs in Hanna's apartment) as a deadpan counterpoint to the broad comic action at various points in the narrative, the cameo role of Carla Aulaulu (known already from films by Hans-Jürgen Syberberg and Werner Schroeter) and her homage to Marilyn Monroe (she sings, "I Wanna be



Loved by You"), or Hanna's lengthy quotation from an account of Lana Turner's tawdry life history, her many marriages and the famous stabbing of one husband by her daughter. The text comes from a Yaak Karsunke³³



Within the film's elaborate weave of texts and cross-references, two documents play an important role and, in each case, lead to seminal myths of 1968. The first is a textbook, Arnold Gesell's *Das Kind zwischen 5 und 10*, a primer on child psychology and a guide for the reproduction of society.³⁴ Hanna, a university student who is training to become a kindergarten teacher, scrutinises the volume, memorising a passage regarding the socialisation of children: "One must inculcate standards of achievement in a child early on and in

that way help to make the adaptation to society as easy as possible." As she repeats the phrases, the viewer has time to mull over these thoughts and, in the process, to become a critical reader. When Hanna meets Katrin for lunch, the friend and classmate is trying to memorise the same words as if she were learning a foreign language. Later on, a group of women, fellow students of pedagogy, gather in an auditorium of the Munich Hochschule für Pädagogik, walking in a circle before a chalkboard on which we see the phrase "USSA" (an abbreviation frequently used by a student left fond of linking American imperialism with Nazi violence) imposed over an erect penis that looks like a weapon. We hear the Gesell text again, repeated this time with sarcastic derision.³⁵ But the radical voice is not the sole sentiment, for not

33 - See Yaak Karsunke, *Reden und Ausreden. Neununddreissig Gedichte* (West Berlin: Wagenbach, 1969). Karsunke was a good friend of Fassbinder's and played bit parts in *Love Is Colder than Death*, *Gods of the Plague*, and *Berlin Alexanderplatz*. A close follower of the Munich theater scene who often reviewed productions on the radio, Karsunke was an enthusiastic supporter and insightful observer of both the Action-Theater and the antiteater.

34 - Gesell was a prominent American expert on child development whose *The Child from Five to Ten* (1946) was an international bestseller. Interestingly, Gesell and his associates also pioneered the use of film as an observational resource in monitoring the passage of children from infancy to adolescence.

35 - The ironic use of Gesell's apologia for conformity intimates what will become a significant emphasis in Fassbinder's work, namely his concern about the deformative power of public institutions and the different ways in which they become internalised and all the more readily reproduced, an impetus perhaps most precisely articulated in the long subtitle to *Effi Briest* (1974): "Many who have an inkling of their possibilities and needs and yet accept the ruling system in their head and, therefore, by their deeds strengthen and confirm it absolutely."

all of the women in the group are leftists or feminists. Both Hanna and Katrin insist that they only want to get married and have children. One of their comrades (played by the awe-inspiring Magdalena Montezuma), staring into the camera, replies, "The oppression of women above all manifests itself in the behaviour of women," which is the title of a contemporary film from 1969 by Hellmuth Costard.³⁶ In the tableau, Fassbinder reiterates the quite popular image of the revolutionary woman with an erotic aura (particularly in his direction of Ingrid Caven and Magdalena Montezuma).³⁷ At the same time, though, he makes it clear that this model is anything but universally accepted, even among university students, and, in the film as a whole, positions his female protagonist as a plier of convention and conformity.

The second key document is the treasure map, an imaginary text that becomes a site of projection. The map not only catalyses a quest; it seals a male bond. Michel forsakes Hanna and her marital designs in favour of adventure. The boyhood fantasy involves a faraway place and untold riches. *Rio das Mortes*, these seekers repeatedly claim, is in Peru, but even a brief look at a world atlas would make it clear that the river's location is in Brazil. Günther is so unburdened by a knowledge of history and geography that he does not know the difference between the Incas and the Mayas and is convinced that "inside a mountain somewhere in Peru" reside ancient Mayan temples. The pair's impressionistic sense of geography corresponds, as subsequent encounters bear out, to their less than certain grasp of basic economic factors and fundamental logistic questions. Their biggest problem is that their adventure requires venture capital.

Rio das Mortes is a film that constantly refers to money and the cost of things, be it for instance Katrin's dress that she purchases for 120 DM or the considerable discounts that Günther, a travel broker, promises for package tours. We witness an itemised reckoning for the tiling work done by Michel and his colleague for a middle-class client, the inventory of time spent and the price per hour plus the cost of materials. We also watch a travel agent put together a painstaking inventory of the planned trip's cost, which, everything included, would come to about 34,440 DM. A protracted scene details the selling of Michel's sports car, his inept attempt at bartering, the

36 - Costard's film premiered in January 1969 on ARD, the West German First Channel, before its screening in October 1969 at the Mannheim Film Festival. It depicts the monotony of female domestic work and a housewife's attempt to maintain order on the home front. In that regard, it resembles Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman, 23, Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles*, (1975), although, to be sure, Costard's female protagonist is played by a man.

37 - See the chapter "Stadt der Frauen: Feministische Sezession und lebenskulturelle Umbrüche", in Gerd Koenen, *Das rechte Jahrzehnt. Unsere kleine deutsche Kulturrevolution 1967-1977* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2001), pp. 233-256.

closeup of the contract and the signature that signs at the bottom line, the cash (with bills carefully counted out) that exchanges hands, and a closing prospect of the car standing on the lot, bought for 2,200 DM and now priced at 3,600 DM. The quest for money will necessitate a series of negotiations, the first of which is with family members, meetings with Günther's mother (who writes a check in an amount that is apparently modest) and Hanna's officious uncle (a no-nonsense businessman who has an intimate knowledge of economic conditions in Latin America, whose pointed questions about the pair's objectives, despite their amateurish attempts at market research that include a visit to the Bavarian State Library and a call to the Peruvian Consulate, receive halting answers that do not inspire confidence). After family come friends. Katrin's significant other, Joachim, a graduate student in Latin American Studies, buoyantly describes the considerable opportunities for state funding of ventures like their own and urges Michel and Günther to try their luck with the German Research Society (*Deutsche Forschungsgesellschaft*), a federal body with offices in Munich. All you have to do, says Joachim, is to prove your qualifications. The subsequent appointment with a government representative (who speaks with pride of the agency's ongoing computerisation) turns out to be yet a further travesty, for the only one with qualifications is Joachim and he has not come with them. The larger part of the film's running time will involve such attempts by the two dreamers to secure the means for their screwball scheme. *Rio das Mortes*, one might say, presents an extended march through the institutions, albeit a very ironic one, a set of confrontations – in bourgeois interiors, business firms, and government agencies – with representatives of the reality principle.

Among the student left, maintains the prominent scholar of 1968, Wolfgang Kraushaar, money was held in suspicion as the instrument of capital; one of the very few ways in which it could be redeemed was when it was used to support revolutionary campaigns in the Third World, particularly in Latin America. In that regard, the benevolent leftist capitalist, typically a young heir to a family fortune, played an essential role in the era's mythology. Progressive millionaires acted as positive pendants to the greedy Uncle Scrooge, putting their riches in the service of good causes. These benefactors, argues Kraushaar, became important projection figures for a student left (itself invariably short of cash) sceptical about the power of capital.³⁸ In *Rio das Mortes*, the leftist myth of the good fairy who bankrolls Latin American causes receives an ironic, indeed hilarious, twist. Out for the evening in

38 - Kraushaar, p. 132.



a bar and by chance speaking with an artist acquaintance, the would-be treasure hunters learn of a rich woman who is fond of "giving money to people who are crazy enough. Theatre people, painters, and the like." Just go up to her, the friend counsels them, and tell her that you are filmmakers. The woman in question takes a meeting and is impressed by the treasure map, which she calls "incredibly beautiful. Almost as if an artist had painted it." With little ado and great eagerness, she hands over a cashier's check for 30,000 DM. As farfetched and tongue in cheek as the scenario seems, it in fact reflects the director's own experience. While ferreting out backers for his first feature, Fassbinder had received a check for 20,000 DM from a similar good fairy.³⁹

For young people living in West Germany, the year 1969, according to Dieter Kunzelmann, prominent activist and co-founder of the legendary Kommune 1, was one of "errors and confusions... Everything was in the process of dissolving, everyone was heading for the road... What a year of twists and turns, this 1969... The only thing

39 - This is an often-told anecdote. See, for instance, Christian Braad Thomsen, *Fassbinder: The Life and Work of a Provocative Genius*, trans. Martin Chalmers (London: Faber & Faber, 1997), p. 86.

that remained clearly in view were one's lack of clarity and the attendant flights in search of self-realisation and the departures to new shores."⁴⁰ Both *The Niklashausen Journey* and *Rio das Mortes*, in that regard, were timely in their impetus; above all they displayed and replayed signs of the times, in the process reflecting on myths and their meanings in a time of flux. They attest, in quite different ways, to the path of a young generation in the wake of 1968 as it traversed both dangerous ground and uncertain terrain.

The Niklashausen Journey and *Rio das Mortes* also chronicle the travails involved in the making of films and, as such, constitute significant film documents which, at crucial moments, become documentary films in their own right. In *The Niklashausen Journey*, two scenes do this with particular emphasis. As the camera shifts from a long shot of a rock quarry to a close-up of a guitarist, we quickly realise we are at a rock concert. Contemporary viewers would immediately recognise the group Amon Düül II and its lead player, Chris Karrer. The stylised and carefully composed tableaux that have defined the film to that point are no longer in evidence during this seven-minute sequence whose fluid and spontaneous cinema vérité recalls Richard Leacock. We partake of tight views of musicians and listeners, among whom figure the actors in the film who are at the same time members of Fassbinder's team having a good time, sprawling on the ground and savouring the moment, smoking marijuana and drinking Coca-Cola. Later the film's fiction will yield to its site of construction and production of meaning. Hanna Schygulla, the actress rehearsing the role of Johanna, stands before a mirror and repeats dialogue about the place of property ownership within the natural order. The character who was the black monk now speaks as the director Fassbinder, correcting the actress and insisting that she get her lines right. As he reads the script with other emphases and insists on a more apposite body language (the pose, he says, should be more humble), the auteur is uncomfortable, impatient, and sullen. He stares at Schygulla with a fierce and intimidating intensity. The last line, he snaps, "has to be more aggressive, much, much more aggressive." And, he adds, "the pause was also far too long." Even more radically and directly than in the meta-film, *Beware of a Holy Whore* (*Warnung vor einer heiligen Nutte*, 1971), this passage bears witness to the director's sometimes autocratic relationship to his players and the studious shaping of his materials.

40 - Koenen, p. 149.

In what at first glance appears to be an unremarkable scene in *Rio das Mortes*, Michel, Günther, and Hanna leave the restaurant Tropic of Cancer and walk down the street. The two comrades continue talking about their quest for treasure, prompting Hanna's objection that the trip makes no sense because anything of importance will surely have already been discovered. No, replies Michel, "there are lot of things, things that nobody has found yet." Undeterred, the partners talk about the tools they will bring on their expedition. The mise-en-scène infuses the passage with an additional and very suggestive point of reference. Hanna leans on the longhaired Michel and for a privileged moment the two replicate to a tee the famous cover motif from the album, 'The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan' (1963), the iconic photograph of the singer strolling down a windswept lane in Greenwich Village with his girlfriend Suze Rotolo. Critic Janet Maslin spoke of the image as "a photography that inspired countless young men to hunch their shoulders, look distant, and let the girl do the clinging."⁴¹ Rotolo later would recall how the picture avoided the posed and polished quality of album covers at the time; it became "one of those cultural markers that influenced the look of album covers precisely because of its casual down-home spontaneity and sensibility... Whoever was responsible for choosing that particularly photograph... really had an eye for a new look."⁴² In that way, Michel's insistence on things that have not yet been found rhymes with the mythic image with its new look that the tableau (given Hanna's conspicuous – and scripted – lean on Michel's shoulder) consciously seeks to replicate. Of course, the "new look" on offer was, by the time Fassbinder's film appeared, not new at all; it was a well-known quotation. But as a quotation it echoed a young German generation's larger recognition, an awareness both of deficit and of challenge, that one needed to look elsewhere if one was to find new ways of being. The quintessence of youth culture and coolness came from a faraway world, every bit as far away as the *Rio das Mortes* with its promises of adventure.⁴³ In a



41 - Quoted in *The Rolling Stone History of Rock & Roll*, ed. Jim Miller (London: Picador, 1981), p. 221.

42 - Suze Rotolo, *A Freewheelin' Time: A Memoir of Greenwich Village in the Sixties* (New York: Broadway, 2008), p. 217.

43 - The film's editing underlines the directness of this link. The shot of Hanna and Michel is followed by a close-up of travel brochures with the slogans "Distant lands call" and "Peru. Land of contrasts."

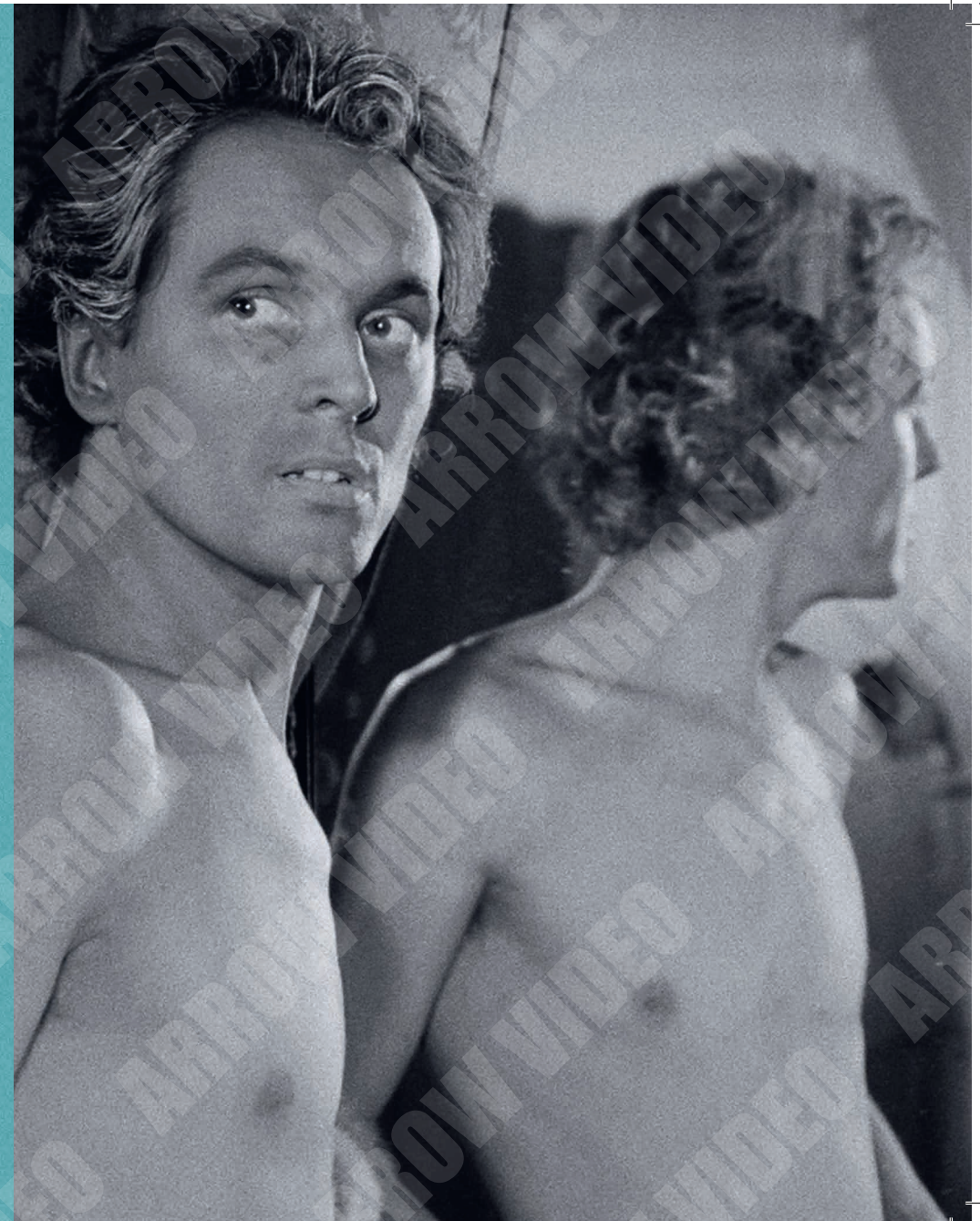
similar regard, Michel and Günther's quest,⁴⁴ for all the bumbling that attends it and all the laughter that the pair's incapacity inspires, can at least on one level be taken seriously. That is, insofar as it documents, unrealistically but still not without veracity, the vicissitudes and challenges that dreamers, especially young German filmmakers, might have encountered in the FRG at the time.

