

INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

U·M·I

University Microfilms International
A Bell & Howell Information Company
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
313/761-4700 800/521-0600

Order Number 1355172

**Absent mothers, absent fathers: Aspects of German Fascism as
seen through the contemporary camera**

Blume, Anne Lynne, M.A.

Rice University, 1993

U·M·I

300 N. Zeeb Rd.
Ann Arbor, MI 48106

RICE UNIVERSITY


ABSENT MOTHERS, ABSENT FATHERS: ASPECTS OF
GERMAN FASCISM AS SEEN THROUGH
THE CONTEMPORARY CAMERA

by

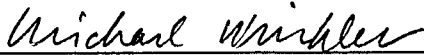
ANNE L. BLUME

A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
MASTER OF ARTS

APPROVED, THESIS COMMITTEE



Margret Eifler, Professor, Director
German and Slavic Studies



Michael Winkler, Professor
German and Slavic Studies



Brian Huberman, Associate Professor
Art

Houston, Texas

May, 1993

ABSTRACT

Absent Mothers, Absent Fathers:
Aspects of German Fascism as Seen
Through the Contemporary Camera

by

Anne L. Blume

The personal history of individuals during the World War II and post-war period is looked at through the film texts "*Deutschland, bleiche Mutter*", "*Europa, Europa*", "*Peppermint Frieden*" and "*The Ties That Bind*". These film texts are considered for the way in which the filmmakers, in autobiographical accounts of their own lives or of the main characters, have explored and recreated history through individual memory. Memories of childhood in Nazi Germany are constructed from personal remembrance and experience to form a memory of the individual that is unaccounted for in the standard institutional history.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest thanks to Dr. Margret Eifler, for inspiring and tirelessly supporting my interest in women and film. I would also like to thank the other members of my committee, Dr. Michael Winkler and Brian Huberman, for their time and interest. Thanks to Su Friedrich for supplying me with a copy of her film, "*The Ties That Bind*". To my mother and father, who in absence and presence have helped me become who I am, I am forever indebted. Thanks Mom, thanks Dad. Very special thanks to Johan for his love and encouragement, and for being such a good sport.

For Wiser

Table of Contents

Abstract.	i
Acknowledgements.	iii
Introduction.	1
" <i>Deutschland, bleiche Mutter</i> ".	9
" <i>Europa, Europa</i> ".	16
" <i>Peppermint Frieden</i> ".	30
" <i>The Ties That Bind</i> ".	39
Filmography.	50
Bibliography.	51

Introduction

The New German Cinema has an identity rooted in the brooding return to Germany's troubled past. Not only was the movement characterized by an attempt to reckon with history itself, and particularly coming to terms with the legacy left by Hitler, but also by the way in which this reckoning was done. As Thomas Elsaesser has said:

"what mattered...was the subjective factor, the individual experience, with the cinema only truthful where it concentrated on the personal - on private, often sexual obsessions - while the public sphere remained a colorful but often clichéd backdrop. These German films tended to show how fascism had affected the (bourgeois) family, and family relations: especially mothers and daughters, mothers and sons; more rarely husbands and wives.¹

Jean Baudrillard has theorized that this reaction to come to terms with the past is characteristic of a "retro-scenario", wherein the Europeans whose lives were unforgettably affected by the war, "nostalgically examine through the cinema a time where their country's history still meant individual villains and victims, causes that mattered, and decisions of life and death."² What is suggested here is a designation of "Nazi-retro", where retro implies what Foucault called the "struggle over popular memory."³

One attraction of such a history was the excuse for still telling stories with a beginning, middle and end, which would give the illusion of a personal or national destiny: a need fascism had tried to gratify on a collective scale. The return to history in the cinema was therefore for Baudrillard not a move towards coming to terms with the past, but the fetishisation of another trauma altogether, located in the present. Fascism is to the contemporary imagination what

¹Elsaesser, Thomas. "Filming Fascism: Is History Just an Old Movie?" Sight and Sound: Sept. 1992..p.19.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

the ankle or laced-up boot is to the foot-fetishist - namely, the last permissible sight that can be possessed as object prior to the trauma barred from sight and consciousness: the absence of history altogether.⁴

This idea can be employed as at least a partial explanation for the great attention paid by New German cinematographers towards reconstructing this historical period with authenticity and in close detail. Archive footage is combined with authentic sound to cinematically recreate the past in its institutional form, and further still make it available in one's own home. For Elsaesser this suggests:

"that the cinema of the 70's essentially confirmed a melodramatic view of history: spectacular in the public sphere, a family soap opera in the home. For if Baudrillard is right, then in films like *Heimat* or *Deutschland, Bleiche Mutter*, the insistence on the family was something of a fetish, because it too clung to an unexamined notion of the authentic, of 'experience' as a quality that could be recovered and represented on film.⁵

In contrast to populist representations of Germany's history which foreground the atrocities of the Hitler period, of which the made-for-TV film *Holocaust* is a prominent example, the New German Cinema seeks to portray personal history, through the telling of private stories. As Kaes and others have pointed out, the consequence of this approach is that political events appear to be represented merely as a backdrop to, or as an intrusive element in people's lives, if not excluded altogether.⁶ Consequently, the well worn question of who should bear responsibility for the horrors committed under the Nazi regime is either sidestepped or denied altogether. Although these filmmakers have undoubtedly participated in the "rewriting" of German history, for Kaes it has been "at the

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Kaes, Anton. *From Hitler to Heimat*. p. 21.

risk of appearing, or indeed becoming, revisionist".⁷ I would argue that these filmmakers, and in particular the women filmmakers who will be discussed here, were not trying to argue the notions of collective or individual guilt. Their aims were to show how life during and just after the Third Reich became destructive for those who had no control, namely the children, as well as the patriarchal structure ultimately brought complete destruction not only to those who were the intended victims, but to the very people and families it called its own.

Such work, re-assessing and re-visioning the past by Germany's women directors has been almost totally excluded from, or referenced only briefly in most studies of the New German Cinema. The emphasis on a traditional auteurist methodology, combined with the often explicitly autobiographical nature of many women directors' films, has functioned at a number of different levels to inhibit serious consideration of the work of these women. The absence of opportunity for well-qualified women directors to make features in the early years of the New German Cinema, chiefly a matter of finances rather than talent, is matched in its effrontery only by the subsequent failure of the critical world to consider their work as fundamental to the movement. Only in recent years has this strand within women's film production - the exploration of personal history - been seen as a valid and vital part of the New German Cinema.

Women wanting to make feature films faced financial infrastructures and social/critical prejudices that either prevented their films from being made, or if they were made, limited the reception offered upon completion. The appropriation of auteur theory by predominantly male critics and male filmmakers led ultimately to the designation of a "Autorenkino", which did not consider or include women contributors. This notion subsequently "informed the institutional framework of the first film subsidy agency, the

⁷ *ibid*, p. 197.

'Kuratorium junger deutscher Film'....Therefore, not only did the new male directors conceive of themselves as Autoren, this self-designation was also officially sanctioned."⁸ The public statements of Alexander Kluge, Rainer Werner Fassbinder and others, were such that concurrent with the introduction of the New German Cinema to the United States and Britain, was the establishment of a conceptual and institutional framework which located and promoted it as a cinema of male personal expression.

Such was the situation in which women filmmakers had to struggle. In the early days women were denied support for their fiction projects and were able to work primarily in documentary, where their lack of auteur status continued into their later feature filmmaking careers. Their efforts were further hindered by the designation of "feminist" - a term that was used to subsume virtually all women's filmmaking, thus denying female directors an opportunity for individual response to their own work. Feminism in and of itself is not to be seen as negative. The lack of clear definition by women of the term "feminism", and the abundance of misdefinition given by others, resulted unfairly in a negative connotation for anything referred to as "feminist". The injustice in the way films by women have been received has been detrimental not only to the filmmakers, but to film studies and audiences too.

In a discussion on women's film and its reception, Helen Fehervary considers the male filmmakers to tell only "part of the story." She does not consider the films of Fassbinder or Syberberg, for example, to be historically incorrect, but until the films of women such as Sanders-Brahms or Brückner are acknowledged as valid reflections on the German past, there is little worth in analyzing things "historically".

There are many men theorizing, writing literature and making films today about the necessity of subjective self-reflection in relation to history. This is fine.. The point is

⁸ Whitaker, *Sight and Sound*. May 1992, p. 45.

that there are women writers and filmmakers who have been doing this very thing all along. Whether it be the writer Christa Wolf or the filmmaker Helma Sanders-Brahms reflecting on fascism, women have managed to describe - without all the abstract theoretical paraphernalia - the relationship between history and so-called subjective processes. They show us that it's not a matter of grasping the truth in history as some objective entity, but in finding the truth of the experience. Evidently, this kind of experiential immediacy has to do with women's own history and self-consciousness. That this simple empirical fact is ignored, and that the role of gender in history is rationalized in any number of ways, is, after all is said and done, willfully narrow-minded. Since we're talking about film, that is a problem of not looking at all the historical evidence.⁹

The films of these women directors set out to "establish a link between German history, the postwar period and the particular difficulties confronting a woman in finding a viable identity."¹⁰

The Little Prince, a fictional child created by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, spoke for all children when he said, "Grownups never understand things for themselves, and it is tiring for children to be always and forever explaining things to them."¹¹ In the four films presented here there is a child and a grownup, in some way trying to make semblance of how they have become who they are, by examining both their past as children and the lives and their relationships to their parents. In "*Deutschland, bleiche Mutter*", the filmmaker-daughter presents both her own story as daughter and the story of her mother in so far as the daughter shared it with her, or is able to reconstruct it imaginatively. "*Peppermint Frieden*" is the recounting by the filmmaker of her childhood and the ways in which truth was obscured or hidden from her. "*Europa, Europa*" is the story of a Jewish boy who has no contact with his parents after the age of thirteen, yet struggles to realize how his destiny

⁹ Lenssen, Claudia, et.al. *New German Critique*, no.24-25, pp. 172-85.

¹⁰ Elsaesser, Thomas. *New German Cinema: a History*.

¹¹ de Saint-Exupéry, Antoine. *The Little Prince*. p. 4.

is linked to his heritage from them. "*The Ties That Bind*" is a daughter's examination of her mother's German past, and the mother's relationship to her American father.

