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From Jugendbewegung to RAF: Youth, Friendship, and Protest in Post-Wall German Cinema

Abstract

Recent German-language films frame anti-establishment activities as a rejuvenating force. In *Die fetten Jahre sind vorbei* (2004) and *Was tun, wenn's brennt?* (2001), the young filmmakers Hans Weingartner and Gregor Schnitzler take a nostalgic approach to the tradition of protest in Germany. Volker Schlöndorff, in contrast, builds on first-hand memories of the 1970s and the RAF, depicting the escalation of violence in *Die Stille nach dem Schuß* (2000). This paper explores the ways in which the three films foreground personal motivations, rather than political causes, arguing that friendship is used to gauge the success of protest. While the friends in *Die fetten Jahre* and *Was tun?* are (re)united through their activism, the terrorist plots portrayed in *Stille* lead to the protagonist's isolation and untimely death. Ultimately, Schlöndorff places German history at the center of the tragic plotline, whereas the younger filmmakers take a position of ironic distance vis-à-vis the past. By placing a strong emphasis on community, these three films indicate that reunification and globalization give rise to dreams of friendship and protest in post-Wall Berlin.

Keywords

Die fetten Jahre sind vorbei, Was tun, wenn's brennt?, Hans Weingartner, Gregor Schnitzler, nostalgia, nostalgie, Volker Schlöndorff, RAF, 1970, Die Stille nach dem Schuß, terrorist, terrorism, Germany, film, ironic distance, reunification, post-Wall Berlin, Berlin Wall

From *Jugendbewegung* to RAF: Youth, Friendship, and
Protest in Post-Wall German Cinema

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The transition to the Berlin Republic created a sense of new beginnings and a desire to revisit history. In the consumerist ‘normalcy’ of unified Germany, the unruliness of the 1960s symbolizes a by-gone era of idealism. A number of recent films about friendship, self-discovery, and love revisit encounters between young idealists and the establishment: “It is easy to be cynical about the student movements of the 1960s, but easier still to be romantic” (DeGroot 9). Rebellion and friendship are nostalgically portrayed in Volker Schlöndorff’s *Die Stille nach dem Schuß* ‘*The Legend of Rita*’, Gregor Schnitzler’s *Was tun, wenn’s brennt?* ‘*What to Do in Case of Fire*’, and Hans Weingartner’s *Die fetten Jahre sind vorbei* ‘*The Educators*.’ The explosive mixture of youth and protest evolves within the generational and political contexts of the respective filmmakers in the Berlin Republic.¹ Cinema forms “a technological memory bank that is shared by everyone,” and this repository of images “shapes and legitimizes our perception of the past” (Kaes 310).

Recent protest films offer a largely positive evaluation of activism as a counterbalance to the apolitical *Generation Golf* and the pragmatic turn of the former 1968ers.² The films by Schlöndorff, Schnitzler, and Weingartner create a tension between the solidarity of friendship and the threat of isolation in cases where protest fails. While the portrayed friendships seem to legitimize activism, there is some question as to how seriously these narratives consider the history of protest since each film foregrounds relationships in the manner of the *Beziehungskomödie* ‘romantic comedy.’ These works have in common a “deliberate flirtation with the myth of left-wing

terrorism” that is very different from the “sober and analytical” approach of *New German Cinema* in portraying the German Autumn of 1977 (Palfreyman 39). The following discussion examines the directors’ engagement with motivations behind social protest, taking into account such varying influences as German unification, changes in funding policies, and generational passage.

Protest: Past and Present

The 1960s contributed to the image of German post-war society as “a culture appreciative of criticism and protest” (Von Dirke 31). The films by Schlöndorff, Schnitzler, and Weingartner are situated in three distinct post-war eras, examining 1970s terrorism, caricaturizing radical anarchists in 1980s Berlin-Kreuzberg, and, finally, exploring anti-capitalist activism among the new generation of millennials. Predominately, Germans use generational models to define their past (Bude, “übertriebene ‘Wir’” 138). Sociologists distinguish between the skeptical generation of the flak helpers (Helmut Schelsky), the critical 1968ers (born between 1938 and 1948), the politically disinterested youth of the 1980s, the technology savvy generation @, and the entrepreneurial individuals of the “Berlin generation.”³ The directors’ individual approaches can be traced to their respective experiences.

Schlöndorff (born in 1939) has been associated with the *New German Cinema*, even though he “eschewed the idiosyncratic styles” of the *Autorenkino* ‘author’s cinema’ (Crowdus and Porton 18). He dealt with the history of terrorism in *Deutschland im Herbst* ‘Germany in Autumn,’ while collaborating with Rainer Werner Fassbinder. Schlöndorff’s *Die Stille nach dem Schuß* portrays a former terrorist hiding in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). While the film explores the misguided idealism of leftist endeavors, it foregrounds the former East’s heritage by incorporating the background of GDR screenwriter Wolfgang Kohlhaase and Schlöndorff’s own experience as director of the newly-founded Babelsberg studio after the privatization of the East German DEFA (William 128).

Schnitzler (born in 1964) describes a group of former anarchists in *Was tun, wenn’s brennt?*, uniting nostalgia for youth with glossy images of the new Berlin. While Weingartner’s *Die fetten Jahre sind vorbei* is also set in the capital around the year 2000, he portrays an

isolated group of students who are neither concerned with history nor comforted by nostalgic retrospectives. The global capitalism they despise is characterized by a faceless, timeless flow of money, products, and services. A sharp increase in social disparity after 1990 leads Michael Corsten to inquire whether the pragmatic “coolness” of the *Generation Golf* would reignite aggressive protest in the younger millenials (506). The youthful *Edukatoren* (as the English title would have it) become activists because they lament a lack of solidarity for the poor in the Third World and at home. Protest is construed as a means to maintain a belief in humanity amid the social inequities of capitalist society.