The symbolic value of 1968, recent analysts of the era's mythology maintain, resides today more in its lasting aesthetic traces than its failed political programs.⁴⁵ A signifier of coolness like the Dylan cover makes it clear how the mythology of the time abides especially as one of youth and a quest for new and more heightened ways of being in the world. In this light, Michel's response that there are "a lot of things, things that nobody has found yet" is both ironic and suggestive. In the context of the film's story, the sentence is yet a further instance of his cluelessness. Within the context of the post-1968 culture that produced and watched this film, however, the quest for the new that this feature enacts had very much had to do with the era's larger concern about different ways of seeing and being seen. Any cultural transformation perforce would only come with new forms of representation even if the institutional opponents of such new expressions, as independent artists in West Germany knew well, maintained considerable power and control within the public sphere. If there is a single lesson that he learned from 1968 it was that any substantial social change would necessitate a fundamental transformation in the ways that people think and feel. The incendiary and still resonant body of films that Fassbinder created would enact, in a multiplicity of ways, the wisdom of his voice-over narrator in *The Niklashausen Journey*, that "there are many ways to fight a battle."

Eric Rentschler is the Arthur Kingsley Porter Professor of Germanic Languages and Literatures and a faculty member of the Film and Visual Studies Program at Harvard University. His publications concentrate on German film history and theory during the Weimar Republic, the Third Reich, and the postwar, post-wall, and postmillennial eras. His books include *West German Film in the Course of Time* (Redgrave, 1984), *German Film and Literature* (Methuen, 1986), *West German Filmmakers on Film* (Holmes & Meier, 1988), *Augenzeugen* (Verlag der Autoren, 1988; second updated edition 2001, with Hans Helmut Prinzler), *The Films of G.W. Pabst* (Rutgers UP, 1990), *The Ministry of Illusion* (Harvard UP, 1996), *Neuer Deutscher Film* (Reclam, 2012, with Norbert Grob and Hans Helmut Prinzler), and *The Use and Abuse of Cinema: German Legacies from the Weimar Era to the Present* (Columbia UP, 2015).

44 - Asked by an interviewer about his reaction in 1978 to the suicide of his lover Armin Meier, Fassbinder said he had considered three courses of action. The first was "to go to Paraguay and become a farmer - I don't know why I thought of Paraguay, it just occurred to me somehow. As glib as that now sounds, at the time it was not glib at all; it seemed like an altogether real possibility." The second alternative would have been to stop being interested in everything, which Fassbinder claimed would have been tantamount to insanity. Or, third, he could make a film - which is, of course, what he ultimately did. See Wolfgang Limmer, op. cit., p. 95.

45 - See, for instance, Wolfgang Scheepers, "Back to the Sixties?" in *Design und Alltagskultur zwischen Konsum und Konflikt*, ed. Wolfgang Scheepers (Cologne: DuMont, 1998), p. 7.





Fassbinder's *Mother Küsters Goes to Heaven* (1975) in a Genealogy of the Arbeiterfilme (2017)

by Christina Gerhardt

Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *Mother Küsters Goes to Heaven* (1975), a homage to Phil "Piel" Jutzi's late Weimar classic, *Mother Krause's Journey to Happiness* (1929), could be read as a film that rests at the mid-way point of a genealogy of the workers' film between the Weimar era to the contemporary Berlin School.¹ In *Mother Küsters Goes to Heaven*, Fassbinder draws on the history of *Arbeiterfilme* (workers' films),² engages the genre of melodrama and also engages West German politics and economics of the 1970s.³

By focusing intensely on the labor politics and political organizing of 1970s, *Mother Küsters Goes to Heaven* provides a counter-narrative about West Germany's long sixties to the prevalent historical and cinematic accounts, which often overlooked the intense uptick in worker strikes.⁴ The strikes were widespread. In France there were nation-wide strikes, which documentaries by Chris Marker and the *Société pour le Lancement des Oeuvres Nouvelles* (SLON, the group to launch new works), a workers' film collective, played a vital role in capturing and sharing with social movements throughout the country and beyond.⁵ Likewise, in West Germany, in September 1969, there were widespread strikes, in particular in the metal industry. It was, however, the 1970s that witnessed the most intense decade of labor organizing in Italy, the United Kingdom and France and also West Germany.⁶ In West Germany, with the disintegration of the extra-parliamentary opposition in 1968, the late 1960s social movements

1 - Gerd Gemünden in his article on how Fassbinder "re-fuses" Brecht mentions that Fassbinder's earlier gangster films can be read as engaging the Weimar era proletariat, e.g., the writings of Döblin, esp. *Berlin Alexanderplatz* and its main character of Franz Biberkopf. Gerd Gemünden, "Re-Fusing Brecht: The Cultural Politics of Fassbinder's German Hollywood", *New German Critique*, vol. 63, Special Issue on Rainer Werner Fassbinder (Autumn 1994), pp. 54-75. Here, pp. 61-62.

2 - Unless otherwise indicated, translations are the author's.

3 - Both Sirk and Fassbinder were familiar with and drew on Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* (alienation effect), translating it from a theatrical to a cinematic idiom. Sirk was very familiar with Brecht's work, having staged his *Three Penny Opera* in Berlin in 1929. And Fassbinder, coming to film from theatre, was familiar with and drew on Brecht's alienation effect already in his earlier stage productions and gangster films. On the influence of Brecht's alienation effect on Sirk and Fassbinder c.f. Jon Halliday, *Sirk on Sirk* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1971); Willemen, "Towards an Analysis of the Sirkian System", in Jon Halliday and Laura Mulvey (eds.), *Douglas Sirk* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1972), pp. 128, 133; Lucy Fischer, ed. *Imitation of Life* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 273; Barbara Klinger, *Melodrama and Meaning: History, Culture and the Films of Douglas Sirk* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 14.

4 - Italy experienced the most strikes in Western Europe between 1958 and 1968, followed by the United Kingdom. Gerd-Rainer Horn, "Arbeiter und '1968' in Europa: Ein Überblick", in Bernd Gehrke and Gerd-Rainer Horn (eds.), *1968 und die Arbeiter: Studien zum 'proletarischen Mai' in Europa* (Hamburg: VSA, 2007), pp. 27-52. Here, p. 38.

5 - Kristin Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), pp. 32-33. Kristin Ross argues that dominant narratives about the 1960s in France reduce events temporally to May '68 and spatially to Paris's Latin Quarter, which erases workers' strikes and French colonization from history books.

6 - Andrei S. Markovits and Christopher S. Allen, "Power and Dissent: The Trade Unions in the Federal Republic of Germany", *West European Politics*, vol. 3, no. 2 (1980), pp. 68-86; Andrei S. Markovits, *The Politics of the West German Trade Unions: Strategies of Representation in Growth and Crisis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 202-236; Gerd-Rainer Horn, "Arbeiter und '1968'", *1968 und die Arbeiter*, p. 38; Antonio Negri, et al, "Do You Remember Revolution?", *Revolution Retrieved* (London: Red Notes, 1988), pp. 229-243; Reprinted as Lucio Castellano, et al, "Do You Remember Revolution?", *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 225-236.

split along different fault-lines, with the *K Groups* (communist groups), which were predominantly Marxist-Leninist, being the most numerous.⁷ As historian Jeremy Varon put it, “leftists flocked in droves between 1969 and 1973 into the rapidly proliferating Marxist-Leninist groups.”⁸ Many of them went into the factories to organize.⁹

Both West German nationals and guest workers participated in these strikes. West Germany had begun ratifying bilateral guest worker agreements with other nations starting in 1961.¹⁰ Fassbinder featured guest workers in two films: *Katzelmacher* (Fassbinder, 1969), in which he played the protagonist, Jorgos, a Greek guest worker; and *Fear Eats the Soul* (Fassbinder, 1974), in which one of the two main characters, Ali, is a Moroccan guest worker. As to the relationship among the social movements, guest workers and strikes, as historian and sociologist George Katsiaficas lays out:

Hundreds of activists went into [West] German factories to organize, and in 1969 and again in 1973 (coincidentally, also when Italian labor unrest peaked), waves of wildcat strikes rolled through industry. Along with [West] German laborers, these struggles involved immigrant Turkish workers in automobile plants, women working on assembly lines... In 1973, 275,000 workers in at least 335 factories struck for better working conditions and higher wages... Only after numerous police attacks, headlines in *Der Spiegel* blaming a Turkish invasion for the unrest and mammoth wage increases (totaling almost 30 per cent from 1969 to 1973) did things quiet down.¹¹

1971 and 1973 saw widespread strikes again, in particular of the metal and chemical industries, the latter striking for the first time in half a century.¹²

Starting in the 1960s and throughout the 1970s, labor was engaged in West German cultural media: in literature (*Literatur der Arbeitswelt*, literature of the working

7 - As important for 1970s social movements in West Germany, but not discussed in this article, were the feminist and the environmental movements.

8 - Jeremy Varon, *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction and the Revolutionary Violence of the 1960s and the 1970s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004). Here, p. 67.

9 - C.f. Gerd Koenen, *Das rote Jahrzehnt: Unsere kleine deutsche Kulturrevolution, 1967-1977*, 5th ed. (Berlin: Fischer, 2011).

10 - In 1955, West Germany signed a bilateral guest-worker agreement with Italy. It was followed by a series of bilateral guest worker agreements: Greece and Spain, 1960; Turkey, 1961; Portugal, 1964; Tunisia and Morocco; 1965; and Yugoslavia, 1968. Karl-Heinz Meier-Braun, *Deutschland, Einwanderungsland* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2002), p. 36; and Deniz Göktürk, David Gramling and Anton Kaes, eds., *Germany in Transit: Nation and Migration, 1955-2005* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

11 - George Katsiaficas, “Sources of Autonomous Politics in Germany”, *The Subversion of Politics: European Autonomous Social Movements and the Decolonization of Everyday Life* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1997), pp. 59-105. Here, p. 62.

12 - On the chemical industries, see Katsiaficas, p. 62.

world); in reportage (Wallraff, Runge) and in cinema in the genre of *Arbeiterfilme* (workers’ films).¹³ Beginning in the 1970s, directors, many of whom had studied at the *Deutsche Film und Fernsehakademie Berlin* (dffb, German Film and Television Academy of Berlin), were producing workers’ films.¹⁴ Christian Geissler, who focused on documenting workers’ lives, taught at the dffb between 1972 and 1974.¹⁵

Additionally, in North Rhine-Westphalia, the site of numerous labor strikes in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the *Westdeutscher Rundfunk* (WDR) subsidized the production of workers’ films beginning in 1967 and until the political climate shifted to the right in 1978 after the election of Johannes Rau as Prime Minister of NRW – who although a member of the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (SPD, Social Democratic Party of Germany) was at the more conservative end of the spectrum – and the films were canceled.¹⁶ Workers’ films were produced at the WDR during the time West German screenwriter, producer and author Peter Märtesheimer was editor (1964-1974).¹⁷ And the group *Arbeit und Film* (Work and Film), founded in 1974 in

13 - One pivotal group that grappled with the issues affecting workers was the Gruppe 61, co-founded in 1961 by the Dortmund librarian Fritz Hüser and union organizer Walter Köpper. See also, Fritz Hüser and Max van der Grün, *Aus der Welt der Arbeit. Almanach der Gruppe 61 und ihrer Gäste* (Berlin: Neuwied, 1966); and the novels of this era by Christian Geissler and by Friedrich Christian Delius. On the reportage, c.f. Hans-Günter Wallraff, *Wir brauchen Dich: Als Arbeiter in deutschen Industriebetrieben: Ford - Köln, Siemens - München, Blohm & Voß - Bremen, Beneteler - Schloß Neuhaus, Thyssen - Duisburg* (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 1968). It was first published as a series of articles in the union publication, *Metall*, and then published as a volume in 1966. Subsequent to its publication, Wallraff joined the Gruppe 61. Wallraff continued his work, going into various institutions, undercover and undetected and publishing *13 unerwünschte Reportagen* (1969), *Flucht vor den Heimen* (1970), which grappled with group homes. He is best known for his so-called *Anti-Bild Trilogie*, which revealed the corrupt practices of the Springer-owned tabloid. For reportage on workers’ lives, see also Erika Runge’s *Bottroper Protokolle* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1968). Runge’s protocols conveyed the daily lives of workers based on interviews Runge conducted. She later confessed that she revised the contents of the interviews, unleashing a furious debate about her book. On the *Arbeiterfilme* (workers’ films), see Richard Collins and Vincent Porter, “Westdeutscher Rundfunk and the Arbeiterfilm (1967-1977)”, *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, vol. 5, no. 2 (1980), pp. 233-251; Richard Collins and Vincent Porter, *WDR and the Arbeiterfilm* (London: BFI, 1981); Thomas Elsaesser, *New German Cinema: A History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989), pp. 171-176; Katie Trumpener, “Reconstructing the New German Cinema: Social Subjects and Critical Documentaries”, *German Politics and Society*, vol. 18 (Fall 1989), pp. 37-53; Julia Knight, *Women and the New German Cinema* (New York: Verso, 1992), p. 60; and Ian Aitken, *European Film Theory and Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), esp. pp. 215-218.