"Absent mothers, absent fathers" is a designation intended on several levels to describe the presence or non-presence of parent-child relationships in these films. In "*Deutschland, bleiche Mutter*", the daughter spends her early childhood years only with her mother, for her father is fighting on the front. Her strongest bonds are formed with her mother, and later after the father's return, are tested as he attempts to become a part of his family. Anna, the daughter, feels she has no use for a father. In "*Peppermint Frieden*", the father is also absent for a period of time, and upon his return, remains very much an ambiguous presence. Both the mother and father maintain a distanced relationship with Marianne, as if to hide from her what she in some way already knows. For Solly in "*Europa, Europa*", he is separated from his parents in their attempt to protect him from further harm during the German occupation of Poland. Absent from the traditions of his Jewish heritage, as practiced by and embodied in his parents, he loses his sense of self-pride as a Jew, and is left only to feel victimized by his Jewishness as marked by his circumcised penis. The filmmaker-daughter in "*The Ties that Bind*" explores her mother's past (whose own father died when she was a child), in an attempt to strengthen her own relationship with her, having sensed that there is much about her mother that she doesn't know or understand. In doing so she is able to develop a better understanding of her parents divorce, which also created a distant and often non-existent relationship with her father. These absences, whether in actual physical presence or the failure to manifest a meaningful relationship between parent and child, are problematic for each of the main figures in these films, and reflect the difficulty the filmmakers have also had in their childhood, and in their development into adults.

What is attempted here is not a consideration of family values in the sense of the 1990's socio-political definition of "acceptable" family structures, but rather a notion of family and human relationships more timeless and organic to human life and (Western) culture. Awareness of self brings a consciousness of choice, and the ability to create one's own world, which in turn becomes a part of the larger world in which we live. Learning about life and developing a sense of self-worth and identification begins at birth and continues to mature into adulthood. The paradox of the young person is to discover oneself as an individual, while also finding ways to understand the connectedness with one's own family, friends and the world as a whole. When the adult figures to whom a child looks are either absent, or not sure of their own connection to the world or society in which they live, this pathway to understanding is blocked. The ambiguous attitudes and behaviors of some adults towards the Third Reich has lead their children to ask if their really wasn't another way, or any other possible outcome. Helma Sanders-Brahms, Marianne Rosenbaum, Agnieszka Holland and Su Friedrich have created films that represent the inverse of spectacle characteristic of the Nazi era, and seen is films such as "*Triumph of the Will*", where the focus was on

"mobilized masses filling the screen so that the surface patterns provide a pleasing design of the whole, letting the viewer forget the purpose of the display, the militarization of society for the teleology of making war. The aesthetics allows an anaesthetization of reception, a viewing of the 'scene' with disinterested pleasure, even when that scene is the preparation through ritual of a whole society for unquestioning sacrifice and ultimately, destruction, murder, and death.¹²

The films "*Deutschland, bleiche Mutter*", "*Peppermint Frieden*", "*Europa, Europa*" and "*The Ties That Bind*", present the viewer with an individual's relationship to the

¹² Buck-Morss, Susan. *October* vol. 62, p.38.

society controlled by German fascism, the positioning of each person to this mass. The viewer becomes engaged in the problem through a film experience that creates anger, sympathy, respect and insight. Man is represented as a child, and society in its most deadly form, in a state of war. The confrontation between the defenseless individual and the overpowering society, between the child and war, represents a condition completely antagonistic to human life, and one which the filmmakers would like never to recur.

"Deutschland, bleiche Mutter"

"Deutschland, bleiche Mutter", by Helma Sanders-Brahms, is the autobiographical retelling of a country and a family torn apart during war. The world created in this film makes very poignant the ways in which the political sphere intrudes and ultimately destroys all happiness in the private sphere. "'History', nazism, the Third Reich, Hitler, the war, the Holocaust - is intertwined with 'history'- Lene and her husband, Lene's sister and their friends."¹ These characters are very much a part of the political milieu, whether as active participants in the war, or citizens of a government gone mad. Sanders-Brahms forces viewers to experience events and characters from a distance, never letting them close enough to feel the feelings of the characters. Sympathy is not asked for, but rather fair judgment of the characters and their actions as considered against the backdrop of the Nazi government.

Helma Sanders-Brahms addresses the history of an individual woman, which is not accounted for in the standard institutional history. "The specifically female experiences of German history provide the point of departure and the point of convergence for Sanders-Brahms' presentation of the past. She is convinced that women have their own history, which differs from male history."² The recognition of gender difference demands that differences in experience that are gender-specific be considered. Women have been subjected to a largely one-sided perspective of history that does not account for their own reality. The individual memory of woman, if considered, may impact the interpretation of what have become accepted institutional histories. Judith Mayne argues that there is a definitive feminist perspective that must be considered in the chronicling of history:

¹ Anton Kaes, *From Hitler to Heimat*. p. 155.

² Ibid., pp. 154-55.

The task of rendering ourselves visible has, for feminist historians, entailed a process of re-reading the very notion of history: not as a series of Grand Events in the public domain, but as a constant interaction of the realms of private and public life, although most frequently through the mediation of domestic life. 'The personal is political' has by now become a truism for feminists. Yet we are only beginning to realize the extent to which the so-called 'personal' areas of existence are shaped and shape in their turn the nature of social relations.³

"*Deutschland, bleiche Mutter*" is an attempt to portray the differences in the experience of men and women living in Germany during the war and the post-war period, and consequently how the perspectives of a child, born into a country at war, have been shaped on both a political and domestic battlefield.

After a reading of Bertolt Brecht's "*Deutschland*" by his daughter, Hanne Hiob, the film opens with a reflection of a Nazi flag in a river. As the camera pulls back two men are seen rowing a boat, and commenting on what has just occurred on the shore. A young woman has just been attacked by a dog following a group of SA officers. The two men in the boat, Hans and Ulrich, are overcome by the fact that the woman has not screamed in her defense. Hans immediately becomes infatuated with the notion of having this black-haired woman for his own. Her non-blondeness and silence have marked her as different and desirable to him. It is at this point that a voice-over says "It is a conventional love story, except that it happened in that time and that place." The voice that will be heard as narrator throughout the film is that of Sanders-Brahms herself. What she has created in "*Deutschland, bleiche Mutter*" is a love story which is in many ways conventional, but a filmic rendering which lacks sentimentality and voyeurism.

The film is structured around this first encounter between Lene and Hans as if to signify that Lene's life commences only when knowledge of her existence enters the

³ Judith Mayne, "Visibility and Feminist Film Criticism," *Film Reader* vol. 5, 1982, p. 122.

consciousness of her future husband. The power of this scene lies in its ability to present Lene as literally silent - emphasizing the fact through Ulrich's valuing of it - and by making her an object of the male gaze. Luce Irigaray has spoken of people "spoken more than speaking, enunciated more than enunciation."⁴ This idea is developed throughout the film, until in the closing scenes Lene loses her natural capability for speech through a brutal tooth extraction, a procedure for which her husband gave consent.

Sanders-Brahms creates a distance between the viewer and object with the use of a minimalist camera style. The camera provokes the viewers curiosity by refusing to show more, or probe further into the perimeters of the surrounding milieu. By limiting the motion of the camera, Sanders-Brahms is able to engage the viewer in the problem by not satisfying their urge to know more. The characters move, or do not move in relation to a camera, that is almost always in a fixed position. Where forward movement is depicted the director cuts directly to the shot, rather than tracking in slowly, or zooming and allowing the viewer to maintain perspective. The camera often lingers on one shot, while the narrative has already advanced. This style of filming may be considered to establish the feminine perspective on war, so central to the movie. The gaze that the camera gives viewers is different from what would be considered the traditional male gaze. Sanders-Brahms allows viewers to see with a female "look," that is patient, observing and non voyeuristic. The only shot in the film that moves forward into the frame is that of an aerial shot over the city of Berlin, where the destruction of bombs has left a gray and devastated landscape. The camera sweeps forward over the landscape, as if showing how war has raped the land, expressing, in form as well as content, the masculine nature of war and destruction.

Shortly after Hans and Lene marry and establish themselves in their new home, a scene which is presented with storybook quality, war breaks out and Hans is quickly

⁴ Luce Irigaray, in Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics*, London: 1985.

shipped off to the front. When he returns on leave, Lene tells him she want to have a child and subsequently becomes pregnant. The child is born in the middle of an air raid, and the soundtrack juxtaposes the sound of sirens with the screaming of the mother and the wailing of the baby. As the narrator says, "as they cut me from you, I fell onto a battlefield." After their house is destroyed in a raid, despite having lost everything except the silver, Lene experiences a sense of liberation, becoming resourceful and independent. Lene and Anna, the infant daughter, set out on foot to seek shelter with relatives in Berlin. On Christmas eve they are seen in a shelter with many presumably drunk people who accuse Lene of having lice. The soundtrack is of both Christmas carols and the sound of falling bombs. Sanders-Brahms explains: "When I mix my sound, I always try to make the sound not only underline the emotion, as in normal Hollywood film, but also to construct a sound track that has contradictions in it."⁵

For the rest of the war Lene and Anna go everywhere together and are always in one another's company. With rare exceptions they always appear in the frame together, and in close physical contact. When Hans visits them on leave in Berlin and sees his daughter for the first time the bond between Lene and Anna has become so strong and dependent that as the narrator says "I had no use for a father." When Lene and Hans try to make love, Anna begins to scream, upset by this previously unknown sharing of her mother. Hans can only watch enviously as Anna takes his place and receives the attention he was seeking. For Anna, being with her mother has in fact become a prerequisite for life, depending on the milk from her breast for life sustenance. It is as if they have never properly separated and are still joined by an invisible umbilical cord. In the voice-over Sanders-Brahms almost always speaks of 'Lene and I', never herself alone.

As the war comes to an end, Sanders-Brahms includes a lengthy scene of mother and child finding their way through the snowy woods, the backdrop against which Lene

⁵ Peter Brunette. "Helma Sanders-Brahms: a Conversation" *Film Quarterly* 44(2) 1990-91. pp.34-42.

tells Anna a fairy tale. As the tale is told they continue along their way, eventually reaching the similar locations to those in the fairy tale. As the tale is told straightforward, there is a contradictory time frame in the visual shot. Lene' tells the tale of the Räuber Brautigam, the story of a young woman who is wooed by and agrees to marry a highly attractive suitor. When she visits his house which lies deep in the woods, however, she learns from an old woman that it is the house of robbers and murderers, who seduce, kill and then eat young women. The robbers return, bringing with them a girl they kill and eat, but the young woman manages to escape with the assistance of the old woman. She then exposes the guilt of her bridegroom on their wedding day by producing the severed finger of the dead girl. Although the tale serves no narrative function in progressing the film, Lene's telling of it implies that she sees it as an allegory for the way she perceives her own experience. For Sanders-Brahms this scene spoke more deeply than documentary footage of the ruins of war, to depict the fears of the mother and the German situation. Sanders-Brahms speaks of the fairy tale as representing "the primal psychic fears that women have of men...but, at the same time, this fairy tale also describes German history."⁶ Although in the film it is Lene who is raped, at the age of four Sanders-Brahms saw another woman raped by American soldiers and was terribly frightened.