Weingartner (born in 1970) and Schnitzler both belong to a younger cohort that rejects *New German Cinema*'s “ethos of authorship” (Hake 180). Eric Rentschler has disparaged the movies of the 1990s and beyond as a “cinema of consensus.” He especially rejects the new wave of German comedies that seem to emulate conventional Hollywood genres (262-64). The change in tone away from the seriousness of the “Papakino” may, however, be less a rebellion than a function of the radical restructuring of European film funding from subsidy to a focus on profit (Halle 18). Changes in financing mean that post-unification cinema must find a compromise “between art cinema and popular cinema” as well as “generic tradition and formal innovation” (Hake 192).

The post-Wall ‘brand’ of easy entertainment is especially visible in the film by Schnitzler, who began his career directing music videos and advertising clips. *Was tun, wenn's brennt?*, produced by the Deutsche Columbia Pictures, caters to a “mainstream” market through its appealing cast and upbeat dialogues and music, “concentrating on visuals and de-emphasizing dialogue” (Halle 23). At the same time, even *Die Stille nach dem Schuß* is not without humorous touches, despite a serious depiction of activism, and *Die fetten Jahre sind vorbei* revolves around a love triangle. Ultimately, all three directors create visually and emotionally engaging narratives that integrate politics within a commercially viable framework.

These nostalgic images of protest and friendship suggest a fundamental shift in the portrayal of radical protest. The films tell personal stories in the context of terrorism, letting politics recede into the background, perhaps to no small part because all three were des-

tinued for international as well as national markets. These directors invite viewers to empathize with the protagonists, who are humans and friends, primarily, and only secondarily activists. Their emphasis on friendship mirrors the tendency of newer “Berlin films” to privilege the everyday lives of individuals over “political themes of the past” (Ganeva 269).⁴

Cinematic downplaying of political concerns has its roots in history: “The German youth movement was an unpolitical form of opposition to a civilization that had little to offer the young generation, a protest against its lack of vitality, warmth, emotion, and ideals” (Laqueur 4). Youthful rebels are associated with images of authentic, uncorrupted existence: “die Jugendbewegungen des frühen 20. Jahrhunderts, aber auch noch die Revolte von 1968 schöpften aus diesem Pathos der Rebellion des unverbildeten Lebens gegen die verkrusteten Strukturen” ‘youth movements of the early twentieth century as well as the 1968 protests derived their energy from the rebellion of artless life against authoritarian society’ (Herzinger 154).⁵

Protest movements align themselves with the Romantic ideal of *Gemeinschaft* ‘community’ as an uncorrupted antipode to bourgeois *Gesellschaft* ‘society’. The desire for belonging was a common denominator among the *Wandervogel* movement (founded in 1896) and the more political formations that followed. Since the “inherited tradition of youthful rebellion” is based on a “history of discontinuities, of cohorts unable to communicate with each other” (Roseman 2), narratives about protest emphasize friendship among members of a generation. The films under discussion depict protagonists who are heroic not only because they resist unjust social systems, but also because they prove their qualities as good friends. Their identification with smaller groups of peers rather than with nuclear families implies a break with tradition on a personal and historical level.

Rather than joining larger movements, the characters fulfill their need for *Gemeinschaft* by communal living arrangements and closely-knit friendships. The focus on cohabitation alludes to the fact that young Germans often live in shared apartments, or *Wohngemeinschaften*. Familial forms of living gained political significance in the context of the legendary *Kommune 1* (1967-69) that sought to replace the bourgeois family. Schlöndorff’s terrorist group

not only hatches plots, but also cooks in a Parisian apartment. Later, Rita's pleasant homes in the GDR and her friend Tatjana's chaotic space serve to characterize them, but also symbolize the trust built as each friend spends time at the other's apartment. With a similar focus on lives together, Schnitzler's anarchists share a flat in Berlin in 1987, and the two most loyal members continue to live there as squatters until 2000. In *Die fetten Jahre sind vorbei*, Peter and Jan's grungy apartment matches their anti-establishment attitudes, and the trio's sojourn in a mountain hut in Austria foregrounds communal meals and fatherly concern by the kidnapped Hardenberg. The strangely domestic scenes in recent protest films leave behind the "haunted and homeless protagonists of New German Cinema" (Rentschler 272).

Remembering Protest: Legends of the RAF

Die Stille nach dem Schuß (hereafter, *Stille*) is the portrait of Rita Vogt, a fictitious member of the *Bewegung 2. Juni* 'Movement 2 June' and, later, of a group resembling the Red Army Faction (RAF). The film opens during a whimsically staged bank robbery, but moves rapidly to the violent liberation of Rita's boyfriend Andreas Klein, who is modeled after Andreas Baader of the RAF. Some years later, Rita shoots a policeman in Paris and assumes a fake identity in the GDR. The larger portion of the film focuses on her friendship with Tatjana, a co-worker, whose defiance provides a critical contrast to Rita's naïve enthusiasm for the East. They are separated when Rita is forced to assume a second "legend," and the *Stasi* (*Staatssicherheit*, or Ministry for State Security) imprisons Tatjana to conceal her friend's true identity. In the wake of unification, Rita faces imminent discovery and is shot storming a police barricade.

