



Re-Framing History
Films from behind the Berlin Wall
curated by Maria Mohr and Maxa Zoller

“I came out quite disappointed from the reunification period. We had hoped that reunification would be more than just a simple takeover. Until now, we have mainly examined the issues of guilt and involvement; the major Stasi dramas have been dramatised. We have been less preoccupied with the huge possibilities those days seemed to offer – the immense force of anarchy.” (Andreas Dresen)

The film programme ‘Re-Framing History: Films from behind the Berlin Wall’ presents a portrait of Germany different from the one depicted in international mass media. This series of five films, which stretch from the 1980s until now, the ‘Wende’, the time of the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the subsequent ‘unification’ of the two Germanies opens up another perspective: Germany seen by those whose vision of a united country after the Fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 has been compromised by history’s course. Arguably, the country was not “united” - more precisely the West bought out the East by means of the ‘Treuhand’ agency that privatised East German’s state enterprises.

With the recent move of the Cairo Goethe Institute from downtown into its new building in Dokki, which integrated the former East German Embassy, this programme is a timely reminder of the complexity of Germany, which not so recently ago was *two* countries. This programme seeks to present a counter-cinema to the popular, cliché-ridden ‘Ostalgia’-films such as *Good-Bye Lenin* (2003) and *The Life of the Others* (2006), which represent the GDR (German Democratic Republic) in either romantic or demonising ways. Deeply moving and politically complex this series of screenings hopes to reanimate a discussion about filmmaking beyond the mainstream consensus.

For its Egyptian audience, ‘Re-Framing History: Films from behind the Berlin Wall’ seeks to provide examples, models and modes of making films from the margins of history. We hope that Egyptian cinephiles and filmmakers who are facing the challenge of making and understanding films in post-revolutionary Egypt, where the enthusiasm of the ‘18 days’ has been replaced by a sobering political reality, might find this programme empowering. This screening hopes to be an inspiration for those who struggle with coming to terms with the political crisis on an emotional, intellectual and last but not least filmic level.

The programme starts with the GDR cult film *Solo Sunny*, a collaboration of Konrad Wolf and Wolfgang Kohlhaase. Produced roughly ten years before the wall came down, the film

tells the story of a young singer struggling for happiness and self-fulfilment. Solo Sunny is about and for “people who don't think the world is so simple and whose world suddenly falls apart.” (Konrad Wolf). 'Winter adé' is a wonderfully sensitive documentary of women workers' life in East Germany produced only months before the Berlin Wall fell. Does the title ('Good-Bye Winter'), a reference to a famous German folk song, anticipate the events of 1989? Honouring the important work of director Andreas Dresen the programme presents his first and last film about Germany after 1989. 'Stilles Land' depicts the typical conflict of the artist persona who is torn between art and revolution. In 'Als wir träumten' Dresen takes up the theme of night life which he already explored to great success in his 1999 film 'Nachtgestalten' in order to express the free-fall years of 1990s Berlin. Similarly, Cynthia Beatt waited twenty years to return to her 1989 experimental short film 'The Invisible Frame', in which the then still unknown Tilda Swinton follows the Berlin Wall on her bicycle - on the Western side, of course. In 2009 a more mature and equally mesmerising Swinton is back on her bike; this time she is in search of the traces of Germany's traumatic, repressed history.

Maria Mohr and Maxa Zoller

Film programme:

Friday 18th Nov, 12pm, Small Hall

Solo Sunny, Konrad Wolf, GDR, 1978-80, 104”

“The GDR, at the end of the 70s: Ingrid Sommer, a woman working in a factory, tries to launch a singing career under the name “Sunny”. The young woman travels around with the band “Tornados” and plays some small gigs in cultural centres around the province. Her life is anything but “sunny” though, even when her love for the philosopher Ralph does promise some light and warmth at times. A story balancing between sadness and hope, and, retrospectively, a wonderfully precise and authentic film about life in the GDR. [...] Solo Sunny is a clever, unruly film that speaks out against stale attitudes and judging people on the basis of their immediate usefulness. The numerous images of narrow spaces and crumbling facades underline this. Wolf and Kohlhaase argue that society in the GDR should not only accept different lifestyles, but suggest that it also in fact needs these unusual characters, or, politically formulated, the dissidents.” (Hans Günther Pflaum)

Saturday 19th Nov, 12pm, Small Hall

Winter adé, Helke Misselwitz, GDR, 1987/88, 116”

“One year before the fall of the Wall, the documentary filmmaker travels from the south to the north of the GDR by train. She wants to find out “how others lived and how they want to live”. On the way, she meets very different women, who, each in their own way, are trying to find their personal freedom, voluntarily or out of necessity, and who talk of their worries and hopes.” (Goethe Institute Film Archive)

Sunday 20th Nov, 12pm, Small Hall

Cycling the Frame, 1989, 30”, Cynthia Beatt, 1989 and The Invisible Frame, Cynthia Beatt, 60”, West Germany, 2009

“In 1988, Cynthia Beatt and Tilda Swinton set off on their bikes, adventuring into relatively unknown territory. They cycled along the perimeter of the Berlin Wall with the intention of documenting the places they passed, but also to capture an introspective view of West Berlin and the view over the wall towards East Berlin. And thus came about the film 'Cycling the Frame'.