Although Hans learns to survive on the battlefield, by the time he returns from war he has become an old, broken and bitter man. When he and Lene are finally reunited at the end of the war, he is unable even to make love to her. Having been a non-party member, when he finds that former Nazis, like his friend Ulrich, prosper in the new post-war society while he fails to get a promotion in his job, Hans' bitterness only increases. In an attempt to compensate for his own feelings of failure and to gain recognition of some kind he ruthlessly reasserts his authority in the domestic sphere. As Sanders-Brahms observes

⁶ Barbara Hyams. "Is the Apolitical Woman at Peace?: A Reading of the Fairy Tale in Germany, Pale Mother" *Wide Angle* v.10(3), 1989, p.40-51.

in voice-over: "The stones we cleared away were used to build houses which were worse than before...That was the return of the living rooms. Then the war began inside, once there was peace outside." Hans becomes tyrannical towards Anna, not only shouting at her but also on occasions hitting and smacking her. When Lene develops a disfiguring facial paralysis he takes her to see a dentist who insists that the only course of action is to extract Lene's teeth. Disregarding her visible distress, Hans authorizes the dentist to go ahead with the operation. We see the teeth being pulled one by one, and Lene spitting blood out of her mouth. Hans' silent acquiescing presence in the background, combined with the excruciating detail of the operation, suggests how Hans has been brutalized by his experiences, especially in his behavior towards Lene.

By exploring how Lene experiences war as a period of liberation and pleasure, and peacetime as a period of violence which silences her, the film suggests that the Second World War can also be understood as an event which disrupted the patriarchal order; whereas the return to peace resulted in a disruptive return to patriarchal power, specifically in the domestic setting. The way they experienced the war made women of Lene's generation aware of the patriarchal order and the way it oppresses women. Lene's telling of the fairy tale is therefore not only an allegory for her own experiences, but also her way of passing on to Anna her understanding of the workings of patriarchy. As if to confirm that she has learned the lesson her mother taught her, Sanders-Brahms dedicates the film to Lene and states in voice-over that she herself has never married.

"Deutschland, bleiche Mutter" offers an experience rich in historical allusions, literary allusions, and the themes of a film reflecting of the Nazi era: coming of age during the Third Reich, the war front, inner immigration, Jewish persecution, and fellow travelers. The topics covered in the last third of the film include all of the major postwar problems. The facial paralysis Lene suffers at the end of the war becomes a symbol for Germany's postwar malaise, and Lene herself becomes a coded signifier of a divided

nation; the veil that covers half of her face symbolizing the physically divided Germany, as well as a people at odds with one another and themselves, trying to understand defeat and coming to terms with the questions of responsibility and guilt. Sanders-Brahms' film is not one based on polarities, but rather dualities. Good and bad are not represented by non-Nazis and Nazis. Lene and Hans are good decent Germans who comply with their legal government. *"Deutschland, bleiche Mutter"*, is an honest remembrance that does not attempt to exonerate or accuse, but to help viewers experience and thereby gain insight into why they - the film characters, the German people, and perhaps, viewers in the audience - acquiesced so readily to policies that denied humanity.

"Europa, Europa"

Every European Jew who survived the Holocaust has an incredible story to tell. During the Holocaust the usual means and skills that humans exercised in order to ward off the world's dangers did not, in and of themselves, provide an adequate defense against the organized ferocity of the Final Solution, as it was orchestrated by Hitler and his forces. Courage, prudence, and guile were rarely enough, and every survivor's history has somewhat miraculous elements: unexpected, often inexplicable acts of kindness; providential oversights on the part of the authorities; happy accidents of timing; one-in-a-million convergences of favorable circumstances. In the time since the war's end, many of those Jews who escaped the death camps and survived the Holocaust have attempted to retell their stories either in the form of published and filmed memoirs, or fictionalized retellings.¹ Of all these tales of wonder, just-missed hiding places and impossible reprieves - none is more bizarre than that of Salomon Perel, a German Jew who spent much of the war passing for an Aryan in an elite Hitler Youth academy.

Agnieszka Holland, a female Polish director has taken the memoirs of Salomon Perel, originally published in Paris and as of yet untranslated, and made a captivating film based on the improbable narrative of a Jew's coming of age among the Nazis. Her film, *"Europa, Europa"* dramatizes young Solly's wartime experiences with sincerity and an unusually light touch for movies of this subject matter. The narrative bounds from one jaw-dropping episode to the next with the speed and the unnerving neutrality of a picaresque adventure, while at the same time Holland avoids pausing to judge the ambiguous behavior of the hero on deeper moral grounds. The ironies of Solly's situation collect around him like reflections in a circular mirror, and the viewer of *"Europa Europa"*

¹Published memoirs include *When Memory Comes*, by Saul Friedländer, *Special Treatment* by Alan Abrams, and many others. Fictionalized accounts include *The Painted Bird*, by Jerzy Kosinski and *Wartime Lies* by Louis Begley. Filmed texts include *"David"*, *"Regentropfen"* and *"Angry Harvest"*.

is left to pass judgement.

From the first images of baby Solly underwater, Holland adopts a magic-realist tone. As Solly flails and struggles in this undefined place, his voice is heard on the soundtrack telling us that he was born in Peine, Germany in 1925, and that he shares a birthday (April 20th) with Adolf Hitler. This coincidence, or perhaps cosmic irony, seems to signify literally that the hero is in some way singular, or marked for a special destiny. From this skewed "fairy-tale" prologue the movie cuts to the scene of Solly's circumcision, which the narrator claims to actually remember. The film moves swiftly forward to 1938, where Solly, on the eve of his bar mitzvah, is enjoying a leisurely bath when a rock thrown by a jeering band of young Nazi dilettantes in the street below, crashes through the bathroom window. He flees the apartment and takes refuge in an empty barrel outside on a landing. That night, the hero, who has left his clothes in the apartment, asks a neighbor to bring him something to wear. The only thing the young woman can find for him is a black coat with a swastika armband, and it is in this appalling attire that he returns home to find that his sister has been killed in the previous attack. She is laid out in the dining room, her blood dripping onto the very table at which Solly was circumcised, and around which his bar mitzvah feast was to be eaten. It is around this table, symbolic of togetherness, that the family gathers in joy and grief. These scenes are presented with a sense of poetic clarity that is haunting, and sets the mood for the rest of the movie. Holland makes us conscious from the outset of the life-sustaining significance of water and blood, and of the terrible contrast between the Nazis' uniforms, covering their wearers with the armor of totalitarian iconography, and the exposed flesh of the Reich's victims. Later in the film when circumstances force the hero to live in that uniform as if it were the full expression of himself, the viewer remains constantly aware (as well as he is) of what the clothes conceal - his circumcised penis. This is the solely irreversible and unambiguous sign of Solly's

identity as a Jew. By the time the movie ends one can understand why the hero believes that he can actually remember his circumcision as an infant. During the war his circumcision acquires the unwanted status of the defining event in his young life. The very operation meant to assure his salvation in this world in the tradition of Hebrew belief, has instead left him among the most vulnerable men on earth. The possibility of forgetting the operation that left him so cruelly unprotected is remote. It is certain that the world he lives in from 1938 to 1945 will not let him forget it. Each time he has to urinate, take a bath or a shower, he risks exposure. The prospect of a sexual encounter generates complete emotional havoc for him. His feelings alternate, excruciatingly, between intense adolescent desire and abject fear. The movie portrays the thoroughness of Nazi terror through the pained expression of teen-age boy who doesn't even dare allow himself to give in to his most hormonal instincts, to be seduced by a German woman of discernible power.

Andrea Dworkin has written on what she terms "the sexual mythology of anti-semitism".² In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler had characterized the Jewish male as a rapist, a paradigm she considers not unique to anti-Semitism, but for racism everywhere.

"Making the racially despised male into a rapist makes him into a kind of animal. It animalizes him and makes him into the kind of animal that logically has to be caged and castrated. Castration is the logical answer to this evocation of a rapist frenzy. And remember that the concern is not that he rapes women of his own kind; it's that he rapes the women of the group that is supposed to be racially superior."³

She further describes the portrait of the Jewish male based on his ownership of money, which she sees as an extension of his sexual prowess. "The valuing and conserving of

²Andrea Dworkin, "The Sexual Mythology of Anti-Semitism" in Brod, Harry, ed. *A Mensch Among Men: Explorations in Jewish Masculinity*, pp. 118.

³Ibid., p. 119.

money, using money to make wealth - like the valuing and conserving of sperm, using sperm to make wealth - demonstrates a conformity to adult male values, both sexual and economic. So when people say that Jews control the money, they are talking about a kind of male sexual power, and on that level too, the Jewish male is supposed to be dangerous to the male who defines himself as racially superior.⁴ The term "Jewess" - a designation originating in anti-Semitic mythology in czarist Russia, and often used for a Jewish female in Nazi Germany has its own implications. Dworkin says:

The Jewess exists not as a human being but as a sexual being. Just as the Jewish male is seen as a rapist - animalized, bestial - the Jewess is seen as a harlot. Hitler characterized Jewish women as sexual provocateurs really, or as whores, as sluts, but as very aggressive whores and sluts.

A very important part of anti-Semitic sexual mythology is that this very provocative, very aggressive slut is going to snare the sperm of the Aryan man - or whoever the superior man may be - and breed half-breed Jewish children. This is a contamination of the superior race, and therefore it is not surprising to find that in the concentration camps there were massive programs to sterilize Jewish women.⁵

The rite of circumcision or "Bris" has a complex symbolic meaning in the Jewish faith that is connected with a promise of fertility on the part of God to the Hebrew people. Ironically, for centuries the circumcision was used among Jews as a symbol of common identity for Jews who lacked a homeland.⁶ The Third Reich aimed to designate visible and natural differences in the pursuit of ethnic purity, however Jewishness, unlike sex and race, is invisible and thus proved to be a test for German fascism's privileging of visibility. "In

⁴Ibid.,pp.119-120

⁵Ibid.,p.120

⁶Romberg, Rosemary. *Circumcision: The Painful Dilemma*. South Hadley, MA: Bergin and Garvey Publishers, 1985. p.38

aiming to make Jewishness a physical trait, Nazi propaganda insistently portrayed a 'typical' Jewish physical type, but records show that another kind of physical typing was actually used to identify Jewish males: the Jewish and non-German custom of circumcision."⁷ Just as there were massive sterilization programs for Jewish women, it was common procedure in the concentration camps for Jewish males to be castrated. "In every corner of Nazi domination, the circumcision criterion was applied to males of all ages during roundups of Jews for liquidation. a circumcised penis could spell death for that person and everyone related to him, regardless of whether or not they were in fact Jews."⁸

The circumcised penis, physical evidence of Solly's Jewishness, is the fulcrum around which the movie's delicately balanced narrative and moral tensions are constructed. Holland uses the ever-present threat with his pants down as a means of creating suspense, but she accomplishes a great deal more than that. In the course of the film she makes us understand that the fact of Solly's circumcision is, in a sense, all that keeps him honest. If he could wish his missing bit of foreskin back into existence he could get into bed with anyone, literally and metaphorically. He is an adaptable and moldable character. Attractive, personable, good at languages, and deft at lying, he is also not burdened with an excess of internal religious zeal. Solly, a Zelig-type character, has a talent for blending in with whatever surroundings he finds himself in, and for becoming whatever the people around him want him to be. His quick instincts in sizing up changes in a situation, as well as his chameleon-like ability to change himself along with them, give him the qualities of a picaresque hero. By the time Solly is initiated into the Hitler Youth, he has already been through several identities, and has proved himself capable of playing his roles with

⁷Mizejewski, Linda. *Divine Decadence: Fascism, Female spectacle, and the Makings of Sally Bowles*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992. p.18.