Stille centers on the conceptual link between youth, friendship, and the revolutionary cause. A comment by an older Stasi official expresses a sentimental view of young protesters: "ich [hab] natürlich Sympathie für romantische junge Leute. Wir sind doch auch Romantiker. Ich bin siebzig und träume immer noch" 'naturally, I sympathize with romantic young people. We're also romantics, aren't we? I'm seventy and still have dreams.' At the same time, *Stille* disqualifies blind admiration of activism by distinguishing positive rebellion from destructive tendencies. Andi is severely lacking in

solidarity since he has no compunctions about leaving Friederike Adebach, a helper, behind, whereas Rita enables their companion to reach the escape vehicle. What drives the film emotionally is not the political cause of the left, but the emotional appeal of Rita, who is modest, loyal, and ultimately becomes isolated by her past.

Schlöndorff had already portrayed female perpetrators in *Die verlorene Ehre der Katharina Blum* ‘*The Lost Honor of Katharina Blum*,’ (hereafter, *Katharina Blum*). His adaptation of Heinrich Böll’s novel gained considerable attention in the context of the *Sympathisantenstreit* (debate about intellectuals sympathizing with terrorists) in the Federal Republic. Like Böll’s novel, *Stille* foregrounds the terrorist’s emotions. Böll and Schlöndorff, respectively, place their protagonists into a situation where the women are cornered. Rita is quite literally caught in an underground parking garage, the policeman standing at the only exit, while Katharina is psychologically trapped by the senseless destruction of her life through a tabloid reporter.

Stille negotiates a middle ground between the light-weight entertainment after 1990 and the politically oriented *New German Cinema* (Rentschler 264). The seriousness of *Stille* derives from the immediacy of Schlöndorff’s and Kohlhaase’s memories for a lost era (1970s) and state (GDR). However, Schlöndorff is ultimately “more interested in character than in ideas” (qtd. in Crowds and Porton 23), which distinguishes *Stille* from his adaptation of *Katharina Blum*. The director portrays the radicalization of the 1960s protests, but focuses on the personal motivations of the terrorists. He approaches Rita utilizing “strategies of clinical individualization” (Trnka 25), moving away from historical contexts and foregrounding personal dimensions.

Emotional aspects are evident in an early scene, when Rita explains her beginnings with Andi’s terrorist cell: “Ich war einfach nur verknallt” ‘I was just in love.’⁶ Friederike, on the other hand, joins the group to rebel against her bourgeois origins: “Ich will weder reiten noch Tennis spielen, Lachs fressen” ‘I’m tired of horseback riding and gobbling down salmon.’ Their conversation sets the stage for a depiction of activism that is inextricably linked to peer relationships. Rita draws in Friederike by showing her approval and implying that she will become one of them: “Ich finde es enorm,

dass du uns helfen willst” ‘I think it’s great that you want to help us.’ Such interpersonal dynamics of terrorism indicate the extent to which the personal and political seemed inextricably linked in the Germany of the 1960s and 1970s.

The youthful context of Rita’s activist beginnings appear in the introductory sequence, where the protagonist’s voice-over begins to tell her life story: “Das waren die heiteren Jahre...” ‘Those were the happy years.’ In the carefree 1970s, Rita and her boyfriend Andi join with friends to target injustice, not people. A bank hold-up features the slogan “Eigentum ist Diebstahl” ‘property is theft’ and a round of candy, stylizing the group as fun-loving idealists. The exuberance of youth cannot, however, erase the consequences of activism when it comes to the violence of the RAF. In *Stille*, the victims are a defense lawyer for Andi and a policeman performing a routine check. Schlöndorff suggests that idealism gets out of hand owing to naïveté. The perpetrators are misled by their peers and ideals: Friederike—who smuggles a weapon into prison—does not anticipate the bloodshed as a result of her venture out of bourgeois life, while Rita shoots as much out of fear as because of a previous altercation with Andi.

Stille does not explicitly criticize Rita’s violent deed, but the film’s aesthetics subtly address the suffering of individuals in the struggle between state and subjects. Scenes are rendered in exaggerated and sterile lighting to imply scrutiny and a lack of privacy. A nighttime encounter between Rita and Tatjana, in which the latter romantically approaches her friend, is preceded by a view of Rita sleeping, then being woken by a passing train that throws ghostly light on the walls. The romantic scene is one of the few instances in which well-lit spaces give way to semi-darkness, although patches of street lights draw attention to their white underwear, i.e., innocence. However, this encounter represents only temporary respite. The film cuts to a painfully neon-lit scene in which Rita and her co-workers wash after their shift. The glaring light corresponds to the relentless stares of a colleague who scrutinizes Rita’s arm for the telltale scar that has been publicized on West German television.

Although Schlöndorff foregoes the “strained seriousness” of 1970s films, *Stille* depicts a woman ultimately unable to escape her past (Rentschler 264). The untenable violence that arose from leftist

extremism in the 1970s and 1980s leads to a failure of friendship between Rita and her peers. Hans-Bernhard Moeller and George Lellis point out that “the so-called revolutionary and liberating communist state pushes Rita ... into an increasingly conformist and confining lifestyle” (312). Rita’s experience after entering the GDR is framed as a lonesome existence, mirroring the *Einzelhaft* ‘solitary confinement’ of terrorists such as Ulrike Meinhof, who was imprisoned from 1972 until her death in 1976.

