

Lecture 08 A: Postwar West Germany and Fassbinder, *Marriage of Maria Braun*, Background

- Introduction to the *Marriage of Maria Braun*
- Best known film of postwar German cinema director, Rainer Maria Fassbinder
- Background about Fassbinder
 - One of the great German creators, providing intellectual response to the postwar era
 - Personal history
 - Controversial lifestyle and filmmaking methods
 - Fassbinder "circle"
 - Films very critical of postwar West Germany, sixties and seventies rebellion against Western capitalism, etc.
 - Indicative of how the German far left also tried to distance selves from Soviet style Communist East: the search for a "Third Way" between Western capitalism and Eastern communism
 - Further to left than the SPD (German Socialist Party).
 - Some moved to terror: Baader Meinhof gang and RAF (Red Army Faction). [See recent movie, [The Baader Meinhof Complex](#).]
 - Fassbinder was not involved with terror, but indicative of the rebellious orientations.
 - Discussion: Green Party originated in Germany out of similar positions. Distinction between fundamentalists and realists ("Fundis vs. Realos").
 - Fassbinder symbolic of the intellectual tendencies that fueled these trends. In many ways he was an extension of Weimar "left-wing intellectual's" and their rebellious tendencies. [Sign of this: he made a [16 hour version of Berlin Alexanderplatz!](#).]
 - "I am an irritant."
 - Postwar equivalent of Heinrich Mann: Maria Braun = his version of Diederich Hessling for the postwar era.

Survey of postwar German History

- Zero Hour (*Stunde Null*) conditions immediately after end of war in 1945.
 - Material destruction
 - Moral bankruptcy
- German territories under Allied control, initial stages
 - Unconditional surrender
 - Morgenthau Plan
 - Soviet revenge and reparations (continually imposed on East Germany). Marxist interpretation of Nazism as front for capitalism.
- US decision to create bulwark against Soviets.
 - Opposed Russia by creating viable economy and state in the West, leading to "economic miracle."

- Marshall Plan
 - Ludwig Erhard: *Wohlfahrt fuer Alle* (prosperity for all); opened up capitalism in West, into the seventies.
- Berlin Blockade: 1948-49
 - New currency in West
 - Soviets close off Berlin
 - Cold War tensions
 - Western allies supply city by airlift
- Establishment of Basic Law for West Germany (and ultimately unified Germany)
 - Liberal constitution
 - No Emergency Decree
 - Five Percent threshold for Bundestag representation.
- Chancellor Konrad Adenauer (CDU) [Christian Democratic Union]
 - Tremendous impact on postwar Germany
 - Rhinelander from Koeln: negative attitudes toward the East.
 - Capital of West Germany (BRD) [*Bundesrepublik Deutschland*] in Bonn, outside of Koeln.
 - Oriented toward US and France
 - Important steps toward development of EC [European Community]
- More on Ludwig Ehrhard, as chancellor
 - Labor/management relations and policies
 - Labor represented on corporate boards
 - Prosperity in comparison with the East
- 1969: first postwar SPD-led government
 - Willy Brandt and Helmut Schmidt as chancellors
 - Shift in attitudes toward East:
 - Small steps through negotiations: *Ostpolitik*.
 - Opened communications and awareness of Easterners about the West? Debate ongoing.
- In general, the postwar era has been a story of Capitalization and Americanization of West: there are positive and negative views.
 - Emphasis on material gain
 - Willingness to work with some former Nazis.
- These are the issues that Fassbinder was symbolically addressing. Film was a response to this.
 - At a basic level, we can “read” Maria Braun, herself, as symbol for postwar West Germany (as we did with Diederich, Paul, Franz, etc.).l
 - She does what is necessary to survive, then prosper. Fassbinder was critical of this, in her and in West Germany itself.
 - Shifting material conditions are clearly symbolized in film.
 - Other themes:
 - Clear symbolic rejection of (especially Romantic) German

traditions; indications that they have been ruptured or bankrupted.

- Increasing materialism and greed
 - Relations with US and Americanization
 - Relations with her husband (prewar Germany?)
 - Extension of Existentialist notions of life as a struggle to survive.
- Full list of themes to consider while studying the film:
 - Conditions at “Zero Hour”
 - Rejection/Indifference to Traditional Culture
 - Capitalism/Anti-Labor
 - Materialism/Greed
 - Atomization/Selfishness
 - Post-War Political Leadership
 - German-American Relations
 - Women in Post-War German Society
 - Post-War Leftist Criticism (“The Third Way”)