Today, 'Cycling the Frame' stands out as a unique historical document. Tilda Swinton, who was awarded an Oscar last year, is a particularly popular and world-famous actress,

renowned for her unorthodox choice of roles. Tilda Swinton and Cynthia Beatt have now taken the opportunity to cycle the very same line that the wall once cut through Berlin in 'The Invisible Frame'." (Goethe Institute Film Archive)

Monday 21st Nov, 12pm, Small Hall

Stilles Land (Silent Country), Andreas Dresen, BRD, 1992, 95"

"'Stilles Land' is not an energetic reckoning-off, it is a tragicomedy. Andreas Dresen only gives a fully energetic display at one point in the film, namely when Erich Honecker's successor Egon Krenz promises that this is the big revolution and the actor Theo is arrested at the same time simply because he has a powerful aerial in his luggage: in other words, nothing has changed. Sometimes he even attempts to convey this in comic tones, but they naturally are not among the film's strengths. Torsten Merten as Kai Finke occasionally struggles through the film in the same way as Pierre Richard and often prevents the story taking a more intense emotional turn. The form of a comedy may also be an attempted form of self-defence: a director who signs a resolution and then locks it away in a drawer until he is certain that circumstances have really changed could make us rage in anger - or shake with laughter after a span of only three years. That is what Andreas Dresen has decided to do with the film." (Hans Günther Pflaum)

Tuesday 22nd Nov, 12pm, Small Hall

Als wir träumten (As We Were Dreaming), Andreas Dresen, BRD, 2013-15, 117"

"Just a few years previously, Dani, Rico, Paul and Mark had still been schoolchildren in the GDR, subject to ideological constraints, but also secure in their manageable daily lives. After German reunification, there no longer seem to be any rules. The friends enjoy their private anarchy, go out at night in Leipzig, speed through night-time streets in stolen cars drunk, take drugs, go on the rampage and enjoy their acts of vandalism. They open a disco, which fails after a year due to Nazi violence. Rico messes up his career as a boxer, Paul deals in pornography; Mark loses his life, Dani the love of his life. 'As We Were Dreaming' tells the story of a lost generation that unknowingly became the victim of reunification." (Goethe Institute Film Archive)

Programmers' bios

Maria Mohr is a German artist and film maker living in Berlin and Cairo, working as a film lecturer at German University in Cairo (GUC). After studies of architecture at TU Darmstadt and Ecole d'Architecture de Paris-la-Villette, she graduated in film at University of the Arts Berlin (UDK). Maria received grants by the Academy of the Arts Berlin (ADK), "Villa-Serpentara-Stipendium" 2011 and "Berlin-Stipendium" 2013. From 2011 to 2016 she was member and lately head of jury of the German cultural film fund (BKM). She is member of the German Documentary Association (AG DOK) and founding member of ProQuote Regie. Selected works: COUSIN COUSINE (Cousins, D 2005, shortfilm, German Shortfilm Award, 3sat Prize Oberhausen); BRUDER SCHWESTER (Brother Sister, D 2010, feature length documentary, Competition DOK Leipzig, Doc Alliance Selection); DOUBLE PROJECTION and WALKING BOUNDARIES (2014, performances in collaboration with Jutta Eberhard and Academy of the Arts Berlin).

Dr Maxa Zoller works as the Art Basel film curator and is a film and art lecturer at the American University in Cairo. With a Ph.D. in experimental film Maxa taught at Goldsmith's College and Sotheby's Institute London before moving to Cairo in 2013. She is a prolific researcher and writer and published her texts in several exhibition catalogues with MIT, IB Tauris, JRP-Ringier and Hatje Verlag. Maxa's interest in films about the German 'Wende' was also the starting point for the film series 'Generation Berlin Wall' that was presented at Tate Modern, Goethe Institute and no.w.here, London in 2009, the year of the 20th anniversary of the Fall of the Berlin Wall. She also was the curator of the art exhibition 'Teenagers of Socialism' at Waterside Project Space, London.