14 - C.f., the early short documentaries, such as *Mietersolidarität / Renter Solidarity* (Max Willutzki, 1969), as well as *Der gekaufte Traum / The Purchased Dream* (Helga Reidemeister, dffb, 1974-1977); and the trilogy directed by Christian Ziewer: *Liebe Mutter, mir geht es gut / Dear Mother, I Am Fine* (Christian Ziewer, WDR, Basis Filmverleih, 1972); *Schneeglöckchen blühen im September / Snowdrops Bloom in September* (Christian Ziewer, Basis Filmverleih, 1974); and *Der aufrechte Gang / The Upright Walk* (Christian Ziewer, WDR, Basis Filmverleih, 1976). Other workers’ films produced during the era include *Rote Fahnen sieht man besser / Red Flags Are More Visible* (Theo Gallehr and Rolf Schübel, Rolf Schübel Filmproduktion, 1971); *Die Wollands / The Wollands* (Ingo Kratisch and Marianne Lüdcke, 1972); and *Der lange Jammer / The Long Lament* (Max Willutzki, Basis Filmverleih, 1973).

15 - On the workers’ film produced at the DFFB, see also Fabian Tietke, “A Laboratory for Political Film: The Formative Years of the German Film and Television Academy and Participatory Filmmaking from Workerism to Feminism”, in Christina Gerhardt and Marco Abel (eds.), *Celluloid Revolt: German Screen Cultures and the Long Sixties* (Rochester: Camden House, 2018). On workers’ films produced during the era in Italy and Spain, see Pablo La Parra-Pérez, “Workers Interrupting the Factory: Helena Lumberras’s Militant Factory Films between Italy and Spain (1968-1978)”, in Christina Gerhardt and Sara Saljoughi (eds.), *1968 and Global Cinema* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2018).

16 - C.f. *Lohn und Liebe / Wages and Love* (Marianne Lüdcke and Ingo Kratisch, WDR, 1973).

17 - See also Thomas Elsaesser, “West Germany’s ‘Workers’ Films’: A Cinema in the Service of Television?”, in Christina Gerhardt and Marco Abel (eds.), *Celluloid Revolt: German Screen Cultures and the Long Sixties* (Rochester: Camden House, 2018).

Frankfurt am Main by Enzo Edschmid and in existence until 1984, went into factories with cameras and taught workers to use cameras in order to document their working conditions and uprisings.

New German Cinema, by contrast, engaged labor issues decidedly less, with Fassbinder being an anomaly. Between 1972 and 1973, his five-part workers' film *Acht Stunden sind kein Tag / Eight Hours Are Not a Day*, on which he worked with Märtzheimer, screened on the West German television station WDR.¹⁸ Although further segments were planned, they were canceled after Märtzheimer left WDR in 1974. In *Mother Küsters Goes to Heaven* Fassbinder revisited workers' conditions but included a focus on the political parties absent from *Eight Hours Are Not a Day*. In fact, Fassbinder focuses on two of the different political fault-lines along which the New Left in West Germany split by 1970: communists pursuing political organizing and anarchists pursuing militant action.¹⁹

Fassbinder's place at this mid-point of the genealogy of *Arbeiterfilme* can also be found precisely vis-à-vis melodrama – not only how he draws on but more so how he revises Sirkian techniques. After 1971, Fassbinder's films, as scholarship has noted, show the influence of Douglas Sirk, evidenced by Fassbinder's tendency to draw on melodrama, be it construed as a genre or a mode.²⁰ While the impact of Sirk's *All That Heaven Allows* (Douglas Sirk, 1955) on Fassbinder's *Angst Essen Seele Auf / Fear Eats the Soul* (Rainer Werner Fassbinder, 1974) or on *Die bitteren Tränen der Petra von Kant / The Bitter Tears of Petra van Kant* (Fassbinder, 1972) has been noted, the effect of Sirk's melodramas on *Mutter Küsters Fahrt in Himmel / Mother*

18 - *Acht Stunden sind kein Tag / Eight Hours Are Not a Day* (Rainer Werner Fassbinder, WDR, 1972). See also Manuel Alvarado, "Eight Hours Are Not a Day", in Tony Rayns (ed.), *Fassbinder* (London: BFI, 1980), pp. 70-78. Alvarado underscores that trade unions and political parties play less of a role in the made-for-television series, and that it shifts the focus to workers as subjects (not objects) and as agents of change in their lives. The series also engages other oppressed groups, such as women and older persons. Here, p. 72. For various reasons, among them, the challenge of accessing films made for television films outside of Germany, relatively little scholarship exists about this series.

19 - *Mutter Küsters Fahrt zum Himmel / Mother Küsters Goes to Heaven* (Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Production Company: Filmverlag der Autoren; Distributor: New Yorker Films, 1975).

20 - See Fassbinder's discussion of six Douglas Sirk films: Rainer Werner Fassbinder, "Imitation of Life: On the Films of Douglas Sirk", in Michael Töteberg and Leo A. Lensing (eds.), *The Anarchy of the Imagination: Interviews, Essays, Notes*, trans. Krishna Winston (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), pp. 77-89. For Fassbinder's use of Sirk, see also Judith Mayne, "Fassbinder and Spectatorship", *New German Critique*, vol. 12 (Fall 1977), pp. 61-74; Andrew Sarris, "Fassbinder and Sirk: The Ties That Unbind", *The Village Voice*, September 30, 1980, pp. 37-38; Timothy Corrigan, *New German Film: The Displaced Image* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983); James Franklin, *New German Cinema* (London: Columbus, 1983), 130; Eric Rentschler, *West German Film in the Course of Time: Reflections on the Twenty Years since Oberhausen* (Bedford Hills: Redgrave, 1984); Thomas Elsaesser, *New German Cinema: A History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 138, 210, 299; Thomas Elsaesser, *Fassbinder's Germany: History, Identity, Subject* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 1996); Eric Rentschler, "Douglas Sirk Revisited: The Limits and Possibilities of Artistic Agency", *New German Critique*, vol. 95 (Spring 2005), pp. 149-163; and numerous articles in Brigitte Peucker, ed., *A Companion to Rainer Werner Fassbinder* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

Küsters Goes to Heaven (Fassbinder, 1975) and Fassbinder's revision of the genre of melodrama by dint of this film in particular has not been discussed.²¹

Films by Sirk, such as *All That Heaven Allows*, *Written on the Wind* (Sirk, 1956) or *Imitation of Life* (Sirk, 1959) and earlier melodramas, such as *Stella Dallas* (King Vidor, 1937), explore differences or tensions between classes. *Mother Küsters Goes to Heaven*, by contrast, both draws on and revises the genre or mode of melodrama.²² It draws on techniques recognizable from Sirk's melodramas, for example, using mirrors and framing as distancing devices. But Fassbinder revises the genre through *Mother Küsters Goes to Heaven*, by shifting the entire focus solidly on to the working class and on to the economic politics that impact it.²³

1. Arbeiterfilme - Weimar Era + Jutzi's *Mother Krause's Journey to Happiness* (1929)

Fassbinder's *Mother Küsters Goes to Heaven* provides a contemporary take on the late Weimar era silent workers' film Phil "Piel" Jutzi's *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück / Mother Krause's Journey to Happiness* (Phil Jutzi, 1929) with key revisions politically and aesthetically.²⁴ The film was a Prometheus production that sought to "synthesize narrative forms of popular cinema and politically committed cinema."²⁵ Jutzi's silent film commemorates the work of popular Berlin artist Heinrich Zille, well known for his illustrations of working class people of Berlin. The film opens with a

21 - See for example, Eric Thau, "All That Melodrama Allows: Sirk, Fassbinder, Almodóvar, Haynes", in Paul Cooke (ed.), *World Cinema's Dialogues with Hollywood* (New York: Palgrave, 2007), pp. 187-200, esp. pp. 191-194; Salomé Aguilera Svirsky, "The Price of Heaven: Remaking Politics in *All That Heaven Allows*, *Fear Eats the Soul*, and *Far from Heaven*", *Cinema Journal*, vol. 47, no. 3 (Spring 2008), pp. 90-121. Fassbinder's *Fear Eats the Soul* reframes Sirk's story between an upper class widow and her gardener fifteen years younger, as a story between a working class widow, who is a cleaning lady, and a guest worker, who is younger than her and a car mechanic. Ruth Perlmutter, "Real Feelings, Hollywood Melodrama and *The Bitters Tears of Petra von Kant*", *Minnesota Review*, vol. 32 (Fall 1989), pp. 79-98.

22 - As to melodrama, some film scholars, such as Linda Williams, have contested it as a genre, referring to it instead as a "mode." Cf. Linda Williams, "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre and Excess", *Film Quarterly*, vol. 44, no. 4 (Summer 1991), pp. 2-13; reprinted in Barry Keith Grant (ed.), *Film Genre Reader II* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), pp. 140-158; and Linda Williams, "The American Melodramatic Mode", "Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson" (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), pp. 10-44. I thank Nicholas Baer for illuminating discussions of melodrama.

23 - Of course, through the communist couple and the journalist the film includes other classes but it focuses solidly on Mother Küsters and her family, that is, on the working class.

24 - *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück / Mother Krause's Journey to Happiness*, Phil "Piel" Jutzi, Prometheus Film Verleih; Distributor: Film Museum Munich, 1929. In 1980, Fassbinder would provide a contemporary take on another film directed by Phil Jutzi, *Berlin, Alexanderplatz* (Phil Jutzi, 1931), in his 14-part made-for-television series, which is almost sixteen hours long.

25 - Jan-Christopher Horak, "Mother Krause's Trip to Happiness: Kino-Culture in Weimar Germany, Part 2", *Jump cut*, vol. 27 (July 1982), pp. 55-56. See also Bruce Murray, "The KPD and Film: From Stubborn Perseverance to Eleventh-Hour Experiments with Alternative Forms of Production and Reception", *Film and the German Left in the Weimar Republic: From Caligari to Kuhle Wampe* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), pp. 186-224.

handwritten text, signed by Zille, which describes the Wedding district of Berlin and the situation of the workers, the unemployed, drunks, prostitutes, and children, as documentary footage depicts it, using montage, unusual camera angles and the then relatively new technique of the unchained camera.²⁶ Throughout, the film intercuts documentary footage and enacted fictional feature footage.

In Jutzi's film, the main character, Mother Krause, a widow, lives in a tenement apartment in Berlin in close quarters with her son and daughter; as well as a lodger, who is also a pimp and thief; his lover, who is a prostitute; and the prostitute's daughter. Struggling to make ends meet, Mother Krause earns money from her lodgers and by delivering newspapers. Her son, Paul, is an unemployed alcoholic and occasional rag-picker, who relies on Mother Krause for money. Her daughter, Erna, meets a young Communist, Max. Unable to make ends meet, Mother Krause despondently commits suicide at the film's end by turning on the gas in her apartment, also killing the prostitute's daughter.²⁷ The film closes with Erna and Max at a march of the Communist Party. Released at the outset of the Weimar Era's final turbulent years (1929-1933), which witnessed, after the Great Depression, an uptick in tensions between right-wing and left-wing politics, often manifesting in fatal street-fights and assassinations, the film depicts Communism – through the young couple, Max and Erna – as a salvaging force.²⁸

Fassbinder's *Mother Küsters Goes to Heaven*, by contrast, places agency and hope on Mother Küsters and her politicization, and casts a critical eye on both the Communist party and anarchist militant action, and both on Mother Küsters' daughter, Corinna, and son, Ernst. The film depicts the political coming of age of Emma Küsters (Brigitte Mira), as she tries to understand what led her husband to commit a crime (murder); the media's representations of it; and the actions suggested by people of various political persuasions – from communist organizers to anarchist activists.

26 - Many of the scenes reference Zille's cartoons and illustrations. Jan-Christopher Horak, "Mother Krause's Trip to Happiness", p. 55.

27 - Fassbinder's *The Marriage of Maria Braun* both revisits and reworks this ending.

28 - Its Nazi antidote would be *Hitler Junge Quex* (1933), which depicts Communism in a negative light and Nazism as a salvaging force. On the reappearance of stylistic innovations of workers' films in early Nazi era cinema, see also Eric Rentschler, *The Ministry of Illusion: Nazi Cinema and its Afterlife* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 72-96. On the gendered dynamics of *Mother Krause*, see also Patrice Petro, *Joyless Streets: Women and Melodramatic Representation in Weimar Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 150-152; and Jan-Christopher Horak, "Mother Krause's Trip to Happiness", pp. 55-56.

Stylistically, Jutzi's *Mother Krause's Journey to Happiness* is recognized for how it combined "proletarian melodrama, Soviet montage" techniques and documentary footage.²⁹ The use of melodrama tempers the stark documentary footage of everyday life of the Weimar era working class. As Marc Silberman puts it, *Mother Krause's Journey to Happiness* relies on "conventional narrative and visual structures aimed at awakening empathy in the spectator through pathos."³⁰ In this way, it contrasted with contemporaneous Weimar era workers' films, such as *Kuhle Wampe*, which, as Theodore Rippey puts it, "modeled a pattern of constructive, analytical engagement with the present."³¹ *Mother Küsters Goes to Heaven* would build on the combination of conventions associated with melodrama and workers' film in *Mother Krause's*, tap into visual stylistics associated with (Sirkean) melodrama and focus on the working class.

A subtle stylistic progression also exists from Jutzi's *Mother Krause's* to Fassbinder's *Mother Küsters* via Sirk's oft-overlooked first feature film *April, April!* (1935). Katie Trumpener, focusing on one sequence of Sirk's *April, April!*, discusses how "throughout much of this sequence the camera works to dismember, isolate, and dissect the servants' bodies, reducing them metonymically to their 'functional' parts. This old operation... turns the servants into 'hands.'"³² This reduction, she argues, contrasts with earlier depictions of the masses:

The iconographic representation of these bodies occupies a middle ground between the "mass ornament" and the "new masses," between the comically ubiquitous chorus-lines of servants in Ernst Lubitsch's *Oyster Princess / Die Austernprinzessin* (1919) and the comically massed employees in *Three from the Gas Station*, between the anonymous, synchronized mass body of the Tiller Girls and the Busby Berkeley spectacular of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) and of Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will / Triumph des Willens* (1936), and the suffering, marching proletarian bodies portrayed in Piel Jutzi's *Mother Krause's Journey to Happiness / Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück* (1929) as in Slatan Dudow's *Kuhle Wampe* (1932).³³

29 - Jan-Christopher Horak, "Mother Krause's Trip to Happiness", pp. 55-56.

30 - Marc Silberman, "Political Cinema as Oppositional Practice", in Tim Bergfelder, Erica Carter and Deniz Göktürk (eds.), *The German Cinema Book* (London: BFI, 2002), pp. 165-172.

31 - Theodore F. Rippey, "Kuhle Wampe and the Problems of Corporal Culture", *Cinema Journal*, vol. 47, no. 1 (Fall 2007), pp. 3-25. Here, p. 15.

32 - Katie Trumpener, "The René Clair Moment and the Overlap of Films of the 1930s: Detlef Sierck's *April, April!*", *Film Criticism*, vol. 23, issue 2-3 (Winter/Spring 1999), pp. 33-45. Here, p. 37.