The desire for human warmth is juxtaposed with the inability to form authentic relationships within fabricated existences such as Rita’s “legend.” The forced separation between Tatjana and Rita destroys their relationship, but there is some indication that this friendship has saved Tatjana from her alcoholism and self-destructiveness. Rita seems to redeem herself by helping her friend and shielding her from the unkindness of co-workers. The emotional violence of the colleagues, a barrage of snide comments, dominates the film’s moral economy, as opposed to Rita’s brief, panicked use of the gun. *Stille* acknowledges the pain caused by terrorism, but the narrative nevertheless suggests that activism is associated in German culture with tropes of community and friendship.

In the end, *Stille* neither calls for protest nor condemns it. To a certain extent, it legitimizes violence by accentuating Rita’s youth. She is in her twenties when she shoots the policeman, unlike the real-life prototype, 37-year-old Inge Viett.⁷ The film, however, is about Rita’s life undercover rather than her deeds. The narrative sets viewers up to empathize with the protagonist’s fear of discovery and with her ultimate end. Although Rita’s one act of violence—shooting a policeman—is never justified, it is her death (the eponymous silence after the shot) that is rendered tragic.

Stille invokes solidarity with friends but finds it impotent both in the context of terrorism and the state’s full-scale persecution of protestors. The film largely ignores the motivations behind radical action. Instead, Schlöndorff’s and Kohlhaase’s narrative is concerned with the relationships and fates of the former activists who are integrated, yet isolated, within GDR society. The film’s overriding concern with the inhumanity of Rita’s ‘solitary confinement’ is supported by the fact that her engagement to Jochen ends after she reveals her past. In the face of these painful images of isolation, *Stille*

evokes sympathy with the perpetrators, avoiding undue nostalgia for protest, but likewise rejecting its demonization.

Protest as Play

Schnitzler's *Was tun, wenn's brennt?* (hereafter, *Was tun*) centers around former squatters in Berlin-Kreuzberg, four men and two women who shared a communal apartment in the 1980s. This reference to the infamous *Kommune 1* merges images from the student revolts with the later *Autonome Szene* 'anarchists' in West Berlin.⁸ Schnitzler's protagonists reunite in 2000 when a bomb they had built in 1987 explodes a Berlin-Grünwald mansion. Together, they set out to destroy the evidence of their 'prank' stored on a confiscated video reel. Hotte, who had lost his legs during a demonstration, is trapped in the Tempelhof police station, and the group rallies to save him.

The mix of drama and romantic comedy differs significantly from Schlöndorff's more serious approach to activism. The category of the heroic was part of the discourse about the '68 generation, but the youth of the 1980s—those born in the 1960s, such as Schnitzler—take a more ironic look at the conflict between individuals and society (Bude, *Generation Berlin* 63-64). In *Was tun*, the waning of youthful ideals between 1987 and 2000 is treated both with wry humor and nostalgia. The film ironically juxtaposes the staid safety of middle age with the anarchists' isolated protests within the "Spaßkultur' der achtziger Jahre" "culture of fun" of the 1980s' (Herzinger 145).

The introductory scenes are digitally edited to resemble an amateurish home video about the making of "eine kleine Bombe" 'a little bomb,' which threatens to implicate the "Gruppe 36." The video of September 1987 zooms in on a map of Berlin-Kreuzberg, parodying the Asterix series by Uderzo and Goscinny about a small village of Gauls valiantly resisting Caesar's forces. The struggle against Roman rule parallels the fight against the West German establishment, emphasizing the squatters' heroic resistance against the city's eviction attempts of "Machnowstraße, Postbezirk SO 36" 'Machnowstraße, zip code SO 36.' These first images introduce the protagonists in action: the leader Tim and his former girlfriend Flo; rugged Hotte; Maik (future advertising exec) spraying graffiti onto a bridge; Terror

(state's attorney-to-be) urinating onto the crowds of police forces; and Nele (future single mother), who playfully provokes masked policemen. The retrospective sequence implies that protests in the 1980s were fun and exciting times.

Critics of the 1960s are quick to point out the lack of maturity and the self-indulgence of the protesters (DeGroot 5). Likewise, Schnitzler goes to great lengths in evoking the immaturity of his protagonists in the 1980s and the present. By way of introducing their situations in the year 2000, *Was tun* shows Tim nearly caught shoplifting and then hiding under a display bed until after hours. In a gesture to the department store fires of Baader and Gudrun Ensslin, he lights up *Karstadt* and opens its doors before fleeing, ending the evening with a one-night-stand.⁹ While the fires were meant in bitter earnest, Schnitzler describes Tim as an overgrown child. With his buddy Hotte, he lives in the past, choosing friendly cohabitation instead of an adult relationship. The lawyer Terror is no more mature: when confronted with the police's confiscation of the telltale *Machnowstraße* films, he asks whether he is visible in the footage, hoping to slip easily out of any responsibility, be it legal or vis-à-vis his friends.

In these inauspicious beginnings, *Was tun* sets up a crisis of friendship and maturation. In 2000, the adult Nele gesticulates wildly in a mummy costume at the birthday party of her daughter Melli. Pointedly, a brief exchange between Nele and Melli concerns aging and its effect on social relations:

Melli: Na warte, wenn ich so alt bin wie du, dann lad' ich mir 33
Freunde ein!

Nele: Ich bin mir gar nicht sicher, ob du dann noch so viele
Freunde hast.

M.: Well, when I'm your age, I'll invite 33 friends!

N.: I'm not so sure you'll have that many left.