⁸ Frank Rector, *The Nazi Extermination of Homosexuals*. p. 132.

conviction and enthusiasm. It is ironic that his youthful dreams were to be a movie actor. Before the occupation of Poland he spends hours in the cinema letting himself be transported to a world beyond the screen, and he wonders about the possibility and difficulty of "being" something other than oneself. He himself proves what the one Nazi officer who befriends him proclaims (he himself a former actor) - "it is easier to be someone else than yourself."

After the death of Solly's sister, his family fled to the Polish city of Lodz. Upon hearing that Hitler's troops were moving East, Solly and his older brother Isaac were ordered by their parents to pack up and head as far east toward the Soviet Union as possible. The movie shows a few pointed scenes of Solly's life in a Soviet school, after he accidentally becomes separated from his brother. He becomes a star pupil and is accepted, despite his petit-bourgeois origins, into the most prestigious Communist youth organization, the *Komsomol*. He stands before an assembly of his student comrades and gives a fervent, impeccably Stalinist oration on the evils of religion. After the Germans attack and he has been taken prisoner, he renounces his Communist ideology and reincarnates himself on the spot, as an orphaned "pure" German, an Aryan child wandering in the barbaric eastern wilderness. His captors are so charmed and moved by his story that they ignore his lack of identity papers. Holland has indicated the significance of this moment in the determination of his final outcome, by the filming of the sun shining through the clouds. By turning himself into the hero of a Nazi fairy tale, Solly stirs the tender emotions of the *Wehrmacht* soldiers and earns the privilege of accompanying them, as translator and mascot, on the march through Russia. He becomes very popular, so much so that the commander of the unit wants to adopt him as his son and model of the Nazi ideal.

When Solly arrives at the Nazi officer training academy he has already had plenty

of practice in conforming to the expectations of totalitarian institutions. We have seen how skillful he is at disarming his enemies, how proficient he is at using his youth and beauty and glibness to dazzle and distract his pursuers. While putting on his uniform for the first time, Solly breaks into a grin and does a comic little soft-shoe dance in front of the mirror. On the one hand it is as if he is loosening himself up for the twenty-four-hour-a-day performance he knows he is going to have to give, and on the other hand indicating the degree to which in uniform his sense of self-identification is altered. This frisky, parodic dance symbolizes everything that is most appealing in him, as well as everything that is most disturbing. The situation he is now in will not allow him to sustain a playful attitude toward his latest act of impersonation. His youthful delight in getting away with something is attenuated by the intolerable pressure of never being able to rest. He must play his part ceaselessly and without intermission.

In these circumstances, which would test even the strongest, most fully formed identity, this malleable teenager is often tempted to resolve his emotional tensions by surrendering to his role, losing himself in the embrace of the enemy's culture and ideology. In one terrifying scene, the film shows us the brown-shirted students' response to the news of the German Army's defeat in Russia. They weep, and Solly, giving in to the collective emotion of the moment, weeps with them. His desire to reduce the cognitive dissonance of his existence, to live a "normal" life in the perverse and monolithic universe of the *Reich*, reaches a heartbreaking climax when he attempts, in the privacy of a bathroom stall, to alter the unalterable and erase the last vestige of his Jewishness. Working painfully, with bits of thread, he tries to extend the flesh of his penis into something resembling a foreskin. Unfortunately his Jewish predecessors had years earlier added a second step to the circumcision procedure to prevent the possibility of becoming uncircumcised.⁹

⁹ During the holocaust various surgical procedures of "uncircumcision" were attempted as a life-preserving measure that would enable the Jewish male to hide his identity. See Rosemary Romberg's *Circumcision: the Painful Dilemma*.

These scenes of self-mutilation and exhausted surrender to the impulse to annihilate oneself in uniformity, are almost unbearably intimate. It seems obvious that Solly has undertaken this grotesque experiment in part so he can satisfy a fundamental human appetite: he wants to sleep with his girlfriend, yet fears her instant repulsion of him, as well as being turned in to the authorities. Lena, considered the cutest of the girls serving at the school, as well as the hardest to catch, is a passionately committed Nazi and a rabid anti-Semite. She wants to fulfill her "duty" and bear a child for the *Führer*. Holland, sympathetic and yet pitilessly objective, makes these passages seem as a kind of apotheosis of the ironies in Solly Perel's extraordinary story. In all the art and history of the Holocaust, there is no clearer image of the cost of survival, or of the unnatural forms that even this most basic instinct can sometimes take.

It is during such moments that we see the hero of "*Europa, Europa*" as a creature immersed in ambiguities, not drowning yet never surfacing either. He is a young man who can't allow himself simply to be who he is. And yet considering that he has no one with whom he can really talk, this is not an unlikely circumstance. His real identity becomes trapped in his mind and symbolized by his circumcision. At this most formative stage of his life he is only able to share his feelings with one of his fellow officers who treats him as a little brother and later dies in battle, and ironically, Lena's mother. Both proclaim that there are actually two types of Germans, the implication being that they represent the "good German", despite the masquerade for their own security. As Lena's mother says, "It is not possible to understand the youth anymore, they are different." - a full testimony to the power and "success" of Hitler's plan. In dangerous circumstances Solly manages to reach maturity, and that alone is a victory, but his sense of self is stillborn. At the end of the film he remains an elusive and undefinable entity. It is as if he is still a boy, forever on the eve of his bar mitzvah. He is not quite ready to take the step to

commitment and responsibility, regardless of the circumstances that may confront him.

In the final scene of the movie we see the real Salomon Perel. He is a bald, sixty-five-year-old man standing on the bank of a river in Israel, where he has been living since the war. As the camera rests on him in close-up, we try to read his features, to find in them some clue to the meaning of his almost inconceivable experience. Like most faces however, Perel's is ultimately inscrutable. He appears mournful and somewhat dazed, but it is difficult to attribute even these qualities to him with any certainty. As outsiders in time and circumstance it is too easy to project one's own emotions and expectations onto him, as the Soviets and the Nazis did when he was young.

To imagine how this man could sort out all that he has lived through is a task of impossibility. Several times in the course of the film Holland uses a filmic style that presumes to enter young Solly's dreams. These dream sequences are grimly comic jumbles of images and ideas from the disparate experiences that have imposed themselves on his consciousness. The action is filmed at a delayed speed and the color has the appearance of a subtle haze. Hitler and Stalin dance with each other, surrounded by a corps of Soviet baby ballerinas. In another scene, Hitler hides from his own secret police in the closet of the Perels' apartment in Germany, then turns into one of Solly's *Wehrmacht* friends and is shot. Solly's dreams are no more legible, and hardly any more preposterous, than his waking life.

The film breaks through this spectacle in one pointed and nightmarish metaphoric passage - one that isn't a dream at all. Although the filming imposes a dreamlike quality, it is clear that this horror is real. Solly, on leave from the academy, travels to Lodz and rides through the ghetto in a tramcar with windows whitewashed to shield the passenger's eyes from the ghetto's horrors. Through a tiny gap he scratches in the paint he peers at this taboo spectacle, of which he and we are granted only a partial and fragmented view. At

one point he sees a woman disappearing into an alleyway who he believes is his mother. For a brief moment he recognizes the embroidery of an exotic bird on the back of her coat, the last image seen of his mother as he left Poland at the beginning of the film. What is actually visible is a shapeless, barely animated heap of rags moving slowly through a landscape of utter misery. This one episode of Solly's experience reveals a greater truth. If this Jewish boy in disguise can be the archetypal German cadet, then in response every ghetto woman can be the archetypal abandoned mother. This painful failed encounter cuts through the film's tendency to build the narrative on frequent anecdotes and "miraculous" resolutions. Janet Maslin has described the story as "a linear, episodic story, punctuated by this departure [from his parents] and many other sad partings"¹⁰ He also relinquishes the option to enter the ghetto himself in order to search further for his mother. The ghetto is closed territory to all but the "undesirables" and any attempt to gain access would also mean giving up his "rights" as a Hitler Youth, as well as the certain discovery of his own Jewishness. His mother's son, the Jew who has managed to pass himself off as a Nazi hero, can do nothing to alter her fate. This response may be read as immoral behavior on his part, or more likely the painful realization that survival was now the only game he was playing.

During a round-table discussion with members of the media, the real-life Perel was questioned about his morality. "She [the reporter] asked about morality," recalled Mr. Perel. "What is there in this situation about morality? You think only about how to survive. If I had shot others, that would be different. When the Russian Army came near Berlin and the SS officers took off their uniforms and changed into the clothes of death camp inmates, now that was immoral."¹¹ The great paradox lies more in at whom the

¹⁰ Maslin, Janet. "Europa, Europa" review. *The New York Times*, 28. June 1991. pC10.

¹¹ Engelberg, Stephen. "A Life Stranger Than the Movie it Inspired" *The New York Times*, 19. Feb. 1992. p.B1.

question of morality is being directed - the persecuted rather than the aggressor. Perel's story of survival is different only in where and how he evaded the authorities, but he was only one of the many Jews who obtained false identities or hid out in Catholic monasteries. Mr. Perel, who unquestionably survived the war on the strength of his icy nerve, modestly casts himself more as "everyman" than hero. "I had an instinct for survival. I hid my documents in a hole in the ground I made with my shoe. I knew that if they realized I was a Jew I was certainly dead." When he recalls his encounter with the German troops after fleeing the attack on the orphanage he says, "It was the single moment when I thought about what to say. After that, everything that happened was inevitable. That was the important moment, my answer, and what came after was a consequence. I decided my future, and after I felt like I was an extra in my own life."¹²

The way the director tells the story of Salomon Perel in "*Europa, Europa*", no fuller explanation of his unlikely survival seems necessary, or even desirable. In the shimmering golden light of the movie's final shots, the old man on the riverbank looks faintly unreal. He could be a mirage, or the product of an illusionary arrangement of mirrors. Whatever or whoever he is, he is undeniably there before our eyes. Agnieszka Holland portrays him to us as a pure, absurd miracle of history.