33 - Katie Trumpener, "The René Clair Moment and the Overlap of Films of the 1930s", p. 37.

Sirk's *April, April!*, by contrast, focuses not on the masses but specifically, metonymically, on the body parts. Fassbinder, continues this shift from the masses, by opening *Mother Küsters Goes to Heaven* similarly by focusing on labor and on hands. In Fassbinder's *Mother Küsters*, however, as we shall see, his focus on the body parts depicts a shift in labor that took place between the Weimar era and the 1970s.

2. Arbeiterfilme - Fassbinder's *Mother Küsters Goes to Heaven*

Fassbinder's *Mother Küsters Goes to Heaven* opens with a focus both on manual labor and on the media. While the diegetic sound focuses on noise stemming from the assembly of sockets as jazz music plays in the background (on what is later shown to be the radio), the film's first shot – rather than provide an establishing long shot, often outdoors, to show the film's setting or provide context for the viewer before slowly zooming in to the main protagonists and action³⁴ – consists of a high angle, extreme close-up shot of a woman's hands assembling two parts to create sockets (Fig. 1).

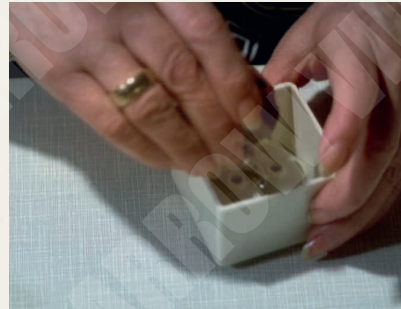


Fig. 1

She picks the parts up from off-screen on the right, assembles them and slides them off-screen to the left. Moving the sockets across the screen invokes an assembly line. The sequence cuts to an extreme close-up of male hands flipping the sockets over and



Fig. 2

34 - On the absent establishing shot and its social function, see also Marco Abel, "Henner Winckler and the Berlin School", *Senses of Cinema* (2015). <http://sensesofcinema.com/2015/feature-articles/henner-winckler-and-the-berlin-school/> - "Cinematically, Winckler's main strategy to confront us with just this sensation of a lack of the ready made is his decision not to provide us with establishing shots, which corresponds to the fact that, as Ekkehard Knörer argues, 'The life of these youths in a small family, as part of which they find themselves, is a life without establishing shot.' A life without establishing shots: taking seriously this condition of possibility for living one's life under the ever-changing conditions brought about by neoliberal processes [...]."

tightening screws to hold them together (Fig. 2). Then, a medium close-up shot shows first Mother Küsters' face, then that of her son Ernst (Armin Meier). Each person is shown from the side, as the film's opening sequence sparingly shows its characters from the front. Since shot-reverse-shots establish intimacy between the characters, which the viewer is allowed to enter surreptitiously, their lack adds to the film's distancing devices and suggests a lack of intimacy between the characters. Mother Küsters, now stirring a red soup pot, bemoans that the number of sockets they have assembled this week (1500) is less than last week (1600). "Well, one becomes older and slower," she says. Thus far, the opening sequence, through its invocation of an assembly line and its reference to mass production suggests a Fordist model of production.



Fig. 3

The film also depicts another form of labor as Mother Küsters gets up to stir the soup pot (Fig. 3). Her meddlesome daughter-in-law, Helene (Irm Hermann) – shown in a medium close-up from the front, first behind Küsters and then alone, grating vegetables – tells Mother Küsters not to add meat to the soup, as meat is contaminated by chemicals and unhealthy. Ernst remains silent. The next shots again show close-ups of the assembly of the sockets (*Heimarbeit*)

and Helene grating vegetables for dinner (*Hausarbeit*). By depicting the home-working (*Heimarbeit*) and multi-tasking, these shots invoke a moment of transition from Fordist mass production to feminized post-Fordist labor. By showing women carrying out the labor of housework, the film also engages *Hausarbeit* (housework) then much under discussion in both labor and feminist circles through the Wages for Housework campaign.³⁵ By not only including but also opening his film with women's labor, rather than (male) factory work, Fassbinder makes a very key and novel contribution to the genre of melodrama, on the one hand, and to workers' films,

35 - Over the course of the 1970s, feminists demanded wages for housework or that men and women share housework. c.f. Alice Schwarzer, *Frauenarbeit - Frauenbefreiung* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhr kamp, 1973); Selma James and Maria Rosa Dalla Costa, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* (Bristol: Falling Wall Press, 1975); Nicole Cox and Silvia Federici, *Counter-Planning from the Kitchen: Wages for Housework: A Perspective on Capital and the Left* (New York: Wages for Housework Committee, 1976); Gisela Bock, "Wages for Housework as a Perspective of the Women's Movement", in Edith Hoshino Altbach, Jeanette Clausen, Dagmar Schultz and Naomi Stephan (eds.), *German Feminism: Readings in Politics and Literature* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1984), pp. 246-250.

on the other hand: he focuses not only on class politics but also on feminist politics, on women, and on their typically unpaid and unrecognized housework or house labor.

Only after an extreme close-up of a ticking clock and a radio – zooming in to its old-fashioned front radio panel, while a radio bulletin interrupts the jazz playing with a newsflash – does the camera zoom out slightly, to provide some context: Mother Küsters and her son Ernst assemble electrical plugs on the kitchen table (to earn extra money). The radio bulletin announces: “at a chemical plant near Frankfurt, a mentally deranged worker beat his personnel manager to death and then committed suicide at one of the machines in the production hall. It remains unclear how it could have come to this gruesome act. As the criminal police stated, the investigations have not yet been concluded.” In this way, while Fassbinder opens with the sound associated with melodrama, song, it is not the sweeping orchestral sound associated with Sirk’s melodrama; instead Fassbinder reworks sound to focus instead on media, here, radio, as its source, and also news.³⁶ He would expand the inclusion of news, blaring on the radio or television, in *Die dritte Generation / The Third Generation* (Fassbinder, 1979) to such an extent that the cacophony of noise in that film makes it virtually impossible to discern or concentrate on the dialogue.³⁷ And again in *Die Ehe der Maria Braun / The Marriage of Maria Braun* (Fassbinder, 1979), media features prominently to highlight historical and political events of the day, when the news broadcast plays on the radio during a family gathering or the 1954 World Cup soccer match plays on the television in the closing sequence. In *Mother Küsters Goes to Heaven*, the news focuses on labor.

The choice of a chemical plant is not incidental, nor is the location. In 1971, chemical workers, bound together by the *Industriegewerkschaft Chemie-Papier-Keramik* (Industrial Union for Chemical, Paper and Ceramics Workers), went on strike for twelve weeks to negotiate better working conditions and wage increases. In 1973, conditions changed intensely for workers in West Germany as a result of global economic shifts. Guest workers, especially those of Turkish heritage, were often

36 - As numerous scholars have pointed out, the “melos” of melodrama, the melody or song, with which the genre (or mode) originated, is typically lacking in Fassbinder’s melodramas, with song reduced to a minimum. While, as Eric Thau put it, “Frank Skinner provided an overdone score for *All That Heaven Allows*”, *Mother Küsters Goes to Heaven* includes just a few songs. Eric Thau, “All That Melodrama Allows”, in Paul Cooke (ed.), *World Cinema’s ‘Dialogues’ with Hollywood* (New York: Palgrave, 2007), pp. 187-200. Here, p. 193. By contrast, it is already present in Sirk’s first melodrama, *Schlüßakkord (Final Accord)* (1936), directed under the name Detlef Sierck. This early film already shows stylistic features that would come to be associated with Sirk’s melodramas of the 1950s, such as the use of music.

37 - This barrage of media also intends to comment on the media fixation of the RAF’s second generation.

used as scapegoats. In July of 1973, *Der Spiegel* ran a headline announcing “Die Türken kommen, rette sich, wer kann” (“The Turks are Coming, Save Themselves, Whoever Can”).³⁸ In August, Turkish employees went on strike for a week at a Cologne Ford factory. As a result, a media debate ensued about foreign workers, both how politicized they were and how their presence impacted other workers – by, so the argument went, leading to increased competition for jobs and to an increased politicization of the workplace. In October 1973, the world oil crisis began. By the end of the year, West Germany had decided to stop recruiting foreign workers and workers’ uprisings had been, by and large, curtailed.

While Jutzi’s *Mother Krause* grapples with the 1929 economic downturn, Fassbinder’s *Mother Küsters* engages the 1973 economic crisis and the stress it unleashed on workers. In *Mother Küsters Goes to Heaven*, after the news bulletin, the regular program, playing jazz, resumes. Emma Küsters looks at the clock, and wonders aloud where “father” could be, since it is already well past 6:00 pm.³⁹ Her son reassures her that “father” will show up, since he has always done so thus far. The doorbell rings and a coworker tells Emma Küsters that her husband, Hermann, has beaten the boss’ son to death, stating he must have heard about the planned mass layoffs.⁴⁰ A media frenzy ensues as journalists swarm the Küsters’ apartment. After a journalist – Niemyer, (Gottfried John) in whom Emma had trusted – writes a sensationalistic article about her husband, alleging that he was authoritarian, violent and an alcoholic, she vows to correct the record about what led her husband to commit the murder.

The film then presents various forms of Emma Küster’s political engagement. Initially, she is involved with the German Communist Party. Fassbinder was one of the few well-known directors to thematize the communist party, which was banned in 1956 as the Communist Party of Germany (*Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands*) and re-established in 1968 as the German Communist Party (*Deutsche Kommunistische*

38 - “Die Türken kommen - rette sich, wer kann”, *Der Spiegel*, 30 July, 1973. <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-41955159.html>. No author listed.

39 - Of course, in Sirk’s melodramas, also known as women’s films, the husbands are often lacking, since the female protagonist is typically a widow, or, in the case of Curtiz’ *Mildred Pierce*, separated and then divorced. In the more contemporary melodrama, *Far from Heaven* (Todd Haynes, 2002), Todd Haynes reinserts the father figure, to consider suppressed male homosexuality in the 1950s, and his tardy arrival for dinner or absence at the dinner table often figures prominently. In *Carol* (2015), it is the mother who is late or absent, made possible by class privilege, shifting the focus to female same sex relationships set in the 1950s.

40 - The film slips between whether Mother Küsters’ husband killed his boss or the boss’s son. The radio broadcast states it is the boss; in two other sequences, it is stated that her husband killed the boss’s son.



Partei).⁴¹ In Fassbinder's film, the communists, Frau Thälmann (Margit Carstensen) and Herr Thälmann (Karlheinz Böhm) – in a clear reference to Ernst Thälmann, the leader of the Communist Party of Germany from 1925 up until he was arrested in 1933 and then executed in 1944 in Buchenwald by the Nazis for his political beliefs – are depicted as an upper middle class couple, who live in a well-appointed home that Frau Thälmann inherited.⁴² Through the figure of the Thälmanns, Fassbinder at once cites communist history and figures but also criticizes contemporary articulations of communist politics. The couple heard about Mother Küsters' case, attended her husband's funeral and gave Mother Küsters their contact information. Over the course of her conversations with them, Emma Küsters begins to consider anew the political and economic factors that motivated her husband to carry out the act, eventually agreeing to speak about her husband at a communist political rally. Buoyed initially by their interest in her situation and their warmth and accessibility, Emma is soon frustrated by the sluggish pace at which things are happening. Here, the film's narrative contrasts clearly with Jutzi's *Mother Krause's Journey to Happiness*, in which Communism is shown as a source of hope, if not for Mother Krause, then for her daughter, that is, the next generation.

An anarchist, Horst Knab (Matthias Fuchs) lingers outside the lecture hall after her talk and introduces himself to Mother Küsters. Frau Küsters, he says, "needs to carry out an action, to wake the public from its sleep." When Frau Küsters shares this exchange with the communists, they reply: "he is one of those who wants to destroy things instead of build them up. We cannot even talk with that kind anymore." The indictment can be read as an expression of a broader sentiment of the era, even among leftists as the film was released during the height of West German terrorism, between the Red Army Faction's 1972 May Offensive, the subsequent arrest of its first generation and the German Autumn of 1977. And yet the film outraged others on the left, who criticized Fassbinder for the film's depictions of both communists and anarchists.⁴³ According to Tony Rayns, "Turned

41 - Patrick Major, *The Death of the KPD: Communism and Anti-Communism in West Germany, 1945-1956* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 15-16, pp. 292-293. See also Andrei S. Markovits and Philip Gorski, "Deutsche Kommunistische Partei (DKP)", *The German Left: Red, Green and Beyond* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 60-61.

42 - The actors also played a couple in Fassbinder's previous made-for-television film, *Martha* (1974). While the film includes a middle class couple, they are not the film's focus. The eponymous main character and her political journey form the film's focus, as is typical for melodramas, but here the main character is not middle class but working class.

43 - "Fassbinder made himself many enemies among [West] German left when he seemed to be saying in films such as *Fox* or *Mother Küsters* that left-wing politics and capitalism are not so different when it comes to emotional exploitation." Thomas Elsaesser, "A Cinema of Vicious Circles (and Afterword)", in Tony Rayns (ed.), *Fassbinder* (London: BFI, 1980), pp. 24-53. Here, 39.

down by the 1975 Berlin [Film] Festival, and disrupted by left-wing protests at its 'fringe' screening in the Berlin Forum, the original version of RWF's film (with its overtly tragic ending) created more furore [sic] than any of his previous films."⁴⁴

Meanwhile, in the film, the journalist, Niemeyer, and Corinna begin a relationship. In a typical Fassbinder scenario, where the personal and the professional (or financial gain) are enmeshed, Niemeyer uses Corinna to gain access to Mother Küsters, facilitating his coverage of the story and his career; Corinna, inversely, uses the relationship and Niemeyer's media coverage of the murder, no matter how defaming to her father and her family, to boost her career as a singer.⁴⁵ In this way, Fassbinder personalizes or interiorizes what are ideological conflicts, in this instance, reframing class conflict in personal terms.

Mother Küsters exhibits the impact of Sirk's oeuvre – with a Fassbinder-ian twist. While the opening shots of Sirk's *All That Heaven Allows* depict a New England town in vivid Technicolor and using a craning shot; Fassbinder shows a series of postcard-like stills (no craning shot) of a village near Frankfurt in saturated color. And like Sirk's *All That Heaven Allows* and *Written on the Wind*, Fassbinder's *Mother Küsters Goes to Heaven* intensely uses mirrors as distancing devices. In Sirk's melodrama, the viewer is first introduced to the daughter and son of the main character, Cary Scott (Jane Wyman), as they appear in a mirror at her vanity table. As has been noted, her children and their initial appearance in the mirror, reflect society's gaze on Cary and her unfolding relationship with her gardener, Ron Kirby (Rock Hudson). In Fassbinder's *Mother Küsters Goes to Heaven*, the mirrors typically appear in conjunction with Corinna: she and the journalist Niemeyer hold eye contact through the car's rear view mirror as she sits in the rear seat, after Mother Küsters and Niemeyer pick her up from the airport. Then, the three-some has lunch, during which Corinna briefly leaves the table to make a phone call and check her face in the mirror. Here, the mirror, rather than reflecting back the constricting upper social class, as it does in Sirk, out of which the main characters try to break, depicts the *aspiration toward* that class, on the part of some characters. As Thomas Elsaesser points out, "Fassbinder's use of mirror shots or internal framing is a typical feature of much 'self-reflexive' cinema, in the tradition of European auteurs, from Bergman to Visconti, or Godard

44 - Tony Rayns, "Documentation", in Tony Rayns (ed.), *Fassbinder* (London: BFI, 1980), pp. 102-122. Here, p. 112.