This exchange is preceded by Nele's somewhat displaced play with six-year-olds, a scene that hints at her isolation from peers. Immediately after her comment, Nele's gaze moves to the door, where Tim and Hotte stand framed by two little guests in party hats. The pres-

ence of Melli and the baby serve to show radical change in Nele, who admits “ich würde mich ja selbst nicht wiedererkennen” ‘Even I wouldn’t recognize myself.’ Nele’s children are proof of the normalcy in which she now lives, but their innocence also contrasts with the facts at hand since Tim’s revelation about the exploded bomb is given against a close-up of the infant.

In the next scene, Nele is distracted by the shoelaces that Melli has used to tie together her shoes, not unlike the group members who are knotted together and prevented from moving ahead by their pasts. As the estranged friends rediscover their former young selves, a generational dialogue of sorts evolves. The ostensible maturity of professional lives (Maik is a PR man, Terror a lawyer) is framed as an abandonment of ideals. The film seeks to remedy this descent into adulthood with the forced venture down memory lane. While Barbara Mennel asserts that “the film discredits the utopias of the 1980s as immature” (70), it might be equally valid to say that *Was tun* criticizes the year 2000 as stuffy, isolating, and lacking the vitality of youth. As Schnitzler explains, “it’s about people in their 30’s who are forced to look back to see if the way they are going is the right one” (qtd. in Kobel). Even the two squatters in the *Machnowstraße* are somewhat less youthful in 2000. Hotte has gained weight, Tim tells him, when his friend chirps “genau wie früher, wa?” ‘just like old times, huh?’ after a demonstration.

Hotte’s stagnation need not be associated with his wheelchair (Mennel 70) since it can equally be construed as loyalty. It is he who insists that the friends work together to evade discovery (and he has retained their new addresses). The concerted effort to destroy the film reels and save Hotte reunites the former *Wohngemeinschaft*. His “Sitzfleisch,” or ‘tenacity,’ as Hotte himself ironically calls it, has helped him to avoid losing sight of the importance of companionship in the speed of modern life. He embodies the integrity of a loyal friend and a man without false poses—unlike Tim, who uses seduction, and in contrast to Maik and Terror, who hide behind their professional roles. Hotte’s plan at the end of *Was tun* to study information science is not simply “a desire to ... join the workforce and thus become a productive member of society” (Mennel 71), but an attempt to set Tim free; it is less a socioeconomic move than an act of friendship.

At the level of the authorities, *Was tun* revisits the struggle between generations, but portrays the adversary—the veteran investigator Manowsky—in nuanced terms. The young and clueless colleague Dr. Henkel looks down on the “old-timer,” but Manowsky’s gut instinct and his “nostalgic attachment to the past” (Mennel 72) actually lead him to old files about “Gruppe 36.” Moreover, his “local affiliations” with Kreuzberg provide a counter-narrative to the pomp of the new capital (Mennel 72). When the unsympathetic Berlin police president demotes Manowsky under the supervision of Dr. Henkel, the simple young-old distinction is invalidated. *Was tun* lets the sympathies fall with sixty-year old Manowsky, who feels betrayed and calls after the police president: “Mensch, Ralf, ich dachte, wir sind Freunde” ‘Come on, Ralf, I thought we were friends.’ Like the group of friends, Manowsky comes to understand that the importance of friendship continues beyond youth; the similarity between his name and the *Machnowstraße* further indicates his alignment with the younger group.

The need for loyalty to old friends represents the core message behind the dramatic scenes of the gang’s efforts at saving Hotte from the police cellar. At first, the friends do not answer their phones (Nele’s baby screams, Flo celebrates her marriage to a yuppie, Maik lounges in his vast office space) but they soon deal with the “unspeakable guilt” (Mennel 71) that had estranged them at the end of the 1980s. Making the issue of friendship explicit, the lawyer Terror points out: “Hotte, der braucht uns! Der hätte uns auch nach dem Unfall gebraucht” ‘Hotte needs us! He would have needed us after the accident, too.’

The loyalty of the former anarchists contrasts with Manowsky’s isolated situation. Thoroughly disillusioned, the policeman corners Tim along with Hotte in the police cellar:

Glaubt nicht, dass auch nur einer eurer Freunde den Kopf für euch hält. Die lassen euch eiskalt verrecken. Freundschaft wird im Allgemeinen überbewertet. Die Fronten verlaufen längst nicht mehr rechts oder links der Barrikade, sondern zwischen denen, die’s geschafft haben und den paar Irren, die versucht haben, sich treu zu bleiben.

Don't think that one of your friends will risk their necks for you. They'll leave you here to rot. Friendship is generally overrated. The lines are no longer between right and left, but between those who made it and the poor nuts who tried to stay true to themselves.

However, when Nele, Flo, Terror, and Maik arrive to save Hotte, it is clear that 'making it' means keeping one's friends and ideals. Tim is proud to be one of "the poor nuts who tried to stay true to themselves." Even Manowsky is ultimately impressed by the loyalty that he has found lacking among his own friends. His refusal to cooperate with Henkel in identifying the culprits (their second bomb destroys all evidence) creates a happy ending in which the authorities are won over—in two senses of the word.

The lines are no longer between young and old, nor between left and right, but between those who are friends, and those who are not. Here, binary oppositions cede to a flexible "Multioptionsgesellschaft" 'multi-option society' of the 1980s (Corsten 501-03). The action-packed finale of *Was tun* is not simply an example of newer cinema's "pseudo-crises" that "have no depth of despair, no true suffering, no real joy" (Rentschler 263). In stark contrast to the seriousness of Schlöndorff's contemporaries, Schnitzler's generation pragmatically capitalizes on cultural history, or "kulturelles Kapital," effectively merging history, irony, and drama (Corsten 498). The exuberant getaway from the police headquarters features a water-cannon that could be interpreted as revenge for Hotte's legs (such a weapon ran over him in the 1980s), but the scene does not reinforce this parallel. Instead, the focus is on renewed friendships, on the budding relationship of Terror and Nele, Tim's recognition that he cannot regain Flo,¹⁰ and Maik's realization that personal relationships are more important than public relations.