Constant themes in Holland's work come from her own expulsion from Poland and life as a political dissident. Agnieszka Holland was born in Warsaw, Poland in 1948 to a Jewish father and a Polish mother. She went to Prague in 1966 to attend film school. Her father, who had fought in the Soviet Army during the war, died when Holland was only thirteen. His death was officially recorded as one of natural causes, although those who knew him had plenty of reason to believe it was a politically motivated murder. She has said that her young ideals were a desire to in some way forget the past, realizing that

¹² Ibid.

something terrible had happened that would influence the rest of her life, and that having the name Holland was like carrying a mark on her forehead. "When I went to Prague I was interested in pure aesthetics, and against political nonsense. It seemed to me that an artist should not bother with politics, that art was one thing and politics another."¹³ But the Prague uprising showed her a collective enthusiasm that was inspiring, free of ideology and beautiful in its naïveté.

Suddenly one finds oneself on the street, with other people, and your hearts are all beating the same way. At the same time, as always, I resisted all fanaticism and ideologies. But the marvelous thing was that the feeling of togetherness was based on fundamental emotions such as self-respect; happiness that people can express themselves freely...¹⁴

Later, when the revolution failed, she learned of human weakness and the capacity for betrayal, and she became a pessimist: "Solidarity never had such innocence. It was quite cynical. We knew the tanks would come, that was the whole point."¹⁵ Holland was later prevented from working by the Polish state, and in this period of involuntary solitude learned to be alone. In 1970, she was sent to prison for working for a dissident publication and consequently spent two weeks in solitary confinement. "I found an integrity under these conditions. It was very medieval but I could take it" Holland's remarks are her attempt to explain how she deals with being forced to work alone, even now that she can claim success as a filmmaker. Her initial work was under the tutelage of Polish film director Andrzej Wajda, and she continues to collaborate with him on certain scripts. Her success has changed her, and yet her integrity and desires to work with the troublesome

¹³ Peter Brunette, "Lessons from the Past: an Interview with Agnieszka Holland" *Cineaste* vol.15(1), 1986, pp.15-17.

¹⁴ Andrew Short, "Poland's Lost Generation", *Index on Censorship*, May 1982, p.17.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.16.

past of her childhood and the history of her native Poland are in some way, through the cinema, her personal attempt "to find truth and beauty in a gray world."¹⁶

Holland calls films that recall the past through the subject of World War II and Nazism "pebbles in the water of our consciousness".¹⁷ For her "the Second World War - in its interior aspects, not the obvious external ones - is the greatest mystery of our century. For [Holland] and for Poland in general, it's never been explained or resolved."¹⁸ Until the mystery is solved, or someone steps forward to shoulder the guilt, it is a subject of the past to which certain interested and conscientious individuals will always return. "The greatest fault of most films about the Nazis is that they always show that it's others who are responsible. For me, the most powerful realization concerning the war is that each one of us could have been responsible, or even guilty. There's also a certain paradox involved - in life, the truth is always hidden."¹⁹

"Europa, Europa" proved to be a huge critical and box-office success, everywhere but in Germany. The film was acclaimed by critics in the United States as one which "accomplishes what every film about the Holocaust seeks to achieve: It brings new immediacy to the outrage by locating specific, wrenching details that transcend cliché."²⁰ In Germany, it generated a huge publicity scandal over the German refusal to nominate the film for an Oscar, which it most probably would have won. The controversy occurred in the spring of 1992, when the German jury responsible for nominating films for the Academy Award refused to nominate *"Europa, Europa"*. Members of Germany's film elite, including filmmakers Volker Schlöndorff, Michael Verhoeven, Wolfgang Petersen, and Margarethe von Trotta, as well as actors and actresses Armin Mueller-Stahl, Senta

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 17.

¹⁷ Peter Brunette, p. 16.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Maslin, Janet. "Europa, Europa" review. *The New York Times*, 28. June 1991. pC10.

Berger, and Hanna Schygulla, took out ads in trade publications asking that the United States jury nominate the film for awards in as many categories as possible, in an attempt to in some way make reparations for the slighting of the film by the German jury. Holland accused the panel members of being influenced by the film's historical theme: "They hate this subject, they really hate it."²¹

The German jury's decision was based on two arguments. They felt the film was not a true German production, having been a joint venture between France and Germany, and included an international cast. Furthermore, jury members felt that the film's quality was not up to Hollywood's standards. One member referred to it as "trash." Another called it "embarrassing."²² The film's co-producer, Arthur Brauner, countered the first argument by stating that the film was shot in German and had thirteen German actors, including the main character. In addition, eight German writers had contributed to the script.²³ The controversy intensified when the film won the Golden Globe award from Los Angeles film critics. Nevertheless, German critics found the film "voyeuristic" and "unbelievable" as well as "opportunistic and cynical".²⁴ Andreas Kilb, a film critic in Hamburg, offered his own explanation for the negative response on the part of the Germans: "In Germany it takes a twenty-five-letter word - *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* - to express the idea of coming to terms with the past. For "*Europa, Europa*", the message came across in four: History is bunk."²⁵

²¹ Peter Buchka, *German Tribune*, no. 1501 Jan. 31. 1992, p. 10.

²² *Deutschland Nachrichten*, Jan. 24, 1992, p. 7.

²³ Rebecca Lieb, "German Panel Stands by Europa Decision," *Variety*, Feb. 10. 1992, p. 15.

²⁴ *Deutschland Nachrichten*, Jan. 24, 1992, p. 7.

²⁵ Andreas Kilb. "Schonk" rev. *Sight and Sound* May 1992, p.5)

"Peppermint Frieden"

Children are born into the world, for a fleeting moment happy and un-self-conscious. Immediately, however, their minds begin to be shaped by their surroundings, and by those who exert authority over them and provide their fundamental security; parents, teachers, clergy and other adult figures. These "grown-ups" pass their own attitudes and beliefs on to the children without consideration for how the life of a child may ultimately be affected. Accordingly, these adults probably received the same treatment in their youth. *"Peppermint Frieden"*, by Marianne Rosenbaum, provides a very thoughtful treatment of how truth is hidden from the young in an effort to protect them, yet ultimately scarring their mental well-being

The right to a happy childhood is a dearly held belief. Adults in their consideration of childhood, look in two directions: first, to their own personal childhood and second, to the childhood of their offspring or of other youngsters that they have come to know well. Remembrance of one's own childhood becomes a basis for defining childhood, and adults have always had a tendency to look back on their early years with a sense of nostalgia and tenderness. In the popular conception, the years of childhood innocence are happy ones, characterized by simplicity, spontaneity and beauty; they are supposedly the best years of one's life. The pains of childhood - feelings of insecurity, doubt and loneliness are often acknowledged by adults, but these feelings become muted with time. Thus, the bad of childhood frequently gets lost in a magical memory of a special time that was.

In *Kindheitsmuster*, Christa Wolf poses the question "Wie sind wir so geworden, wie wir heute sind?". The generation born during the last years of the war and immediately following the war are now grown, and many have children of their own. They look back on their childhood in an attempt to answer this question. The German

history presents an extreme example of the suppression of unhappy, destructive and troublesome beginnings, and it is this very theme that Rosenbaum confronts in "*Peppermint Frieden*", and handles in a very sensitive way. "*Peppermint Frieden*" looks at war, history and politics through the eyes of children, constructing its perspective of the aftermath of the Second World War in Germany. The film is seen from the viewpoint of Marianne, a young girl who moves with her mother and father from the city to a remote country village in the American Zone by the time the war ends. To Marianne and her friends, the world appears confused and mysterious, mediated as it is by adults dedicated to hiding the truth from them. In Marianne's eyes, the events of the war appear fragmented, filtered through the efforts of her mother and other adults to protect her from what is really happening. Faced with barriers to knowledge, the children construct an imaginary world in which the actions and words of adults take on new meanings. The opening scenes show the children involved in a burlesque-type performance, using gas-masks and other "toys of war". They try to make sense of the strange world of adults through games and fantasies. Seeing her father tearing Hitler's picture from his school text books and burning it during de-Nazification, Marianne imitates him by tearing her own storybook, to shreds and burning it, an action that points out the repression involved in destroying the past rather than understanding it. The book she destroys is *Der Struwwelpeter*, a children's storybook that threatens children into good behavior by portraying the dire consequences of misconduct and disobedience of adult authority. Here as elsewhere, the film uses the child's viewpoint as a surreal commentary on the adult world, constantly bringing it into question.

This world has three main aspects for Marianne. The post-war American presence in Germany, bringing with it luxury goods previously scarce, peppermint chewing gum, and the promise of peace and freedom, is personified in the ever-smiling, gum-chewing

American soldier known as Mr. Frieden (Mr. Peace). Mr. Frieden, idealized in a movie-star image as played by Peter Fonda, becomes the children's hero, giving them rides in his big car and sharing seemingly endless supplies of peppermint chewing gum. His affair with Nilla Grünapfel, a young village woman, provides a fascinating source of voyeuristic fantasy and speculation. In sharp contrast to this, the repressive religious doctrine taught by the village priest stresses the sin and guilt attached to sexual desire and knowledge, a doctrine whose myths of suffering and atonement exert a powerful hold on the children's imagination. Finally, with the escalation of the Cold War, the atom bomb looms, threatening imminent destruction on a huge scale. In Marianne's mind, these three aspects are closely linked, mingling with her memories of the war, producing dreams which work through her fears and the questions she cannot ask adults directly. If she were to ask these questions the answers given would very likely not be true. In her fantasies, Marianne reworks the elements of her life in bizarre new combinations that demand that politics, sexuality, religion and war be looked at from a fresh perspective. In bringing these issues to the screen, Rosenbaum is asserting her feminist viewpoint. One gets the sense that she is making a connection between the very cause of war and the tendency that develops to view the personal body as an enemy, as shown in the film through the religious teachings of the priest.

Formally, the film owes much to surrealism in its use of strange juxtapositions, its play with language to shift meanings usually taken for granted, and its emphasis on the link between sexual desire and knowledge. Its use of wit to play off the adult world against the children's experience of it is very effective in producing an anti-war message. Often anti-war films make their statement by appealing to those in power on behalf of the powerless victims whose sacrifice bears witness to the futility of war. "*Peppermint Frieden*" prefers to highlight contradictions in the ideologies that sustain and justify war: the rhetoric of

'peace' and 'freedom' used to give credence to imperialist ventures, for example, or the claims of religion to have Truth on its side while at the same time preaching the saintly virtue of self-sacrifice.