45 - See also Elsaesser for how "Fassbinder's melodramas drew from Sirkean classicism [... to question how] identity and subjectivity could be tied to class, money and social status, besides being oedipal dramas of patriarchy." Thomas Elsaesser, *Fassbinder's Germany*, pp. 74-75.

to Almodóvar. It is also common in the work of Europe's preferred American auteurs, such as Nicholas Ray, Orson Welles, Joseph Losey, as well as emigré directors like Sirk and Fritz Lang.⁴⁶ Yet while Sirk uses mirrors to depict the stifling corset of 1950s upper class politics on women, Fassbinder uses them to show a fixation on upward mobility. Like Sirk, Fassbinder uses mise-en-scène throughout to express characters' internalized repression, that is, the interiorization or sublimation of the dramatic conflict into décor, color, gesture and composition. Yet while Sirk often includes class politics, that is, by depicting both wealthy and working class figures and relations between them, for example, in *All That Heaven Allows*, *Written on the Wind* and *Imitation of Life*, Fassbinder often shifts the entire focus specifically on to the working class in his melodramas and in *Mother Küsters Goes to Heaven* in particular.

Additionally, in *Mother Küsters Goes to Heaven* Fassbinder underscores and heightens thematics often touched on by the melodrama genre but with two decided shifts that again bespeak class politics. After the opening sequence set in the kitchen, many of the sequences that take place at Mother Küsters' home are shot in the hallway. The hallway and characters in it are typically shown with a doorway appearing within the frame of another doorway, that is, another frame (Fig. 4). Or the camera is placed to the right or left of the hallway, close to the wall, and a row of open doors is shown (Fig. 5). Or the shot is framed with numerous doorways and open doors framing a person (Figs. 6 & 7).

Seeing all these frames within frames or open doorways, typically in the hallway, gives the viewer the uncanny feeling of being simultaneously trapped and not yet settled. Elsaesser calls these types of shots

46 - Thomas Elsaesser, Fassbinder's Germany, p. 58.



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7

Fassbinder's "obsessive framing shots."⁴⁷ Eric Thau describes the effect of Fassbinder's framing in his film *Katzelmacher* as follows: "throughout the film, Fassbinder will emulate Sirk's limiting frames, creating boxes and prisons from which his lead characters must find some escape."⁴⁸ But in *Mother Küsters Goes to Heaven* two crucial shifts take place.

Whereas in Sirk's melodramas, framing focuses on the constricting environment of 1950s upper middle class society on women, in Fassbinder's melodrama it focuses on the working class and, interestingly enough, shows disintegration. The aforementioned sequences in the hallway, all featuring frames within frames or open doors, show, at first, Corinna moving in; then Ernst and Helene heading on vacation, and then moving out: Helene cites being pregnant and needing calm.

Then, Corinna moves out and in with the journalist Niemeyer. In this way, the film depicts the unraveling of a working class family. Both children are depicted as selfish: Ernst as a result of unquestionably obeying his domineering wife, and Corinna as a result of her lust for fame.⁴⁹ Neither one considers or tends to Mother Küsters' mourning. The framing heightens both the melodrama and the claustrophobia, as had already similarly been the case in Fassbinder's earlier *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant* and would subsequently be the case in his dark satire *The Third Generation*, but here focuses on a working class family's unraveling due to the era's economics.

47 - Ibid.

48 - Eric Thau, "All That Melodrama Allows", p. 192.

49 - This motif of the selfish child who exasperates and sometimes causes the trying situation of the (often single) mother also forms a focal point of classic melodramas. Cf. Curtiz' *Mildred Pierce* (1945); Sirk's *All That Heaven Allows*; *Written on the Wind*; *Imitation of Life*; as well as Haynes' *Far from Heaven*.

Mother Küsters, increasingly politicized, decides to take action. She visits her husband's former employer and demands he pay out her husband's pension to her. His former boss tells her that she is not entitled to it, since her husband did not die as a result of a work accident but rather committed a crime, and a murder at that. Frustrated, Mother Küsters proposes to the communists that she go to the factories and discuss the matter with workers. The communists confirm their commitment to her but state that they are busy with the upcoming elections and ask for her patience. The anarchist activist stops by Mother Küsters' apartment and tells her that all political parties are bourgeois and cannot risk taking action. He convinces her to participate in a sit-in at the offices of the newspaper responsible for the slanted coverage.

Two different versions of the ending follow: one produced for the West German market and the other for the U.S. market. In the closing sequence included in the version produced for the West German market, Mother Küsters, together with the anarchist and two other activists, heads to the offices of the corporate paper's editor and demands that he acknowledge the article's skewed vantage-point, stating the group will occupy the space until the paper prints an official apology. Then, to Mother Küsters' horror, the other activists brandish a handgun and a rifle; state they are taking the editor and journalist Niemeyer hostage; and demand the release of all political prisoners to honor Hermann Küsters. They demand that a vehicle drive up to take them and the hostages to the airport; that no police be present within a 200-hundred meter radius; and that an airplane be made available to allow them to escape. In an ensuing shootout, not shown but narrated on screen, Mother Küsters, the editor and Knab die.⁵⁰ This version met with the afore-mentioned criticism when it premiered at the Berlinale in 1975.

By contrast, the version of the film released in the U.S. closes with a sequence in which the editor condescendingly replies that he will not take the sit-in of the anarchist and his lone companion seriously and walks away. A string of employees ignore them and step over them one by one to go home at the end of the workday, so the activists eventually give up on their sit-in and they, too, leave. Eventually, only Mother Küsters remains. A security guard arrives and tells her she must leave as he has to lock up. She is welcome to come back the next day and every day after that but

50 - Vis-à-vis the violence not shown, Thomas Elsaesser writes: "As a storyteller, Fassbinder felt so self-assured that, in the manner of classical tragedy, the dramatic framing events (the husband's initial suicide and the final showdown) happen off-stage." Thomas Elsaesser, *Fassbinder's Germany: History, Identity, Subject* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1996), p. 284.

she must leave at night. He states he has to go home to cook up *Himmel und Erde* (Heaven and Earth), a traditional dish popular in the Rhineland, consisting of blood sausage, mashed potatoes and applesauce. He reveals that his wife passed away years ago. Mother Küster decides to join him for dinner at his home, suggesting a new beginning.⁵¹ While the happy ending can be read as Fassbinder's nod to the wishes of a U.S. audience for such a conclusion, the new relationship with a security guard, the invitation to dine on blood sausage, and the invocation of the dishes' name Heaven and Earth are each highly symbolic and ironic.

In summary, Fassbinder's *Mother Küsters Goes to Heaven* engages key hallmarks of Sirk's melodramas, such as his use of sound, mirrors and framings, each of which would subsequently become signature signs in their own right of Fassbinder's oeuvre, but it shifts them to focus decidedly and solely on the situation of the working class in 1970s West Germany, engaging the era's politics and economics. Rereading how Fassbinder uses each of these techniques in this film revises an understanding of them when considering a history of the genre of melodrama but also of Fassbinder's oeuvre and of the genealogy of the workers' film.

3. Conclusion - The Genealogy of Workers' Films and the Berlin School

One could also read Fassbinder's melodrama, as mentioned at the outset, as sitting at the midway mark of a genealogy of *Arbeiterfilme*, or films that engage work, which, at its contemporary end, manifests in the German cinema of the Berlin School. The cinema of the Berlin School and of its best-known director, Christian Petzold, in particular, engages neoliberal economics in post-reunification Germany, showing the impact these policies have on workers. Arguably, all of Petzold's films that are set in post-1989 Germany grapple with the issue of precarious labor.⁵² They show the flexible labor market and its effects on relationships – couples, families or communities – and on notions of (having a) home.

Petzold often makes films in what he has called the graveyard of genre. That is, he uses genres and often combines genres, what Jaimey Fisher has called a "generic

51 - Stanley Kaufmann, "Further Fassbinder", *New Republic*, June 4, 1977, pp. 22-23.

52 - C.f. Marco Abel, "The Counter-Cinema of the Berlin School", (Rochester: Camden House: 2013), p. 2; Hester Baer, "Affectless Economies: The Berlin School and Neoliberalism", *Discourse*, vol. 35, no.1 (Winter 2013), pp. 72-100; Anke Biendarra, "Ghostly Business: Place, Space and Gender in Christian Petzold's *Yella*", *Seminar*, vol. 47, no. 4 (September 2011), pp. 465-478; Marco Abel, "The Cinema of Identification Gets on My Nerves: Interview with Christian Petzold", *Cineaste*, vol. 33, no. 3 (2008). www.cineaste.com/articles/an-interview-with-christian-petzold.htm



(re)assemblage” or an archaeology of genre, one that excavates, piecemeal, recombines, and re-exhibits in the service of his own aesthetic and political vision.⁵³ Petzold’s second feature film, *Wolfsburg* (2003), for example, is a melodrama and at once

clearly engaged with Germany’s economic transitions and contemporary labor. The opening sequence shows Philip, driving and on his cell phone, arguing with his girlfriend, Katja. “Visibly agitated, he drops the phone, reaches down to retrieve it,” Fisher writes, “hears a portentous thud as his car strikes something... He realizes he has hit a boy on a bicycle...[and] flees the scene.”⁵⁴ Later, Philip goes to the hospital in order to confess his crime. He meets Laura, the boy’s mother, and does not admit to his action. A relationship between the two ensues, made tense by the question of whether Laura will eventually learn that it was he who hit her son. “Even in light of more recent theories of the genre,” Fisher argues, “the makings of the melodrama are largely there: melodrama’s inherent moral logic in Philip’s dilemma; the agnition... of Laura’s discovering who Philip is even as she falls in love with him; and the identification with an innocent victim.”⁵⁵ While Petzold draws on the genre of melodrama in *Wolfsburg*, he also combines it with other genres, such as thriller (will Laura uncover that Philip committed the crime). Additionally, as Fisher points out, Petzold creates a distance or gives a cool tone to this melodrama, foreclosing some of the empathetic gestures that characterized the genre’s earlier iterations.⁵⁶

Set in the city of Wolfsburg, famous for its production of VW vehicles, Philip notably works not in the factory but in sales. Laura, trained to be a graphic designer but – in a typical situation for Berlin School films and also indicative of the times – cannot find work in her area of training. As Fisher argues, “*Wolfsburg* foreshadows aspects of his

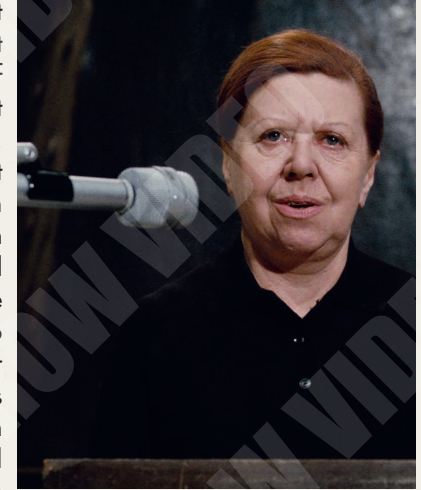
53 - Jaimey Fisher, *Christian Petzold* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013), p. 15.

54 - Fisher, *Christian Petzold*, p. 68.

55 - Fisher, *Christian Petzold*, p. 69. Here Fisher references Peter Brooks and Linda Williams: Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); Williams, “Melodrama Revisited”, in Nicke Browne (ed.), *Refiguring American Film Genres* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 42-88.

56 - Fisher, *Christian Petzold*, pp. 69-70.

[Petzold’s] style that reverberate throughout his later work, including his engagement with the contemporary transformation of work and social life.”⁵⁷ The economic shift manifests not only through Philip’s job. In this film, the most private space is not the home but Philip’s car: at once a sign of mobility and also of being trapped in motion and without a home. Mobility and scenes filmed from within cars, of people not only being constantly in motion but also



needing to be constantly in motion, in order to chase precarious job opportunities, has become hallmark of Petzold’s films set in contemporary Germany.⁵⁸ Marco Abel has underscored “what links Petzold’s films is... an interest in the question of what happens to this desire for *Heimat* and one’s ability to forge one when the conditions of living, of subjectivity, and thus also of desire in the age of finance capitalism are defined by the rhetoric, and affectively manifest forces, of ‘mobility.’ What happens to the utopia inscribed into the *Heimat*-building when the demand on contemporary subjects is that they be flexible and ready to uproot themselves at a moment’s notice?”⁵⁹ A new kind of homelessness, in other words, marks the contemporary flexible labor. And this aspect of Berlin School cinema adds a new element to the workers’ film, one that differs markedly from the Weimar era’s post-1929 high unemployment but rootedness in a city and a neighborhood, or Fassbinder’s *Mother Küsters Goes to Heaven*, made after the 1973 economic downturn, where the family is also still rooted, if not exclusively in a neighborhood, then in West Germany. Petzold’s films are unrooted in Germany, or unable to take root.

57 - Fisher, *Christian Petzold*, p. 68.

58 - See also Christina Gerhardt, “Space, Motion and Sound: The Cinema of Apichatpong Weerasethakul and Christian Petzold”, *Cinema and the Production of Space*, ed. Katy Hardy, special issue of *Wide Screen* 7.1 (2017); and Lutz Koepnick, “Cars”, in Roger F. Cook, Lutz Koepnick, Kristin Kopp and Brad Prager (eds.), “Berlin School Glossary: An ABC of the New Wave in German Cinema” (Chicago: Intellect Press, 2013), pp. 75-82.

59 - Marco Abel, *The Counter-Cinema of the Berlin School* (Rochester: Camden House: 2013), p. 78.

Petzold's *Jerichow* (2008) is set in post-reunification north eastern Germany (so former East Germany) where jobs are scarce. The film features the married couple Ali, of Turkish heritage and the owner of snack bars, and Laura, German and working for Ali; as well as Thomas, a German veteran who served in Afghanistan. Petzold's film references both Fassbinder's *Händler der vier Jahreszeiten / Merchant of Four Seasons* (Fassbinder, 1971) and *Fear Eats the Soul*.⁶⁰ The relationship between Ali and Laura is not healthy: he drinks too much and physically assaults her; and she owes him money, suggesting it might be the reason she stays or is forced to stay with him. As Fisher points out, "this is a world... remade by late capitalism, in which people relate to each other primarily through economic interests."⁶¹ Ali has lost his license as a result of drunk driving and hires Thomas, who needs work, to be his driver. Laura and Thomas soon began an affair. It remains unclear if Ali intentionally set her or them up for a test. The references to a lack of job prospects for returning veterans and in this region grapple with the contemporary economic situation, in this case, in Germany, of what Harvey has called uneven development.