Schnitzler's film ends with a view of the thirty-somethings traversing the *Museumsinsel* 'Museum Island' in early-morning Berlin. Maturity is not making it in a bourgeois sense, but in re-establishing former loyalties.¹¹ The days of demonstration are over: Hotte—in a shopping cart, ready for his venture into normal life—is contemplating a career in computers. The image of tired-but-happy Berlin *flâneurs* marks an entry into adulthood, albeit this time in the company of friends. When the puerile protesters light up the telltale

film reels against the morning sunlight, the atmosphere conveys the happiness of having reunited. In answer to the eponymous question “Was tun, wenn’s brennt?” ‘What to do in case of fire?’, they sound the incendiary call: “Brennen lassen!” ‘Let it burn!’ Schnitzler’s narrative revives friendship without reigniting flames of protest. His colorful images of post-Wall Berlin suggest that protest is play, and it may be the fountain of youth.

Protest as Belief

In Weingartner’s *Die fetten Jahre sind vorbei* (hereafter, *Die fetten Jahre*), the protagonists Jan and Peter seek to instill fear in affluent Berlin families by rearranging the furniture of expensive homes. The ‘refurbished’ city villas and the eponymous message they leave, “the days of plenty are over,” represent mind-games with the establishment. At the same time, Peter’s erstwhile girlfriend Jule demonstrates against Asian sweatshops. Weingartner hints at this generation’s search for a *Jugendbewegung*, or idealistic youth movement. When the protagonists are caught one night during a break-in, they kidnap the wealthy owner, Hardenberg, and flee with him to a remote mountain hut.

Weingartner’s idealistic protagonists call themselves “die Erziehungsberechtigten,” ‘the custodians,’ unwittingly copying a hierarchical model of society. They stage their protest with the help of a surveillance vehicle (a VW bus) and technology, imagining themselves to be a “counterculture” that operates from outside the dominant establishment (Von Dirke 4).¹² Their approach to activism takes a new turn when Jan introduces Jule to his nocturnal escapades. Unlike the fast-paced music and stylized visuals of *Was tun*, Weingartner’s style is matter-of-fact. From the dim light of the darkened bus, Jan and Jule observe Hardenberg’s villa, searching a Blackberry screen for clients of the security company Peter has worked for. When Hardenberg’s appears among them, Jan mimics the game of “Schiffe versenken” ‘Battleship’: “Treffer!” ‘hit!’ The cramped VW bus and Blackberry screen represent a position twice-removed from reality, recalling the derealization of video games. Criticism of the media later became the focus of Weingartner’s *Free Rainer, dein Fernseher lügt* ‘Free Ranier’ (2007).

While the rock band *Tocotronic* ironically proclaimed in 1995,

“Ich möchte Teil einer Jugendbewegung sein” “I want to be part of a youth movement,”¹³ the new millennium activists of *Die fetten Jahre* really mean it. The world offers their generation few illusions about the future. Therefore, protest is a matter of belief, or at least that is how the young activists interpret their deeds. Weingartner has commented on his own disappointment in the 1990s when he realized how apolitical student life had become (qtd. in Arnold). The dissolution of youth movements is embodied in *Die fetten Jahre* by the middle-aged kidnapping victim Hardenberg, whose entry into the establishment—assuming that his nostalgic narratives about 1968 are not just made up—presages the failure of protest.

The ‘Edukators’ are driven by the many signs of societal neglect and have-nots. *Die fetten Jahre* introduces Jule and other demonstrators struggling against masked police. As she intercedes for her fellow protestors, Jule herself is manhandled, which implies that protest involves solidarity not only with collaborators, but also with the young sweatshop workers on whose behalf they speak out. In the following scene, Weingartner introduces Jan on a streetcar, where conductors torment a homeless man. Jan’s unshaven demeanor lets the viewer first see him as the establishment would: a surly youth with a taste for loud music. But Jan is the idealist of the trio, slipping his ticket into the old man’s hand. When confronted by an aggressive conductor, Jan pins him against a wall, an act that characterizes the youth as observant, angry at authorities, and willing to act.

Die fetten Jahre broadens the traditional focus on “generational revolt,” a conception that reflects the student movement but that fails to capture post-*Wende* realities (Laqueur vi). Jan sides with the elderly, disenfranchised victim but also criticizes his peers, condemning Peter’s theft of an expensive watch during one of their ‘educational’ raids. At the same time, Jan is an ambiguous character. He fits into Hardenberg’s explanation of capitalism: human nature seeks to dominate, which means “[dass] in jeder Gruppe sich in kürzester Zeit ein Anführer bildet” ‘that in every group a leader soon emerges.’ Jan quite naturally becomes the trio’s leader, using his charisma to take away Jule from the less eloquent and educated Peter. Nevertheless, Jan conveys naïve idealism, as if the Berlin generation believed in the 1968ers’ romantic call for something more than bourgeois life. As Rudi Dutschke expressed it, “our life is more

than money. Our life is thinking and living. It's about us, and what we could do in this world" (qtd. in Cornils 114).