Marianne's final fantasy works through these contradictions as she and her friend Elfriede resuscitate Jesus, reconcile the Russians and Americans, and extract a promise from Mr. Frieden that he will never drop the Bomb. Marianne takes credit in her own mind for saving the world from nuclear disaster, only to have her fantasy shattered when she hears news on the radio of the American involvement in Korea. Her fantasy of peace is destroyed by the very technological tool that gave her hope for the future. If fantasy cannot prevail against the harsh reality of power politics, however, it can still provide the means for articulating the desire for change. "*Peppermint Frieden*" uses the positive, subversive aspects of fantasy, directing its irony with remarkable sureness at its targets: the ignorance, repression and hypocrisy upon which fear and prejudice feed and war thrive - that which the children see and what adults would lead them to believe.

In an interview with Jane Root, Rosenbaum expressed her memories and the way in which she was influenced to make "*Peppermint Frieden*". The transcript of one section has been included in full for its candidness:

...I was born in Leitmeritz in Bohemia in 1940. On the other side of the river to where we lived was the Theresienstadt concentration camp. As children we always heard people talking about Theresienstadt, but we never knew exactly what it was. The adults spoke of it constantly, the word was always in their mouths, but if the children should ask...well, nothing came out. My grandmother was a little strange, and always cleaned her windows at night when the moon was out. She told me that she saw lights in the night at Theresienstadt, things moving. Later I found out that this was when the transports came to take people away to other concentration camps, to Auschwitz. Theresienstadt, you see, was a

'good' camp. No one was actually killed there, although many people died there, of course.

We children used to go tobogganing down a slope near where I lived. At the bottom, there was a steep drop and after that what the adults described as a 'brick factory'. It was really a crematorium. The people of Theresienstadt had worked to build it, and then when they became ill and died through overwork they were burnt there. And even though they were not actually killed, it is very strange for children to hear words whispered about death and the burning of people. For many years after that I always felt strange about houses which are made of brick, as in England. I was always afraid when I saw them, although I didn't know why. Then when I was a student in what is now Czechoslovakia, I went to Leitmeritz again and suddenly remembered about the so-called 'brick factory'. I realized my fears, understood the half-truths that I had been told. It is out of those kinds of memories that *Peppermint Frieden* came. Mine is a film about the birth of guilt.¹

The film qualities and techniques employed by Rosenbaum are essential in the creation of the meaning. She uses the camera from different angles and levels to emphasize who is the speaker, versus who is the receiver. The camera is almost exclusively at the eye level of the child. As viewer we return to childhood proportions and the world that is always above us. In the eyes of a child the world is disproportionately large. Children are always looking up to parents, teachers, they clergy - adults in any role, and are left to confront this "superiority" - whether merited or not. Thus the camera is usually low and the viewer too is put in the position of looking up to authority. To convey the power of doctrine, seen here in the preachings of the priest, a low-angle shot looking up towards the pulpit, is employed. This variation in the level of the camera enables the filmmaker to clearly depict the separation of the adult and child worlds.

¹Jane Root, "Memories of Childhood, Dreams of Freedom" int. with Marianne Rosenbaum, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, vol. 52 (613), 1985, pp. 41-2.

Ultimately the harshness of the adult war overplays the children's feelings, and thus one understands how the children were overlooked. When the children ride in the car with Mr. Frieden everyone looks at one another. During the scene where Mr. Frieden and Nilla are fraternizing, they are seen by the camera, behind the door with the children. It is not their intimacy that we notice, but the children's perception of their happiness and laughter. Why is fraternizing "wrong" if it brings this joy. This is an affirmation of life that is forbidden, one that is in stark contrast to war, which has been permitted. In *Peppermint Frieden* the so-called wisdom or true knowledge of those who are "superior" serves to make children feel guilty about everything they do, including feeling guilty about identification with their own bodies. As personified in the father, this is a world in which questions that have yes or no answers can be answered. Anything that requires a show of emotion, or evokes any visible feeling remains unanswered.

"Peppermint Frieden" is an example of filmmaking that has a tendency to examine how their protagonists experience or perceive things as they can, by the way in which they represent what those protagonists experience. This method undertakes what Maya Deren has called a "vertical" investigation of a situation. The film "probes the ramifications of the moment, and is concerned in a sense not with what is occurring, but with what it feels like or what it means."² In Germany, as elsewhere, the nature of women's artistic expression has been intensely debated - not least among women filmmakers and viewers. This discussion has furthered the notion that there is indeed a characteristically feminine way of looking, and thus makes necessary the development of a feminine aesthetic.³

Peppermint Frieden is very much like an autobiography for Rosenbaum, but it is dramatized. It is her life, and the lives of others as well. There was a real Mr. Frieden who came to her village, gave the children chewing gum and made love with a woman called

²Amos Vogel, "Poetry and Film: A Symposium" *Film Culture* no. 29, p. 171.

³Julia Knight, *Women and the New German Cinema*, 1992, p. 123.

Nilla.⁴ Rosenbaum has told her story while also making a statement of her own feminist position.

At first children are happy and unselfconscious. I was like that when I was a child: the children are like that in the film. But then the police and the priests come along and make us guilty about our bodies, about everything. We become strange, have strange fantasies, play strange games. They make you look at your body as an enemy. When that happens, you start looking for enemies all over the world. In the war it was the Jews and the Communists and the gypsies. Now in Germany it is the Turkish workers and the Russians. This is not separate from the way that we divide our bodies into different zones.⁵

For Rosenbaum, the body is thought of as head and limbs, with a void in between. She extends this notion to form a connection between war and destructive sexuality. "If we could each be one person, with all the parts of our bodies integrated, we would never want to destroy ourselves, or destroy other people by going to war."⁶ Although for her this connection is very logical, she is aware it is not very popular. The discussion of our sexuality and human need for love and compassion, whether in heterosexual or homosexual relations, remains a great social taboo. One viewer offended by the film's subject suggested she would be better off making a film about imperialism. "We can talk about politics, we can talk about everything except the gulf at the centre of our bodies. To people like him, sexuality is still bad and better not discussed."⁷

In Rosenbaum's view, "*Peppermint Frieden*" could never have been made by a man, for she sees it as a film about the role of men, and about masculinity. "I ask what does this mean for them? What does it mean for us? Do men help women, or do they

⁴Root, p. 41.

⁵Ibid., p. 42.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

control them?"⁸ The father figure present at the beginning of the film is a reflection of the father Rosenbaum didn't see in her own childhood. Having suffered from the absence of his love, which he states, but is not there to give creates a troubled relationship. Although Rosenbaum's view of steps that might be taken to prevent war may seem to come through rose-colored glasses, there is indeed a great truth behind this thought. "The father goes to war to defend the women. But we needed him at home, not fighting in Russia. When the war came to our land he was not there to defend us. But do we need defenders anyway? I think not. We need lovers not defenders."⁹

In contrast, the American, as played by Peter Fonda, symbolizes the new lover. "He stands for the possibility of a new kind of love, the kind we all desire. In my film and from my point of view, it is the women who have desire. They need to live and love but they are not allowed to do it."¹⁰ Because in "*Peppermint Frieden*", the forbidding of fraternization takes this lover away from these women, Mr. Frieden stands only for this possibility for love and desire for love, not the reality. Peter Fonda's acceptance of this role was in large part due to his empathic understanding of the story. "When I told him the story he liked it because he also had big problems with his body and with love. His family was especially a problem for him. He understood the self-destruction in the film, the connections between a lack of love and war."¹¹

"*Peppermint Frieden*" mingles the traumas of childhood with the laughter of humor, the acting on depraved and perverted innocence, as well as mystery and farce. The films many elements of humor and disguise embody both wonderful and horrible, as seen through the eyes of Marianne. On the one hand there is a doctor disguised as a rabbit, and yet the mysterious deportation of her father to the Russian front. Marianne is never able to

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid.

experience life with any certainty. The film is a constant interplay between two qualities: burlesque and horrible, sinister and grotesque. Like heads or tails, the two feelings are contradictions of the one same emotion for a child in the apprenticeship of life - ignorance and deception.

"The Ties That Bind"

The process of looking into the past is not unusual as one grows older. As one reflects on one's childhood and the stories heard from parents and grandparents, these stories begin to take on a relevance that was not possible as a younger child possessing a limited vision of history. History was what books were written about, but certainly not about any one of personal acquaintance or relation. In *"The Ties That Bind"*, Su Friedrich has looked at her origins through her mother, who witnessed the rise of fascism as a young woman in Germany and lived there until the end of the Second World War. Friedrich's film is at once an examination of this past, as well as "a moving and courageous tribute from a child to her mother's beleaguered memory."¹

"The Ties That Bind", made in 1984, is a scrutiny of both a mother/daughter relationship and demands of national identity. Since the nation delineating this identity is Germany in the 1930's and 40's, the problematic of nationalism are greatly intensified. For Friedrich, the ties that bind are not only the putative benevolence of motherhood, but also the repressive dictates of the Fatherland. Friedrich, born in 1950 in the United States, to a German Catholic mother and an American serviceman, traveled to Germany in 1982, to shoot footage of the traditional sites of monumental oppression - most notably Dachau and the Berlin Wall. She juxtaposes these scenes with archival footage of wartime Ulm, her mother's hometown, and accompanies the whole visual piece with her mother's photographic and verbal accounts of the Nazi regime under which she grew up, the Allied bombings and her marriage to an American and its aftermath.

¹ Erika Suderburg, *Afterimage* July 23, 1988, p. 15.