Not only Petzold's films but also those of other directors associated with the Berlin School consider precarious labor and its impacts on communities, families and relationships: Henner Winckler, *Lucy* (2006), Maria Speth, *Madonnen / Madonnas* (2007), Chrisoph Hochhäusler, *Milchwald / In This Very Moment* (2003), Hochhäusler, *Unter dir die Stadt / The City Below* (2010) and, of course, Maren Ade's recent Oscar-nominated *Toni Erdmann* (2016). In Ade's comedy, the sequence introducing Ines, the protagonist, shows her at a family birthday gathering in Germany, but while the family is indoors enjoying cake, she is outside in the back yard, talking to colleagues on her cell phone. Her work clearly never ends. She is a consultant in Bucharest, Romania. The film is replete with references to contemporary economics and its effects. In the film, Ines' father tells her colleagues he has hired a replacement daughter because Ines is too busy to spend time with him. Ines, meanwhile, is busy organizing "team-building" events. Her father finally creates the persona of "Toni Erdmann," who is a life coach, he says, to be able to spend more time with her and her colleagues. In these ways, Ade, Petzold and other Berlin School directors focus on precarious labor in present-day Germany and could be read as a contemporary iteration of workers' films.

Petzold, among other Berlin School directors, taps into the genre or mobilizes a generic assemblage, precisely to convey the "costs" of the logic of neoliberalism, personal and otherwise. For this reason, the Berlin School could be considered a contemporary iteration of the workers' film. Fassbinder's *Mother Küsters Goes to Heaven* sits at the midway point of a cinematic history of the *Arbeiterfilme*, revisiting the Weimar era's worker's films but also revisited by the contemporary German cinema of the Berlin School. As argued, Fassbinder also draws on the genre of melodrama in *Mother Küsters Goes to Heaven*, and revises it by focusing on the working class. By shifting the focus entirely to the working class, Fassbinder makes a novel contribution to the genre of melodrama. A reconsideration of Fassbinder's *Mother Küsters Goes to Heaven*, resting as it does at the intersection of melodrama and workers' films, not only sheds light on the economics and labor politics of 1970s West Germany but also reveals his unique contribution to the genre of melodrama and locates him in the genealogy of workers' films.

Christina Gerhardt is Associate Professor at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa. She has been awarded grants by the DAAD, Fulbright Commission and NEH; and held visiting appointments at Harvard University, Columbia University and the Free University in Berlin. She is author of *Screening the Red Army Faction: Cultural and Historical Memory* (2018), co-editor of *1968 and Global Cinema* (2018) and of *Celluloid Revolt: German Screen Cultures and the Long Sixties* (2018) and editor of *1968 and West German Cinema, a special issue of The Sixties* 10 (2017). She has been published in *Cineaste*, *Film Quarterly*, *German Studies Review*, *Mosaic*, *New German Critique*, *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, *The Sixties*, and *Wide Screen*.

This essay first appeared in the journal *Film Criticism*, vol. 41, issue 1 (February 2017), and is reproduced by kind permission of the author and the journal's editor.

60 - Fisher, *Christian Petzold*, pp. 118, 126, 128, 136, 167. See also Gerd Gemünden, "Introduction: The Dreileben Experiment", Eds. Marco Abel and Christina Gerhardt, *German Studies Review*, vol.36, no. 3 (October 2013), pp. 603-606.
61 - Fisher, *Christian Petzold*, p. 126.



Margot's Life of Quiet Desperation: On Fassbinder's *Fear of Fear* (2021)

by Margaret Deriaz

Fear of Fear: the title sounds like a Hollywood noir, or maybe – less enticingly – a portentous slice of post-war European arthouse full of philosophical musing and existential foreboding. But as one might expect, Rainer Werner Fassbinder's fearlessly distinctive work (*Angst vor der Angst* in the original German) fits neither category. Made for West German television in 1975, it was the 30-year-old director's 27th film, its title deriving from the short story on which his screenplay was based.

This unpublished tale was the work of Asta Scheib, then a little-known freelance journalist and mother of two, but later to become a best-selling novelist and sought after screenwriter. Fassbinder's film, according to its opening credits, was merely 'based on an idea' by Scheib, but this – as she later remarked – understates her contribution. The story, subsequently expanded, would become her first novel, *Langsame Tage* ("Slow Days", 1981), but even in its original form it was, according to Scheib, substantial enough to provide Fassbinder with the bulk of his screenplay, which reproduced her text with minimal changes.¹

Scheib's account of a young middle-class woman in crisis was semi-autobiographical: Margot Staudte has everything the average female in the mid-1970s was meant to aspire to: a well-appointed home, an amiable, hard-working husband, and a couple of children to keep her busy. And yet her hands suddenly tremble, and she suffers terrifying episodes in which the world around her seems to blur and dissolve before her eyes. She herself can't explain what's happening: "I never learned any words that could express it." Nor does she receive any real sympathy or understanding from those supposedly closest to her, especially not her interfering in-laws who live upstairs and constantly imply that everything she does is wrong, whether it's allowing her daughter to paint her fingernails, failing to cook properly nourishing food (i.e. spinach and carrots), or kissing and cuddling her children to abnormal excess. Even when she flees to the local swimming pool, trying to distract herself with strenuous exercise, she's accused by her brother-in-law of swimming "like a madwoman".

It seems that society can only deal with Margot's apparently inexplicable anxiety by medicalising it – prescribing drugs rather than trying to get to the root of the problem. Fassbinder's own diagnosis, in an interview published in 1977, was typically incisive.

1 - Asta Scheib, *Jeder Mensch ist ein Kunstwerk: Begegnungen* (Munich, Deutscher Taschenbuchverlag, 2006), p. 16. (Scheib further explains that Fassbinder had suggested that they work on the screenplay together; this would, however, have required her to join him in the United States – an offer that family commitments prevented her from accepting.)

This wasn't, he insisted, a film about mental illness as such, but about how "normal" people in societies like ours are alienated from their true selves: "The life this woman has to lead is not her life [...] this type of 'illness' sets in with anyone who begins to realise that the life they are leading may not be the life they would like to lead, and that most people are simply playing roles in their lives that are not theirs."²



With a growing women's movement in Germany and beyond, this was far from being the only film of its time, either in Fassbinder's oeuvre or in cinema worldwide, to portray the misery endured by women in patriarchal society. Indeed, Margit Carstensen, who stars here as Margot, had already played a number of such roles for Fassbinder, from the brutally gaslit wife in *Martha* (1974) to the 19th-century serial killer in *Bremen Freedom* (*Bremer Freiheit: Frau Geesche Gottfried - Ein bürgerliches Trauerspiel*, 1972) whose first victim is her abusive husband. In the opinion of Asta Scheib, however, the flamboyant

Carstensen was seriously miscast as Margot; her own preference, she told Fassbinder prior to the shoot, was for Hanna Schygulla who, she felt, would more credibly convey Margot's vulnerability.

But Fassbinder, who had fallen out with Schygulla while filming *Effi Briest* (1974), was unpersuaded. And though Schygulla might have been more moving in the role, Carstensen's air of artificiality – deemed inappropriate by Scheib – conveys a brittleness wholly in keeping with Margot's struggle to keep up appearances. More muted and naturalistic than usual, her performance hints at a strong personality largely repressed but occasionally breaking through. The sardonic gleam in her eye,

2 - Conversation with John Hughes and Ruth McCormick, "Rainer Werner Fassbinder and the Death of Family Life", *Thousand Eyes Magazine* (New York, April 1977).

her precise, fluent speech and faintly defiant smile suggest that Margot has a mind of her own. The fact that such a woman can still feel crushed serves to underline how inescapably oppressive the system is.



As a TV movie, *Fear of Fear* was deliberately aimed at a mass audience – Fassbinder being always keenly aware of the differing requirements and possibilities of television and cinema – and the film, shot in Cologne and Bonn, is rooted in recognisable reality. But this is kitchen-sink realism with an expressionist twist: Margot's apartment,

presumably rented from the in-laws, feels alien to her and she longs to move out of a place in which nothing is of her choosing. It's a plausible representation of contemporary (i.e., 1970s) décor combined with relics of a previous age; at the same time, it eloquently conveys Margot's psychological predicament. It's almost as if its clashing patterns of wallpaper, curtains and upholstery, along with the constant background hum of traffic, are instrumental in triggering her panic attacks. The same is true of the mirrors into which she stares without recognition, while a painting of the Madonna and child, hanging over the marital bed, sets impossible standards of maternal devotion. Margot is frequently relegated to a corner of the frame – boxed-in or half-hidden by bulky furniture, ill-placed lamps and houseplants. Like the claustrophobic interiors of many other Fassbinder films, the flat's awkward, cluttered arrangement – desperately in need of a touch of feng shui – suggests entrapment.

Peer Raben's soundtrack, too, shifts between realistically motivated (or "diegetic") music and his own jangly, nervy score which he described as "purely psychological".³ At times, the diegetic seems to be at odds with the non-diegetic, as when Margot seeks solace in favourite songs that make her feel more like herself – the seductive intimacy of Leonard Cohen or the uninhibited rhythms of The Rolling Stones – using them, along with Valium and cognac, to drown out the anxiety so viscerally evoked in Raben's score.

3 - H.G. Pflaum/Rainer Werner Fassbinder, *Das Bißchen Realität, das ich brauche – Wie Filme entstehen*, (Munich, Carl Hanser Verlag, 1976), pp. 122-123.



As for the melodramatic effects beloved of Hollywood film scores, Raben – though generally averse to such devices – thought them useful in focussing the attention of more easily distracted television viewers. Thus Margot's meltdowns are heralded by portentous musical flourishes, as are her uneasy encounters with a mysterious neighbour, Herr Bauer, who lurks in wait for her on street corners. This character lends a thriller-ish element to *Fear*, especially as played by Fassbinder regular Kurt Raab (also set designer for the film), whose world-weary melancholy and mocking half-smile recall Peter Lorre in Fritz Lang's *M* – an impression possibly

reinforced, for audiences of the time, by Raab's Lorre-esque portrayal of Weimarer-era child murderer Fritz Haarmann in *The Tenderness of Wolves* (*Die Zärtlichkeit der Wölfe*, 1973). It gradually transpires, however, that Herr Bauer, who has a history of mental illness, isn't motivated by malice but feels drawn to Margot as a fellow-sufferer. It's this sense of affinity, rather than any concrete threat, that fills Margot with such unspeakable dread, in much the same way as Flaubert's Emma Bovary is terrified by the repeated apparition of a blind beggar whose wretched fate seems to foretell her own. In the end, Herr Bauer is less reminiscent of a murderer than of the desperately depressed young husband and father portrayed by Raab in an earlier Fassbinder film, *Why Does Herr R. Run Amok* (*Warum läuft Herr R. Amok*, 1970). One can only hope that Margot, a female counterpart to Mr R, will be spared a similarly tragic outcome.

But it's not only Herr Bauer, with his unsettling stare, who conjures up a world of Hitchcockian voyeurism; this is a community of curtain twitchers in which the watchers also find themselves watched. Even the camera, with its deliberate movements, seems like a spy, observing with calculated, malevolent intent. It's a sunlit world of everyday ordinariness in which certain characters, at first sight worthy and dependable, add to the unsettling atmosphere. Such is the case with Margot's ostensibly supportive

mother-in-law, played – disconcertingly – by Brigitte Mira, here icily devoid of the heartrending humanity that suffused her lead performance in *Fear Eats the Soul* (*Angst essen Seele auf*, 1974). And then there's Dr Merck, the suave pharmacist who seduces Margot, cloaking his core of steel in a kindly veneer. He's played by Fassbinder regular Adrian Hoven, a heartthrob of the 1950s *Heimattfilm* who later pursued an alternative career in exploitation movies (which he also produced and directed) such as *Kiss Me, Monster* (*Küss mich, Monster*, 1969) and *Mark of the Devil* (*Hexen bis aufs Blut gequält*, 1970). No wonder he's able to invest Dr Merck – a respected professional who trades Valium for sex – with an aura of ambiguity.

Of course, Hoven's performance is also tinged with comedy – indeed, the film is laced throughout with a strain of cartoonish black humour which heightens rather than diminishes our sympathy for Margot. It's here that Carstensen's theatricality comes into its own, as in the scene where Margot, fortified by alcohol, gleefully informs Lore, the sister-in-law who plies her with unsolicited vegetables, just what she thinks of her stinking cabbage. The prim, censorious Lore (Irm Hermann) is pure comic caricature – and a cruel piece of casting from the carnivorous director who wanted to poke fun at Hermann's real-life vegetarianism (and who, in any case, tended to stereotype her in mean, spiteful roles). But the film's most diverting highlight is surely Margot's glorious but short-lived moment of rebellion when, dressed in an unsuitably sexy black top, she's caught in broad daylight lying next to the record player, blissfully inebriated and totally immersed in The Rolling Stones. The joke here is firmly on the two female in-laws (plus a kindergarten teacher played by Fassbinder's mother) whose smug moral outrage is made to seem ridiculous. Standing shoulder to shoulder in a chorus of disapproval, they're like pantomime Ugly Sisters scolding a drunken Cinderella.

There are other films of the era such as *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) and *The Stepford Wives* (1975) which use horror and dark humour to depict women trapped within nightmarish constraints. However, Fassbinder's film, though less sensational than either, is ultimately more troubling because its dystopian elements can't be explained away as an evil plot of Devil worshippers or a conspiracy of men skilled in advanced robotics. In Fassbinder's world, societal oppression is all-pervasive, and men too are numbered among its victims, not least Margot's husband Kurt (Ulrich Faulhaber). Perplexed and worried, the well-meaning Kurt is clearly stressed by the responsibilities of his role as breadwinner, although Margot is too consumed by her

own problems to notice. In the final analysis, *Fear of Fear* – despite its very different cinematic approach – has more in common with John Cassavetes' *A Woman Under the Influence* (1974): compassionate, painful and funny, Cassavetes' film shows how Mabel (Gena Rowlands), like Margot, strives in vain to conform to the stereotype of perfect wife and mother, while her beleaguered husband (Peter Falk) also shows signs of cracking up.