Jule is instrumental in letting the viewer sympathize with the cause of the 'Edukators.' She is in debt owing to an automobile accident under lapsed insurance, while the adversary in traffic, the middle-aged Hardenberg, makes over three million Euros a year. *Die fetten Jahre* suggests that Jule owes 95,500 Euros primarily as a result of the expensive taste in cars the millionaire can afford. The disparity resulting from capitalism is reflected in her life of financial worries, eviction, and the dimly envisioned career in education that displaces the naïve, youthful dreams she had before the accident: "einfach nur wild und frei leben" 'to just live, wildly and free.'

The heroine's lack of security is, however, also an ideological one. A key dialogue between Jan and Jule on a balcony overlooking nighttime Berlin lays the foundation for Weingartner's twenty-first-century *Jugendbewegung*. Here, Jule laments that there are no more youth movements: "Deswegen gibt's auch überhaupt keine Jugendbewegung mehr. Denn jeder hat das Gefühl, das war doch schon mal da und hat nicht funktioniert und warum soll's dann bei uns funktionieren?" 'That's why youth movements are over: everyone feels like that's been done before and didn't work, so why would it now?' Jule's desire for solidarity arises from a sense of moral and emotional void: "Das Problem ist einfach, dass ich nirgendwo etwas sehen kann, woran ich wirklich glaube" 'the problem is just that I don't see anything to believe in.'

Jan reveals his nightly escapades ostensibly to counter Jule's lack of belief, but in reality, Weingartner creates a classic 'hero rescues maiden' scenario. The break-in to Hardenberg's mansion is based on Jan's desire to impress the girl with technological prowess. Weingartner suggests that private desires can be the driving forces of political causes. This idea is supported in one of the key images in *Die fetten Jahre*: the photo that Jan takes of Jule while they renovate her apartment, after they have smeared the line: "Jedes Herz ist eine revolutionäre Zelle" 'every heart is a revolutionary cell' in red paint onto the wall. Color, language, and the expressive strokes of penmanship link the activist ideals with the emotions arising between Jule and Jan. The excitement of activism fuels emotions, and passion drives the trio toward further action.

Nothing in the kidnapping is political, and all is emotional. Jan and Jule lose her cell phone in the mansion on their first romantic encounter. They fail to gather their belongings because of newly-discovered emotions and initially forego Peter's help to hide their secret. The second half of the film is as much a resolution of the love triangle as it is an answer to the question as to how far these young people will go. Accordingly, Anthony Lane dismisses the ineffective "décor terrorism" of the young protagonists (91). Indeed, the film reveals fissures in Jan's logic, who proudly tells Hardenberg that the 'Edukatoren' are not like the masses, who just sit and talk about change. The youth is oblivious to the fact that their sojourn in the mountain hut is characterized precisely by sitting around and discussing revolutionary ideas.

Since the middle-aged millionaire Hardenberg, once a 1968er, exemplifies abandoned idealism, *Die fetten Jahre* addresses the notion that protest is part of cyclical generational conflict. Hardenberg seems to begin regretting his move into the establishment, but it remains doubtful that he is genuinely revisiting his youthful ideals. Instead, he manipulates his captors by revealing to Peter the relationship between Jule and Jan. Hardenberg's influence on the three young friends discredits the 1968 generation for using its past to dominate in the present. His reneged promise not to alert the authorities re-establishes entrenched oppositions. As the police storm the young people's Berlin apartment, they encounter the final, educational message: "Manche ändern sich nie" 'some people never change.' Hardenberg cannot retrieve the solidarity of youth. And perhaps, his idealist past was never more than a performance for the benefit of the three kidnappers.

Weingartner's images of twenty-first-century capitalism leave viewers without clear political messages. The anti-globalization generation lacks tangible entities to rebel against, in contrast to the 1968ers who confronted the government and vestiges of Nazi figures.¹⁴ This lack of political friction leaves Peter, Jan, and Jule in a position of staging somewhat artificial scenes of protest in an era when revolutions have fallen prey to marketing. Jan points out that the subversive symbols of the past, such as Che Guevara, can now be bought on T-shirts in any store. *Die fetten Jahre* presents political protest as driven by passionate youth, and Weingartner's trio seems

generally unconcerned with questions of German identity, which is an entirely different attitude than the positions displayed in Schlöndorff's and Schnitzler's politically and historically rooted works.

Against images of essentially ineffective protest, the most authentic dimension of *Die fetten Jahre* remains at the interpersonal level. Peter forgives Jan and Jule, which suggests the potential for lasting friendship. In the end, the trio may find nothing to believe in but each other. In the international release, they are last seen in a hotel bed, refusing room service in Spanish. Having moved from social activism to a *ménage à trois*, this ending suggests that the desire for protest has been laid to rest along with the consequences of their educational endeavors. However, the more provocative resolution of the German version—the trio stands on Hardenberg's yacht, sailing toward their plans to sabotage European satellite towers—indicates that belief in protest endures in post-unification Germany.

Departing from History: In Search of Private Lives

Recent protest films cater to popular taste by uniting drama and comedy with gestures to the tradition of political engagement: “the division between commercial forms of filmmaking and the author's cinema may be beginning to break down” (Clarke 4). The significant shift in film funding parallels the competitiveness of global markets. Whereas youth protests in the 1960s were fueled by anti-fascist politics, recent film targets the capitalist system. A materialist state drives Jule into debt, maims Hotte, and provokes Rita to embark on a life of protest and futile violence. The critique of capitalism is the strongest in *Stille* and *Die fetten Jahre*, whereas the colorful settings in *Was tun* flirt with the stylishness its characters ostensibly reject. Schnitzler's film resembles the attractive comedies of the 1990s, which may be related to the international production context. Indeed, the focus on profitability is underlined by the fact that Schnitzler was hired by Claussen & Wöbke to direct the completed script, whereas *Stille* and *Die fetten Jahre* were co-written by their directors.