Although the mother's telling of life under Nazism would implore one to believe that individual rebellion or resistance was virtually impossible, Friedrich seems less comfortable with this response. The site of Ulm as the base of the resistance group *Die Weiße Rose* being the same as Lore Bucher's hometown leaves the unrealized hope that there was an alternative. We are told in no uncertain terms that group action and the possibilities for the unassociated individual were two completely different entities. Su Friedrich's film style challenges the assumptions of the traditional documentary, and through its construction explores how history is created through individual memory, and raises questions of both personal as well as political responsibility. Barbara Kruger has described the film as "a scrutiny of both a mother/daughter relationship and the complex demands of national identity."²

Friedrich has devoted much of her filmmaking to the quandaries of her personal life, including most recently the film *"Sink or Swim"*, her attempt to come to terms with the barriers between her and the father she saw little of after he divorced her mother, as well as *"Gently Down the Stream"* and *"Rules of the Road"* - the tale of a failed relationship). She uses an avant-garde cinematic style as means of paying notice to compelling contemporary social issues, exposing in some way her own connection to them, while at the same time penetrating the barriers within herself that had developed as a result of her parents' broken marriage. Although her style may be termed "experimental cinema", at the same time they are quite accessible to the interpretation of the viewer. In an appearance at the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston in January 1993, with her most recent films, she expressed her desire to keep her films accessible, while continuing to develop her experimental style. Although the juxtaposition in her films of obscure images and narrative, and in most cases nondiegetic soundtracks challenge the viewer, her careful

² Barbara Kruger, *Art Forum*. October 1984, p. 89.

editing succeeds in constructing a meaning. Her choice to work in black and white is quite simply due to her extensive experience as a still photographer and thus was a medium that felt comfortable to her, however, the somber tones do enhance her films and their effectiveness. As critics have noted, although the variety of Friedrich's imagery is great, the barrage effect of dialectic montage is avoided through careful editing. The various sources of visual and auditory imagery create a stream of information within which individual threads periodically intersect in suggestive ways.³

Friedrich has said that in making *"The Ties That Bind"*, she "was committed to investigating the areas of German complicity and resistance".⁴ In doing so, she also examines the conflict, complicity and resistance of her own mother. "In effect, the film is like a court transcript of a mother brought to trial (albeit kindly) by her own daughter." ⁵ The guilt of the Nazi regime is without doubt, but the mother's ability to speak the truth is clearly under investigation. Lore Bucher speaks only in response to her daughter's questioning, but the interrogator's voice is barely heard, as if it almost silently feeds its queries to the defendant. Her mother gives voice to Friedrich's filmwork, as the filmmaker remains the silent child. She does not, however, remain completely silent, speaking instead through visual images. As her mother narrates a tale of failed opposition to the Nazis, hands are seen riffling through the pages of *The New York Times Magazine*, drawing mustaches on the male fashion models. Later hands are seen perusing a stack of mail from various antinuclear causes, and organizations such as Amnesty International. At this moment, Friedrich is seen questioning her own political and moral consciousness, perhaps realizing that she too may be guilty of passiveness.

³ Scott MacDonald, *Journal of Film and Video*, 44(1-2), 1992, p31-41.

⁴ Kruger, *Art Forum*, October 1984, p. 89.

⁵ Ibid.

Multiple imagery elements are used in the construction of *"The Ties That Bind"*. Friedrich has combined her own 16mm footage shot of her mother in her home, and daily environment, with the hand-held Super-8 footage that Friedrich collected when she traveled to Germany to visit Ulm, Dachau, and Berlin in 1982, as well as 16mm material from her own participation in an antinuclear demonstration in upper New York state, and the great March for Peace, held in New York City in the summer of 1983. She has utilized several other types of footage as well, including home movies of her mother and father during the early years of their marriage, archival news footage from the war portraying the ultimate destruction after the war, imagery recorded directly from a television screen, and various other selected still photographs, including the woman dancing around waving an American flag. The questions Friedrich asks are scratched into various frames, giving the effect that the questions are not only hers, but also the viewers. They must be read, as there is no sound, and thus engage the viewer in the questioning process. The questions included are as such: "So you did know about the camps?", "What did you do after the war?" , "Couldn't anyone do anything to help?". In answering these questions Lore Bucher reveals in how many ways and to what extent Nazism was worked into the lives of the German people, as well as how non acceptance of Nazism completely disturbed life.

The majority of what is seen in the film does not serve to document or dramatize what Bucher saying. Friedrich uses the sound of her mother's voice, including the changes in tone and inflections, chuckles and sighs, to contextualize the visual images. Friedrich also uses scratched texts (in addition to the questions) to give additional information, provide coherency, and to add emphasis in certain sections. As the film begins the voice of Lore Bucher is heard describing her childhood during the rise of fascism, and later her first awareness of the Nazis and Hitler. The photographed imagery is a subjective camera shot emerging from the darkness of a tunnel, to light at the other end. This may be read both as

the developing awareness of the mother, as well as Friedrich's coming out of the dark into the light about her mother's, and therefore her own, past. This birth of awareness and growing consciousness is most also likely meant to symbolize the birth of the Third Reich. Bucher says that "that man" (Hitler) came just at the moment when the Germans were "looking for some way out of their total and utter misery" during the depression following World War I. The next shot is of a hawk attacking its prey (an image that is repeated later), clearly an expression of the victimization of those who did not give totally of themselves to the Nazi effort, and the vulnerability of Germany when the Allied troops came in to "liberate" the country. The film shows someone construct a tiny house from a build-it-yourself kit as we listen to the mother's story of her own childhood. This ties in with Friedrich's search for her mother's house in Ulm, a search strongly portrayed through the use of a flashlight beam darting about on a darkened map of the town. This constant focus on "the house" also suggests its place as the site of women's presence, and their interiority (women and their role within structures). Finally the miniature house is smashed by a marauding pair of boots, and this shot is followed by one of soldiers marching.

One of the more significant effects of this interwoven imagery and sound, from both past and present in Germany and the United States, is the way in which the viewer is reminded that the struggles of now and then are a part of the same mind-set and historical process. Soon after Bucher exclaims, "That people can live and be so brutal!" When referring to the allied invasion, Friedrich reveals a sign near the Seneca Army Depot that is not clearly legible, but is delineated by a circle around it, and a subsequent scratched text telling what was on the sign: "Nuke them till they glow, then shoot them in the dark." This disturbing image serves not only to illustrate that the sorts of people who enjoy the brutalities of war exist quite openly in our society, but also that it was the development of

the nuclear bomb that brought down the Third Reich. This nuclear technology also followed the Americans home making the existence of such depots a necessity. That the Allies were/are, as Lore Bucher explains, "no better than anybody else" concerning their potential for inflicting torture and destruction, is clearly implicated by the crowd of flag-waving and club-wielding demonstrators protesting the women's encampment at Seneca.

Throughout the film Friedrich makes quite clear her intent to point out the parallels between military growth in Germany in the 1930's and that in the United States in the 1980's. However, one would be naive to believe she is not making a greater statement regarding gender - what was it like to grow up as woman in Germany then, as compared to grow up as a woman in the United States now. It seems impossible to examine Nazism without noticing how the ideology created very clear roles and expectations based on gender difference. As Linda Mizejewski has pointed out, the sexual politics and practices of the Third Reich were obsessively focused on motherhood, "Not just in the institution of 'pure' Aryanism, but also as an inevitable result of the absolute sexual polarization by which a 'natural' order could emerge." ⁶ The Third Reich saw this ideology of a "natural sexual order as the beginning of a better world order. "The mandate for a pure, essentialist motherhood that would save the world from totalitarianism is a continuation of the Nazi totalitarian doctrine of the sacred maternal - whereby Mother's Day in the Third Reich was officially connected to a celebration of the Aryan heritage." ⁷ (the birthday of Adolf Hitler's mother) This ideology is not unlike that which romanticized motherhood in the 1950's text *The Modern Woman* by Lundberg and Farnham, a time when the "modern woman" was considered by many to be a major postwar social problem. According to Lundberg and Farnham, "the neurosis of modern society stems from the neurosis/unhappiness of the

⁶ Mizejewski, Linda. *Divine Decadence: Fascism, Female spectacle, and the Makings of Sally Bowles*, 1992. p.118.

⁷ Ibid.

woman, either in her refusal to be maternal or in her faulty mothering."⁸ The refusal of woman to acknowledge her true nature, motherhood, and the subsequent "masculinization of woman" are thus responsible for all twentieth-century evil - or what Lundberg/Farnham call "unhappiness": feminism, fascism, alcoholism, juvenile delinquency, and so on, as defined in a series of appendices to the text.. The agenda of Lundberg/Farnham that was proposed in the United States following the war called for "the elimination by law of childless women from some public spheres; they should not be allowed to teach children on the ground of theoretical (usually real) emotional incompetence. Mothers would receive cash subsidies for each child; women would naturally be drawn to the nurturing professions as opposed to the more masculine areas of business, law, mathematics, technology. The ensuing population problem would be solved by imposing public controls to prevent the breeding of certain strains."⁹

Lore Bucher describes the Nazi Cross of Honor that was awarded to women who stayed out of the workforce and had many children, and declares that her own mother would (rather have died) than worn "that thing". The *Mutterkreuz* was awarded to woman who had more than four children: "bronze for five children, silver for six, and gold for seven or more. whenever a member of the Hitler Youth met a decorated mother (with her award worn neatly on a blue ribbon at her neck), he had to snap to attention with a brisk 'Heil Hitler'"¹⁰ Upon graduation from high school Bucher had planned to go to the university to study: "And then I was told I could study no further. The guardian who was set up after my father had died claimed that there was not enough money to continue the education...All I had talked about was how I wanted to go to the university and study. and I have never forgotten the shock when we were told..They consented to pay for secretarial

⁸ Ferdinand Lundberg and Marynia Farnham, *The Modern Woman: The Lost Sex*, p.364.

⁹ Ibid., pp.370-71.

¹⁰ Claudia Koonz., *Mothers in the Fatherland*. p.186

school..." Friedrich clearly blames the position of women in German society as the primary cause for her mother's experience during and after the war. However, it is certainly clear that as a non-believer in the Third Reich her experience as a male would probably have not been much better. Although the opportunity to study at the university may have been more accessible, the most likely experience would have been as a soldier in the army.

Lore Bucher was actually transported from her home by the government in 1939, and taken to the airbase at Darmstadt. To this day she believes it was her piano teacher who reported her, after Bucher refused an offer to "join the party" and pushed her from the door. When asked where they were taking her, she was told "this is none of your business." Her secretarial skills were put to use by the government, and later following the Allied occupation she had a job at the American military headquarters, where she met her future husband, Su Friedrich's father, Paul Friedrich. For her meeting him was "like a straw. I thought, ah, now God is good after all: I couldn't do it [go to college] then, eventually I will do it". She remembers his assuring her, "Oh don't worry about it, you will be able to do this and you will be able to do that, you can play the piano and you can go and sing." Later in the United States when money was short for his college tuition she returned to work in order to pay for his education. He divorced her in 1965, with three children to raise. The final scratch-text frame states: "In 1980 (after raising three children alone) she bought herself a piano and began to practice the scales."

Friedrich's attempt to rethink gender in as far as they relate to parenthood exhibit her realization that her own life is better in some way because of continual sacrifice on the part of her mother. Lore Bucher's life has been constricted repeatedly by oppressive circumstances over which she has had no control. Her desire to study music at the university was thwarted twice - first in Germany due to the outlines of the Nazi party, and

later in the United States, when she was forced to return to secretarial work in order to support her family. Although she has never returned to college, she has seen her three children through their studies, and in some way, the filmmaking of Su Friedrich is an embodiment of her own creative drives. Lore Bucher has survived and insured better lives for her children. Friedrich has made *"The Ties That Bind"* in an effort to find out what she doesn't know, ultimately to reconnect herself to her mother and her German heritage.