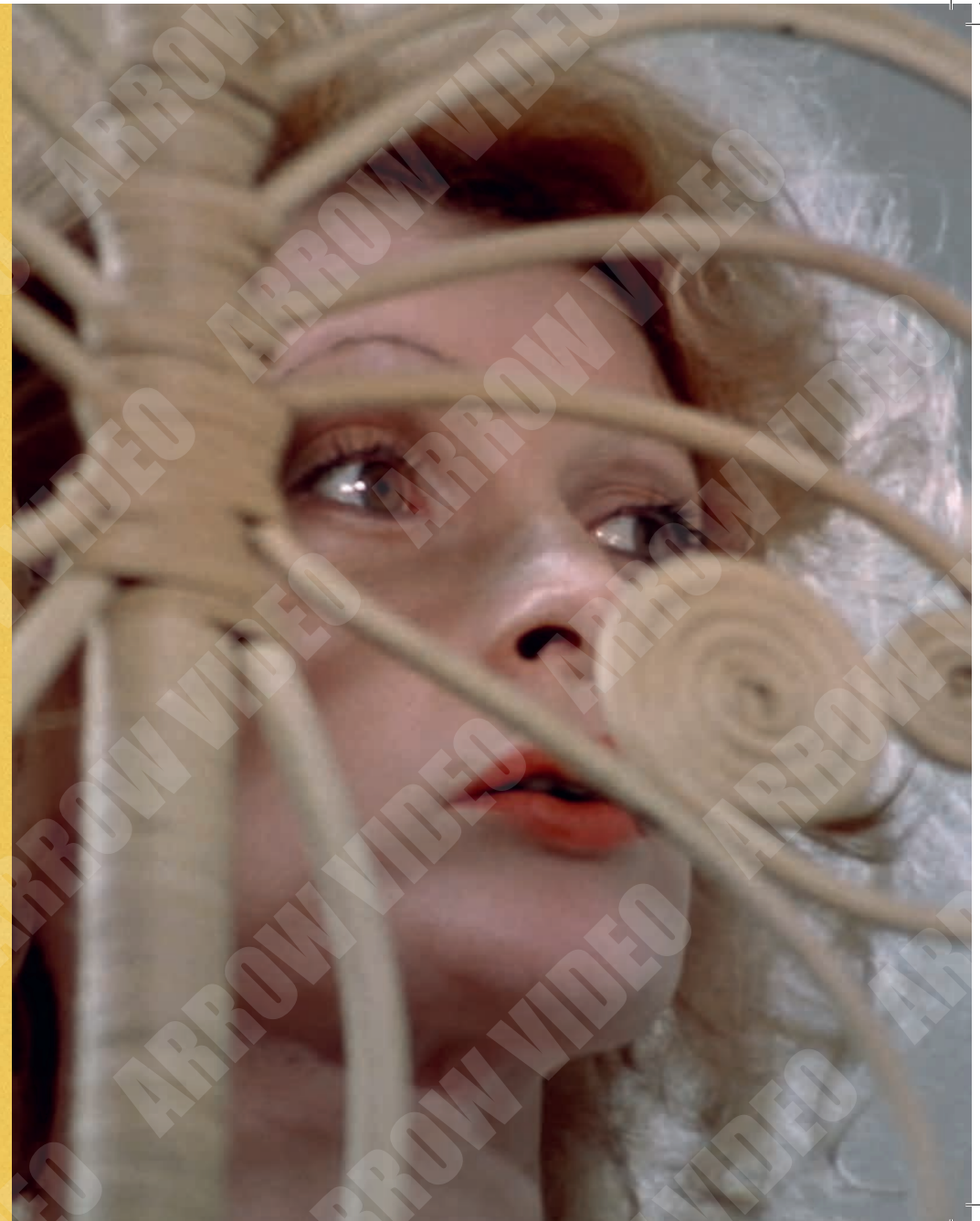
Fear of Fear was broadcast on German TV on 8 July 1975, just one day after the Berlin Film Festival premiere of *Mother Küsters Goes to Heaven*, Fassbinder's scathing take on contemporary political culture, which unleashed a stormy debate. By contrast, *Fear of Fear* – seen, initially at least, by a much larger audience – was reportedly “warmly received”.⁴ Serious yet entertaining, it seems to have struck a chord with many lonely and disturbed people, a number of whom reached out, mostly in writing but also in person, to Asta Scheib.

Nonetheless, this heady cocktail of social realism, melodrama, thriller and comedy remains one of Fassbinder's lesser-known films – maybe because it was a relatively modest TV production; or because it was submerged in the flood of Fassbinder's productivity; or because it's another variation on themes already elaborated in his work. Yet this disturbing tale of everyday folk, which in other hands could easily have turned out dreary and depressing, crackles with life and energy thanks to Fassbinder's cinematic zest and inordinate, playful love of his medium. From the early 1970s, he had been intent on reaching a wider public by creating a type of cinema as “beautiful and powerful and wonderful as Hollywood films [...] and yet at the same time critical of the system”.⁵ He would finally achieve this aim with *The Marriage of Maria Braun* (*Die Ehe der Maria Braun*, 1979), a huge domestic and international hit. But *Fear of Fear* – driven by a keen sense of how to engage an audience without disguising painful truths – was an effective step in the right direction.

Margaret Deriaz is a freelance film programmer and writer. Until 2015 she was Head of Film Distribution at the BFI, bringing more than 200 classic re-releases and archive projects to cinemas nationwide. Previously, she was Film Officer at the Goethe Institute, London, where she programmed and promoted German cinema, both classic and contemporary. Between 2015 and 2019 she programmed the Cambridge Film Festival's silent film strand. For BFI Southbank, she curated a major Fassbinder retrospective in 2017 and a two-month survey of Weimar film (*Beyond Your Wildest Dreams: Weimar Cinema 1919-1933*) in 2019.

4 - Robert Katz & Peter Berling, *Love is Colder than Death: The Life and Times of Rainer Werner Fassbinder* (London, Jonathan Cape, 1987), p. 100.

5 - Interview with Wilfried Wiegand quoted in Peter Jansen & Wolfram Schütte, *Rainer Werner Fassbinder* (Munich, Carl Hanser Verlag, 1974, Reihe Film 2), pp. 89-90.





Disenchanted Germany: The Limits of Submission in *Satan's Brew* (2021)

by Earl Jackson

106

Long-time Fassbinder associate Kurt Raab (1941-1988) starred in two films that constituted punitive experiences for the audience, albeit in different forms. In *Why Does Herr R. Run Amok?* (*Warum läuft Herr R. Amok?*, 1970), Raab plays the titular Herr R., a minor employee at an architectural firm. The endless banal details of daily life without apparent narrative structure or thematic agenda bear down both on Herr R. and the audience until R.'s final acts of wanton destruction are almost a relief.



The unbearable banality of being. *Why Does Herr R. Run Amok?*

Satan's Brew takes the opposite approach: any approximation of a plausible life is eclipsed by Raab's mega-hysterical performance and the exaggerated responses of characters who deliberately remain caricatures. In both cases, however, these assaults against cinematic pleasure are where the radical significance of the film is realised.

107



Affect out of control *Satan's Brew*.

While Herr R.'s rage ends that film, we hear Walter Kranz's rage over the credits. His demands for advance pay from his publisher begin at a fever pitch and are not allayed by the secretary's casual antisemitic protest that he "is not a Jew" and shouldn't act like one. Thrown out of a friend's apartment, Walter literally bumps into Irmgard von Witzleben (Katharina Buchhammer) on the stairs but instead of apologising, he slaps her, pulls her back into her apartment where he hurls abuse at her. He rips off her coat, leaving her in a fetish bra and panties. Kranz retrieves a pistol from a drawer full of sex toys. As part of the humiliation ritual, he forces her to write him a check; being extorted for money gives her an orgasm, interrupted when he shoots and apparently kills her.



Extortion as a sex game.

Walter's home with his aggrieved wife, Luise (Helen Vita), and his mentally challenged brother, Ernst (Volker Spengler), who incessantly extols the sexual proclivities of his dead flies, offers no respite, only a focused chaos. Rather than building a narrative coherence, the film's serial excesses comprise a thematic portrait of accommodation and submission that will be explored in a depth that the film's surfaces deny while becoming increasingly transparent to it. Fassbinder described *Satan's Brew* as "a journey into the interior of sorrow" of a "leftist poet" who thought he conquered his writer's block with a poem that his wife told him had actually been written by Stefan George, "who had been dead for fifty years."¹

But both Luise and Fassbinder are wrong and must know it. Luise reads the poem back to Walter from George's translation of Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal*. Although George's translation in Germany is generally celebrated as his achievement for the language, Baudelaire's original, "L'Albatros", is one of the most internationally famous poems of the

¹ - Rainer Werner Fassbinder, John Hughes and Brooks Riley, "A New Realism" *Film Comment*, Vol. 11, No. 6 (November-December 1975), pp. 14-17:16.

19th-Century. The oversight is not a glitch, but a feature of the mystique of Stefan George that was an enduring phenomenon in Germany in first decades of the 20th Century.²

While *Satan's Brew* has been derided for its baroque acting style, Fassbinder's oeuvre in general has been criticised for its pessimism. Fassbinder answers both criticisms in a 1980 *Stern* interview, explaining that what seems to be pessimism is actually a warning, a kind of instruction toward change. He admitted that he did not attempt to depict reality in his films but instead strived to "expose the processes" that led to the characters' grim situations.³ Although he was not referring to *Satan's Brew*, it certainly applies, since the "process" in this case is Walter's attempt "to live the special fascism of Stefan George."⁴

Stefan George (1868-1933) became a poet who wanted to do for German poetry what he saw Stéphane Mallarmé do for poetry (and for the persona of the poet as 'Maître') in France. In 1892, George co-founded the poetry and poetics journal *Blätter für die Kunst* ['Pages for Art'], which became the voice of the George-Kreis, a circle with George at the centre.⁵ Evenings became cult-like, with induction rituals and celebrations of ideal beauty in various manifestations. George's homosexuality also informed how those ideals took shape – most notably in the prodigy Maximilian Kronberger (1888-1904), a young man George became fascinated by and whom he essentially deified in his Maximin poetry cycle after the boy's death at 16. To give George's his due, although the Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei praised George's work, George found them repellent, and in 1933 George rejected a small fortune offered to him if he would accept an official recognition as a pioneer in the Nazi salvation of the homeland. It is certainly understandable, however, that the Nazis would discern a kindred spirit in George's followers, when those closest to him such as the scholar Friedrich Gundolf published instructions to would-be disciples to discard the "isolation of the ego" in order to accept the magnificence of the unique Being of "the Führer" (meaning George).⁶

2 - Ironically, Helen Vita who plays Luise was infamous for her albums featuring German translations of French songs, *Frechen Chansons aus dem alten Frankreich*. The lyrics were so explicit that German courts deemed them unfit for children and in some regions the record was banned outright. The legal battles around the recordings lasted until 1969.

3 - Gespräch mit Rainer Werner Fassbinder: "Egal, was ich mache, die Leute regen sich auf" *Stern* 45. October 1980.

4 - "A New Realism" p. 16.

5 - See Thomas Karlauf, *Stefan George und die Entdeckung des Charisma*. (München: Karl Blessing Verlag 2007), chapters 3 and 4.

6 - Friedrich Gundolf, "Gefolgschaft und Jüngertum" *Blätter für die Kunst*, Band 8.F. 1/5.(1908/09): 106-112. In my very traditional German literature education, Gundolf was one of the fundamental thinkers we studied, not only his more conventional monograph on George, *Stefan George in unserer Zeit* but also his monographs, *Goethe*, and *Shakespeare und die Deutsche*. In these works, Gundolf's earlier use of "Führer" was erased.

Ironically, even without assuming George's identity, Walter already had at least two devotees: the apparently late Frau von Witzleben, and Andrée (Margit Carstensen), a spinster from the countryside who wrote Walter fan letters filled with explicit details of her sexual fantasies of him. Walter installs Andrée in his household and commandeers her savings to fund his George impersonation.



Margit Carstensen, downtrodden into submission in *Martha* (1974).



Carstensen exalting in her victimhood in *Satan's Brew*.

He has a 19th-Century suit custom made, dons a wig, and hires five actors to play the George-Kreis as he reads poetry at them.



The conjuring of Stefan George.

The film restages George's circle, only to brutally expose its fraudulence. Walter appears as George by carefully arranged candle flame, but when Luise flicks on the lights, Walter's make-up appears clownlike and the disciples break character, opting for payment, gossip, and a snack tray.



"George" exposed.

Walter himself finds his own limits regarding George's identity in his futile attempts at homosexuality. He cruises a *klappe*, a public restroom where men congregate for sex, and encounters a hustler (Armin Meier). They go to a motel room, but Walter gags from a brief genital contact.



The attempt at homosexuality.

Nevertheless, Walter inducts the man into the circle, unveiling him as Greek god, but the hustler is far too muscular and hirsute to correspond to Maximin, and he needs Walter to whisper the lines he was hired to spout that are beyond him.



A failed Maximin.

This final failure of reality was enough for Walter – he declared George dead and ironically thereby freed himself to write his own poetry again. Walter's failed George-Kreis serves as an allegory for the aestheticized brutality of National Socialism, but it also bears an uncomfortable resemblance to Fassbinder's own fabled command of his entourage. The presence of Armin Meier as the miscast Maximin substitute is like a wound on the screen, as he was Fassbinder's lover and would be dead from suicide two years later, prompting Fassbinder to make *In a Year of 13 Moons* (*In einem Jahr mit 13 Monden*, 1978), starring Volker Spengler (who plays Walter's brother here) as Erwin/Elvira.⁷

7 - For a detailed account of Fassbinder's relationship with Meier see Peter Berling, *Die 13 Jahre des Rainer Werner Fassbinder: Seine Filme, Seine Freude, Seine Feinde*. (Berlin: Lübbe 1992). The events leading to Meier's suicide and the discovery of his body are described in pp. 394-397.



Spengler as Ernst.



Spengler as Erwin/Elvira.

Even the abrasive tone of *Satan's Brew* becomes an analogy for a process. The film is essentially a melodrama that is played as an absurdist comedy. Such an affective dissonance resonates with the disfiguration of affect that informs fascism. The charisma of the leader displaces competence and accountability; group identification pre-empts rational negotiation; group solidarity suppresses empathy for others (Andrée is as imperious in her treatment of those around her as she is obsequious to Walter). Fassbinder fuses politics with idiosyncratic psychosexual patterns, often imposed by traumatic or love-deprived childhoods, supported by certain intertextual relations among his films.

After the payments for the Kreis actors ceases, one young man, Urs (Vitus Zeplichal), remains, his sincere devotion to Walter requires neither the George facade nor money.



The true believer.



A phony mastery.

Although the reasons underlying Urs' devotion are not given in *Satan's Brew*, they are suggested by analogy in *I Only Want You to Love Me* (*Ich will doch nur, daß ihr mich liebt*), a TV film Fassbinder also made in 1976, starring Zeplichal as a young man whose parents' refusal to love ruined his life. As Peter in that film, Zeplichal is as eager for the love of the Other as Urs is in *Satan's Brew*. And there is a parallel scene that supports the association. As a child, Peter presented his mother with a bouquet of flowers he took from a neighbour's garden. She responds by bending him over a chair and beating him mercilessly with a clothes hanger. The mise-en-scène is repeated in *Satan's Brew* when Walter punishes Ernst for a more serious infraction.



Punishment as template for life.



Punishment as centre of a politico-sexual domestic tableau.



Walter and Urs offer to whip Ernst to the limit of his endurance.

The way childhood trauma lingers in adult attitudes finds another parallel in the kind of hero-worship that persists in post-war Germany left over from a period that should have obliterated it. Here too the pattern integrates *Satan's Brew* with Fassbinder's other films. When a destitute, overdrawn Walter rushes from the bank, he knocks down a woman (Lilo Pempeit) counting money, scattering it over the floor. Walter scoops some of the money up and runs. But when the bank official tells the woman she had just been knocked down by the "poet", the two of them look on the fleeing thief with an admiration approaching gratitude for the assault.