Schlöndorff, Schnitzler, and Weingartner show youth in action, demonstrating the fascination of older generations for young rebels (Laqueur xi). The small circles of friends portrayed in *Stille*, *Was tun*, and *Die fetten Jahre* reflect the strength of friendship as op-

posed to pragmatic forms of organization. This suggests that C. S. Lewis was on the right track about the subversive potential of friendship, which “withdraws men from collective ‘togetherness’ [...] and more dangerously, for it withdraws them by two’s and three’s” (Lewis 40). Weingartner’s trio, the anarchists in *Was tun*, and the terrorist friends in *Stille* illustrate the “perilous charm of a shared hatred or grievance” (Lewis 45).

The three generations of filmmakers reveal a significant change in the protagonists’ awareness of history. Schlöndorff places the German past at the center of his works:

Geschichten haben Vorgeschichten. Es gab die Nazizeit, den Zweiten Weltkrieg, die Niederlage, die Teilung Deutschlands und den Kalten Krieg. Vor diesem Hintergrund stehen die Lebensläufe der Terroristen. Sie sind ja nicht aus irgendeiner Kiste gesprungen, sondern sie waren die Kinder ihrer Eltern.

History has pre-histories: the Third Reich, World War II, defeat, German division, and the Cold War. The terrorists’ development must be seen against this past. They didn’t just pop out of a box, but were their parents’ children. (Schlöndorff, *Licht* 442-43)

Stille revisits the history of the 1970s and beyond, while also taking a traditional view of German society in which personal experience is strongly marked by generational belonging. In accordance with 1968 values, the Nazi past is evoked in order to legitimize the extremes of the left; as the *Genosse General* in *Stille* points out: “In Deutschland ist immer von rechts geschossen worden” ‘In Germany, the shots were always fired from the right.’

This tragic connection to history is loosened in the works by the two younger directors. Weingartner’s protagonists lament the loss of a *Jugendbewegung*, but the ‘Edukatoren’ do not look to the past to legitimize their actions, basing their activities instead on anti-globalization positions. *Was tun* situates the protagonists vis-à-vis history, but does not subscribe to a tragic view of historical forces upon the present. Only at the surface does the past legitimize the protest in the narrative present. The script contains references, albeit humorous, to the RAF and the Third Reich. When Nele hears

their bomb exploded, she protests, “Wir sind doch nicht die RAF” ‘after all, we’re not the RAF.’ *Was tun* does not, however, aim at a discussion of guilt and violence. When Terror observes the speed limit during a comical escape scene, Maik tells the pedantic lawyer, “wegen Leuten wie dir hat’s das Dritte Reich gegeben” ‘people like you made the Third Reich possible,’ a ludicrous allusion that ironizes the painful historical scrutiny (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung* ‘dealing with the past’) of the postwar Federal Republic.

All three films about youth and protest seem to imply that everyday life in pre- and post-Wall Germany fails to provide meaningful experiences. The emphasis on community in recent film may arise in reaction to the wide-reaching perception that the Berlin generation is an apolitical assortment of individualists prone to retreat into private lives (Herzinger 163). Retrieving youthful idealism but not the mass movements of the 1960s, these cinematic protesters merge solidarity and activism with a display of caring among friends. Ultimately, this newer Berlin cinema turns from the political to the private, leaving history behind on a quest for friendship and youth.

Notes

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1 Jamie H. Trnka points out that recent protest films present a personalized narrative and offer “possibilities for renegotiating the history of terrorism in Germany” (3).

2 The trend is also visible in Uli Edel’s *Der Baader Meinhof Komplex* (2008), although the film lacks the humor and emphasis on friendship of the three films under discussion.

3 In *Generation Berlin*, Heinz Bude coined this term to give shape and impetus to unified Germany under the new capital.

4 The actor Til Schweiger similarly claims: “it’s really more about friendship, faithfulness and trust” (qtd. in Kobel).

5 All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

6 Stefanie Hofer similarly reads this scene as proof that emotions, not convictions, lead Rita (132).

7 Viett shot a policeman (he survived) in 1981 and sought cover in the GDR.

After discovery, she was sentenced to thirteen years in prison, of which she served five before being released in 1997.

8 *Was tun* alludes more closely to the *Kommune 1* than to the 1980s Berlin anarchists described by Tomas Lecorte.

9 Rabehl's description of the *Kommune* reveals parallels to *Was tun*. The historic group similarly adopted fire as its symbol. Moreover, the communards' handwritten documents mention the idea to spray foam from a fire extinguisher onto the police, while Schnitzler's protagonists use a fire extinguisher as casing for their second bomb.

10 Twice, in the final scenes, he begins to put his arm around her and pulls back.

11 An alternative ending, in which Tim meets the woman from his earlier one-night-stand, was deleted because it does not fit into "ein Gruppenende" 'a group ending' about the circle of friends (Schnitzler, DVD commentary).

12 Owen Gleiberman derides "these scowling baby Marxists for what they are: middle-class wastrels who've inflated a valid critique of the system into a tantrum."

13 On their 1995 album, *Digital ist besser*, "Ich möchte Teil einer Jugendbewegung sein" is track number 17. <<http://www.tocotronic.de>>, accessed 17 January 2009.

14 Interview with Hans Weingartner: <<http://www.vierundzwanzig.de>>.

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