In contrast, *"Sink or Swim"*, the film examining Friedrich's relationship with her father is constructed around childhood experiences which she remembers all too clearly, most notably his method for teaching her to swim - tossing her into the deep end of the pool and telling her she had to get back on her own. Paul Friedrich's life was also in many ways determined by forces beyond his control - including his involvement in World War II. However, in contrast to the sacrifice on the part of his wife, it is a life characterized more by opportunity and achievement. He did attend the university, and became an anthropology professor at a well-known university. His success, in the eyes of his daughter - and seen via her camera - reflects a pattern of callousness and self-indulgence that reconfirms her conventional cultural stereotypes of "maleness."

Friedrich's decision to explore her German background was a confrontation with an implicit cultural taboo. For those with German roots, the specter of the Holocaust remains haunting in a way that transcends ordinary awareness. Genetic inheritance, or quite simply put, to state "I'm German" often invites an unwelcome and misplaced condemnation. At the time when Friedrich talked with her mother, she could not be sure what her mother might reveal about herself - and by implication, about Friedrich herself. Even her mother's affirmation of her firm and certain disapproval of the Nazis, and how she suffered for this view, leaves no doubt that one-up-manship is irrelevant when compared to what went on in the camps. If her purpose in making the film had been to create sympathy, the final

product would probably have been counterproductive. But instead she has produced a film which allows those of German heritage to admire the example of some Germans in resisting the Nazi horror. There were indeed "other" Germans. Although there were many who resisted and lost their lives for treason, most notably the Scholls of *Die Weiße Rose* resistance group (and also from Ulm) the conviction and efforts of anyone who resisted the ideological tyranny of the Third Reich are to be commended and recognized.

"*The Ties That Bind*" can be seen as a journey across borders, both geographic and personal. Lore Bucher's journey from Germany to the United States after World War II, and Su Friedrich's journey from New York to Berlin, Ulm and Dachau. As Scott MacDonald has said "the interpersonal boundaries between Friedrich and her mother could only be penetrated by Su Friedrich's willingness to confront what her mother's journey meant by retracing her mother's trek out of Germany."¹¹ This is a journey of geographical and historical dimension. "She crosses the 'borders' of both space and time and discovers that the connections between 'there' and 'here' and between 'then' and 'now' are quite real, that she is part of a historical and geographic continuity within which all the issues that confronted the mother continue to confront the daughter."¹² In undertaking this journey Friedrich has opened the possibility to be more faithful to the history of two individual women of a specific ethnic heritage living in particular areas of particular nations, revealed through their experiences to actually share a commonality among women and among all people. "*The Ties That Bind*" connects its effective literalism with a group of complex issues: the shifting attributes of memory, the repression of familial contempt, and the economy of fascism, be it that of Nazi Germany or of today's more integrated logistics of

¹¹ Scott MacDonald, *Journal of Film and Video*, 44(1-2) 1992, p. 38.

¹² Ibid., pp. 38-9.

"pure war". In Friedrich's own words, "You get to something that's universal by being very specific."¹³

¹³ Scott MacDonald, interview with Su Friedrich in *A Critical Cinema 2*, pp. 283-318.

Filmography

Deutschland, bleiche Mutter (Helma Sanders-Brahms/Literarisches Colloquium Berlin, 1979)

Director: Helma Sanders-Brahms

Screenplay: Helma Sanders-Brahms

Camera: Jürgen Jürges (color)

Music: Jürgen Knieper

Cast: Eva Mattes, Ernst Jacobi, Elisabeth Stepanek, Angelike Thomas, Rainer Friedrichsen, Giesela Stein, Fritz Lichtenhahn

Running time: 145 minutes

Europa, Europa [Hitlerjunge Salomon] (CCC Filmkuns/ Margaret Menegoz/Les Films du Losange, 1991)

Director: Agniewzka Holland

Screenplay: Agniewzka Holland; based on the autobiography of Salomon Perel

Camera: Jacek Petrycki (color)

Music: Zbigniew Preisner

Cast: Marco Hofschneider, Julie Delpy, Hans Zischler, Klaus Abramowsky, Rene Hofschneider

Running time: 115 minutes

Peppermint Frieden, (Nourfilm, 1982)

Director: Marianne S. W. Rosenbaum

Screenplay: Marianne S. W. Rosenbaum

Camera: Alfred Tichawsky

Music: Konstantin Wecker

Cast: Saskia Tyroller, Gesine Stempel, Hans Peter Korff, Peter Fonda, Cleo Kretschmer

Running time: 110 minutes

The Ties That Bind

Director: Su Friedrich

Screenplay: Su Friedrich

Camera: Su Friedrich

Cast: Lore Bucher Friedrich, Su Friedrich

Running time: 55 minutes

Bibliography

- Abrams, Alan. *Special Treatment: The Untold Story of Hitler's Third Race*. Secaucus, NJ: Lyle Stuart, Inc., 1985.
- Bammer, Angelika. "Through a Daughter's Eyes: Helma Sanders-Brahms' Germany, Pale Mother." *New German Critique*, no. 36 (1985), pp. 91-109.
- Berman, Russell, A. "The Recipient as Spectator: West German Film and Poetry of the Seventies." *German Quarterly* 55 (1982), pp. 499-511.
- Brod, Harry, ed. *A Mensch Among Men: Explorations in Jewish Masculinity*. Freedom, CA: Crossing Press, 1988.
- Brunette, Peter. "Lessons from the Past: an Interview with Agnieszka Holland" *Cineaste* vol.15(1), 1986, pp.15-17.
 ——— "Helma Sanders-Brahms: a Conversation" *Film Quarterly* 44(2) 1990-91. pp.34-42.
- Buchka, Peter. "A Simple Complication: No Oscar for This Film", *German Tribune*, Jan 31, 1992, p. 10.
- Buck-Morss, Susan. "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered" *October* 62 (1992), pp.3-41.
- de Lauretis, Theresa. *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film and Fiction*. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press. 1987.
- Engelberg, Stephen. "A Life Stranger Than the Movie it Inspired" *The New York Times*, 19. Feb. 1992. p.B1.
- Elsaesser, Thomas. "Filming Fascism: Is History Just an Old Movie?" *Sight and Sound* 5 (May 1992) pp. 18-21.
 ——— *New German Cinema: a History*. London: Macmillan Education Ltd. 1989.
 ——— "Tales of Sound and fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama." 1972. In Christine Gledhill, ed., *Home is Where the Heart is: Studies in Melodrama and the Women's Flm*, pp. 43-69. London: BFI Publishing, 1987.
- Hyams, Barbara. "Is the Apolitical Woman at Peace?: A Reading of the Fairy Tale in Germany, Pale Mother." *Wide Angle* 10, no. 3 (1988) pp. 41-51.
- Insdorf, Annette. *Indelible Shadows: Film and the Holocaust*, 2nd ed. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- James, Caryn. "Putting the Unimaginable to Imaginative Use". *The New York Times*, 1. March, 1992. p.C11.
- Jameson, Fredric. "On Magic Realism in Film" *Critical Inquiry* 12, Winter 1986, pp. 301-325.

- Kaes, Anton. *Deutschlandbilder. Die Wiederkehr der Geschichte als Film*. Munich: edition text + kritik, 1987. In English: *From Hitler to Heimat: The Return of History as Film*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989.
- Koch, Gertrud. "Exchanging the Gaze: Re-Visioning Feminist Film Theory." *New German Critique*, no. 34 (1985) pp. 139-53.
- Koonz, Claudia. *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family and Nazi Politics*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987.
- Kruger, Barbara. "The Ties That Bind" review. *Art Forum*, Oct. 1984, p.89.
- Ferdinand Lundberg and Marynia Farnham. *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex*, New York and London: Harper, 1947.
- Lenssen, Claudia et al. "From Hitler to Hepburn: A Discussion of Women's Film Production and Reception." *New German Critique*, nos. 24-25 (1981-82) pp. 172-85.
- Lieb, Rebecca. "German Panel Stands by Europa Decision", *Variety*, Feb. 10, 1992, p. 15.
- Mayne, Judith. "Visibility and Feminist Film Criticism", *Film Reader* 5, 1982.
- MacDonald, Scott. *A Critical Cinema 2: Interviews with Independent Filmmakers*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992.
- . "From Zygote to Global Cinema via Su Friedrich's Films", *Journal of Film and Video*, vol. 44(1-2) 1992, pp. 30-41.
- Maslin, Janet. "Europa, Europa" review. *The New York Times*, 28. June 1991. pC10.
- McCormick, Richard W. *Politics of the Self: Feminism and the Postmodern in West German Literature and Film*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991.
- Mizejewski, Linda. *Divine Decadence: Fascism, Female spectacle, and the Makings of Sally Bowles*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992.
- Mouton, Jan. "The absent Mother Makes an Appearance in the Films of West German Women Directors" *WIG Yearbook* 4 (1988) pp. 69-81.
- Ozsvath, Zsuzsanna and Satz, Martha. "The Audacity of Expressing the Inexpressible: The Relation Between Moral and Aesthetic Considerations in Holocaust Literature". *Judaism*, vol.34 (2) 1985, pp.197-210.
- Petro, Patrice. *Joyless Streets: Women and Melodramatic Representation in Weimar Germany*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989.
- Rector, Frank. *The Nazi Extermination of Homosexuals*. New York: Stein and Day, 1981.
- Rentschler, Eric, ed. *West German Filmmakers on Film: Visions and Voices*. New York: Holmes and Meier, 1988.

- _____.ed. *German Film and Literature: Adaptations and Transformations*. New York: Methuen, 1986.
- Romberg, Rosemary. *Circumcision: The Painful Dilemma*. South Hadley, MA: Bergin and Garvey Publishers, 1985.
- Root, Jane. "Memories of Childhood, Dreams of Freedom" *Monthly Film Bulletin*, vol.52 no. 613, 1985, pp.41-2.
- Seiter, Ellen, "Women's History, Women's Melodrama: DBM" *German Quarterly* 59 (1986) pp. 569-81.
- Silberman, Marc. "Cine-Feminists in West Berlin." *Quart. Rev. of Film Studies* 5 (1980) pp. 217-32.
- Sichtermann, Barbara. trans.John Whitlan. *Femininity: The Politics of the Personal* Cambridge: Polity Press, 1983.
- Short, Andrew. "Poland's Lost Generation: Interviews with Prominent Polish Film-makers" *Index on Censorship*, May 1982, pp.15-19.
- Staiger, Janet. "Securing the Fictional Narrative as a Tale of the Historical Real". *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 88(2) 1989, pp.393-413.
- Stam, Robert. *Reflexivity in Film and Literature: From Don Quixote to Jean-Luc Godard*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1992.
- Suderburg, Erika. "So Much For Pleasure" *Afterimage*, 23. July 1988, p.15.