Adoration of the bankrupt poet.

This look of longing after someone who does not deserve it is a pose Pempeit will strike again in *Veronika Voss* (*Die Sehnsucht der Veronika Voss*, 1982). It is set in 1955 when Voss (Rosel Zech), an UFA film star of the *Hitlerzeit*, "borrows" money from a stranger to buy a brooch and then returns it for the money to feed her drug addiction. At first the clerk refuses, but her manager (Pempeit) recognises Voss, refunds the money, and gushes over her artistry as she asks for an autograph, fondly remembering the past.

After Voss leaves, Pempeit resumes the look of longing awe she first struck in *Satan's Brew*. Pempeit's real-life identity as Fassbinder's mother adds another dimension to these performances, especially when considering Pempeit's appearance as herself in *Germany in Autumn* (*Deutschland im Herbst*, Fassbinder, Alexander Kluge, et al. 1978) in which she contends that Germany needs another strong leader.



Adoration of the ruined movie star.

Although Pempeit's characters here represent the German subject still in thrall to a virulent fantasy, Walter's final remaining disciples, Andrée and Urs become disenchanted when, in the first instance, Walter's smile after being beaten renders him too close to Andrée's own masochism for their bond to survive. And in the second instance, Urs becomes disillusioned when Walter breaks down sobbing at the news of Luise's death. Ironically, Walter's emotional display had been for the benefit of the doctor and as false a performance as his George identity. Even the only dramatic plot element, the murder, turns out to have been a practical joke.



The false victim and fake detective celebrate the emptiness of the law.

The film ends with all illusions of the master, all delusions of mastery dispelled. But rather than liberatory, this new realism seems empty, awaiting an as-yet-unanticipated vertigo to take hold.

Earl Jackson is Professor Emeritus from the University of California, Santa Cruz, and currently Chair Professor at Asia University, Taiwan. He is the author of Strategies of Deviance, and numerous essays on Japanese, Korean and Taiwan cinema. Jackson has worked in the Korean Independent film industry as screenwriter, line producer, editor, and actor. He is currently writing a book on Japanese Genre Film.



Fassbinder and the Politics of Everyday Life:

A Survey of His Films Part Three (1977)

by Ruth McCormick

With *Mother Küsters Goes to Heaven*, Fassbinder succeeded in further alienating groups who, one would think, would be among his most ardent supporters. The dogmatic left – many of whom see homosexuality as decadent, subjectivity as bourgeois, and any art beyond posters and slogans as superfluous to the class struggle – had always regarded Fassbinder (and, for that matter, most of his New German Cinema colleagues) with suspicion, but *Mother Küsters*, which states unequivocally that the German left in general is out of touch with the working class, riled even many former sympathizers. That the film is also extremely entertaining must seem to some a sign that the New German Cinema's most touted representative had finally sold out completely.

Frau Küster (Brigitte Mira) lives an uneventful life with her factory worker husband, son, and pregnant daughter-in-law. When not cooking and cleaning, she does piece work assembly of electrical fixtures at the kitchen table. One day, while at work, her husband kills his supervisor and himself. The yellow press descends upon the family. Reading the next day's papers, she is shocked to discover that everything she and her children have told the reporters has been distorted. Her beloved husband has been painted as an irresponsible, wife-beating alcoholic. How else, it is implied, can one explain his terrible behavior? Hoping to evade scandal, the son and his priggish wife (another of Irm Hermann's stony, conformist women) move out, while her attractive daughter, sympathetic but a total cynic, uses the publicity to further her singing career. Frau Küster comes under the influence of the Tillmanns, a well-to-do couple who look more like movie actors than the Communist Party organizers they are. They explain to her that her husband's act was "revolutionary" in essence, and that while they condemn violence, it must be understood in its context. Eventually, she joins the Party, but is disheartened when they refuse to openly battle the publishers who have blackened her name: the Communists are involved in their election campaign and must maintain a low profile.

In the end, in desperation, Mother Küster agrees to stage a sit-in at the newspaper office with the help of a group of young student anarchists. Only two actually show up, and they soon grow bored and leave. Alone, the woman stubbornly continues her vigil, until the janitor, a man slightly older than she, invites her home for supper. He assures her that he and his friends, working people after all, knew all along that the newspapers were lying. Giving in, she leaves with him. There is really little else

for her to do. (In the original ending, the young radicals are terrorists who force a confrontation with the police, during which Frau Küster is killed.)

Fassbinder has opted for a more realistic, perhaps more optimistic ending, one which shows compassion and genuine affection for his working-class heroine. Those who dislike the film's pessimistic view of the German organized left, however, will feel he has failed his subject and betrayed his 'bourgeois' distrust of communism. He denies this emphatically, but it must be said that the film definitely accuses the CP of revisionism, and student radicals of infantile adventurism, while ignoring other tendencies – Trotskyist, Maoist, anarcho-syndicalist – that do exist in the German left. By ignoring them, Fassbinder may have made a lot of enemies by implying that these alternatives are equally ineffectual. (Schlöndorff's *The Lost Honor of Katharina Blum*, by avoiding the issue of the left completely in his much more romantic and Hollywoodian film, enjoys far greater popularity.)

Fear of Fear, a TV film about a middle-class housewife cracking up, may have won back some friends, especially among feminists. It is far less ambiguous, because less ambitious. Margot, pregnant with her second child, experiences strange spells where the world suddenly becomes unreal. They disappear for a while after the baby is born, but then return. Little by little, her life is revealed – the routine housework, the neat apartment, the whining kids, the nosy mother-in-law, the indifferent husband that make her uneventful life a trap. She is terrified of Herr Bauer (Kurt Raab), an eccentric neighbor generally considered to be not quite right. She takes to drinking and tranquilizers, and even has a brief affair with her middle-aged pharmacist. Finally, she flips out and is hospitalized. A sympathetic woman psychiatrist seems to know what her problem is and she is soon released. Bidding farewell to another patient, a woman hopelessly trapped in her private world, she experiences a sudden rush of renewal (symbolized, as it often is in Fassbinder's films, by a pan shot out the hospital window to green trees and blue sky). Back home, she is told that poor, mad Bauer has committed suicide. In the last scene, Margot is typing. Out the window, she sees Herr Bauer's body being taken away. The look on her face is one of commiseration, not fear. Her brother-in-law drops by to see if she's all right. Smiling, she assures him she's fine.





Fear of Fear was very popular with German TV audiences, especially women. Margot is not crazy, nor is Fassbinder into the current vogue of glorifying schizophrenia. Her symptoms are those of millions of people who feel trapped in lives that aren't really theirs – they are objects, rather than active subjects, of their lives. This is accentuated in the film by the faded, overexposed photography: Margot's life, like Herr R's [in *Why Does Herr R. Run Amok? / Warum läuft Herr R. Amok?*, 1970], is dull and meaningless. Unlike him, however, she puts up a fight, and makes the first step (denoted by the typewriter) towards some kind of liberation. Only a step, perhaps, but for Margot, unlike Effi, the step is possible.

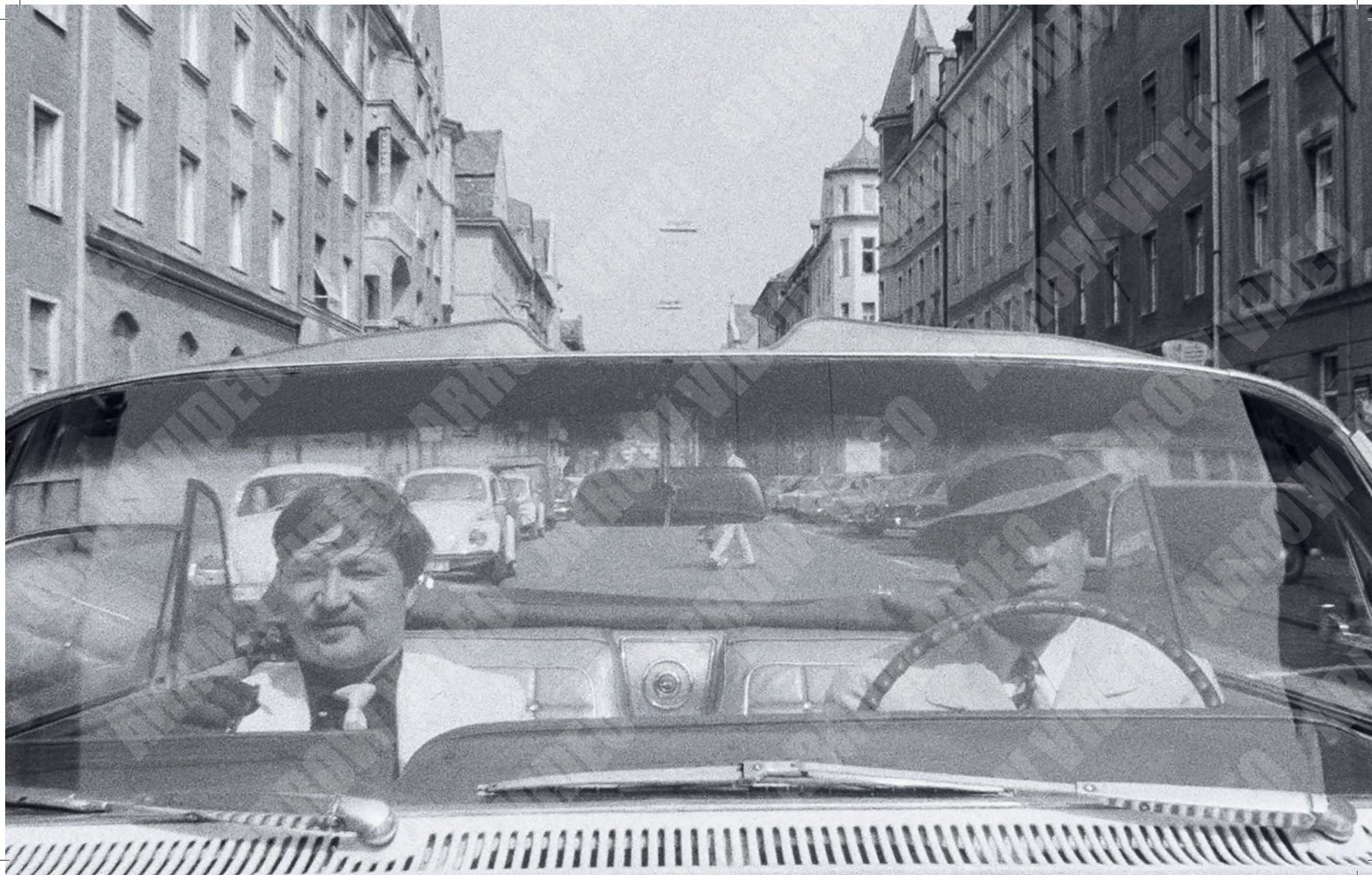
Satan's Brew is indeed outrageous. Walter Krantz is, and we have to take his friend's word for it, a well-known "revolutionary" poet. A comic cousin of Jeff and Petra von Kant, he is, despite his rather frumpy appearance, a modern Lord Byron, with scores of adoring female admirers. At home, he might as well be Joe Blow as far as his sensible *hausfrau* of a wife is concerned, because he hasn't written any poetry in a while and isn't bringing in any money. He is, at least, more normal than his retarded brother whose prize possession is a collection of dead flies. Our poet turns to a variety of women (everyone but his poor, frustrated wife) for inspiration, but it is not forthcoming. Suddenly, he starts writing again and one of his women friends identifies the poetry as taken word for word from Stefan George, a German poet who's been dead for 50 years. Although Krantz is an avant-gardist and self-proclaimed anarchist, he comes to believe he is possessed of the spirit of George – a conservative aesthete, German chauvinist and, as the poet finds to his dismay, a homosexual. This doesn't deter him. He makes himself up to resemble the poet (a difficult task since he is short and chubby, while George was tall and gaunt), and holds poetry sessions in his home surrounded by a hired 'circle' of admirers, including a well-built homosexual who poses half-nude during the readings as "The God of Love." Krantz begins work on his magnum opus, to be entitled *No Ceremony for the Führer's Dead Dog*; meanwhile, his neglected wife is slowly dying of cancer. To make a long story short, his wife's death brings him back to his senses and in the last sequence he reverts to his old anarchistic and lascivious self.

Satan's Brew is a sometimes very funny, sometimes incomprehensible spoof on the cult of the German Artist. While Fassbinder has always shown considerable comic gifts, even in his angriest films, which usually have moments of real humour, he is no

Woody Allen, and in this film the wackiness gets a bit out of hand. He employs all his usual Sirkian devices, plus a few that seem to have been borrowed from Jerry Lewis or Mel Brooks, and the result is a bit confusing. The idiot brother and his flies get to be a bit much after a while, as does Margit Carstensen's slavish, middle-aged groupie. Nevertheless, Kurt Raab's performance as the bumbling and manic, self-proclaimed genius is alone worth the price of admission, and Fassbinder takes some very well-aimed shots at the arrogance and pretentiousness of the bourgeois artist.

Excerpt from Ruth McCormick's original essay first published in Cineaste VIII no. 2 (1977), reprinted with kind permission from Cineaste Magazine. It concludes from the sections reprinted in the booklets accompanying Rainer Werner Fassbinder vol. 1 and vol. 2.





about the restorations

All films are presented in their original aspect ratios of 1.37:1 with mono sound. The restorations for *The American Soldier*, *Gods of the Plague*, *Mother Küsters Goes to Heaven* and *Satan's Brew* were produced and provided by the Rainer Werner Fassbinder Foundation from original 35mm camera negatives scanned on an ARRISCAN film scanner at ARRI Media GmbH in Munich. *The Niklashausen Journey*, *Rio das Mortes* and *Fear of Fear* were originally made for television, with restorations produced and provided by the Rainer Werner Fassbinder Foundation from original 16mm camera negatives, and are presented in Standard Definition.

production credits

Discs and Booklet Produced by **Jasper Sharp**

Consulting Producer **Robert Fischer**

Executive Producers **Kevin Lambert**, **Francesco Simeoni**

Technical Producer **James White**

Technical Assistant **James Pearcey**

Disc Production Manager **Sigrid Larsen**

QC **Aidan Doyle** and **Alan Simmons**

Production Assistant **Samuel Thiery**

Blu-ray Mastering and Subtitling **The Engine House Media Services**

Artwork by **Sister Hyde**

Design by **Sister Hyde** and **Obviously Creative**

special thanks

Alex Agran, Margaret Deriaz, Michael Fengler, Robert Fischer, Christina Gerhardt, Sherry Hormann, Earl Jackson, Michael König, Renate Leiffer, Olaf Möller, Tony Rayns, Eric Rentschler, Jonathan Rosenbaum, Asta Scheib, Corinna Stürz, Andreas Swiderski, Christian Braad Thomsen, Joe Tompkins (Film Criticism).



