

# Polarized Politics: Fassbinder's Use of 'Spiele(n)' in *Die dritte Generation* (1979) as an Explanation of Left-wing Terrorism in West Germany

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## Introduction

In September and October of 1977 West Germany experienced some of the most extreme acts of terrorism the country had ever seen. The series of events, including the kidnapping and murder of Hanns-Martin Schleyer, the hijacking of a Lufthansa plane, and the death of the terrorists in the high security prison at Stammheim, came to be known as the German Autumn. Those responsible belonged to a left-wing terrorist group that went by the name Rote Armee Fraktion, [Red Army Faction] (RAF), but was also widely known as the Baader-Meinhof Gang. This group of political radicals evolved from the West German student movement in the 1960s and plagued the country with violent acts throughout the seventies and eighties.

At the turn of the millennium, the topic of violent protest reemerged in Germany with the "formation of a new coalition government with its roots in the radical ferment of the 1960s" (Homewood 131). Once again the Baader-Meinhof Gang was in the spotlight, not due to new terrorist activity, but rather as a pop culture icon. Terrorism became a fashion statement with t-shirts and military jackets donning the name "Prada Meinhof" and clothing advertisements that imitated famous photographs of the original RAF terrorists. "Politik wird zum Zitat, Leidenschaft zur Coolness, Klassenkampf zum Kult: Mörder werden Mode [Politics turns into quotes, passion to coolness, class struggle to cult: murderers become fashion]" (Mohr 202). This commoditization of the RAF, a group whose first act of violence was setting department stores on fire, ironically added fuel to the capitalist machine

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that the terrorists had been fighting against. This new generation of “rebels” were ignorant of the troubling historical facts and “the majority of the people wearing Prada-Meinhof slogan T-shirts tended to know what Prada was rather than Meinhof” (Homewood 133).

Terrorist chic and the idolized image of the RAF was only further perpetuated by the 2008 film, *The Baader-Meinhof Complex* directed by Uli Edel, based on the account by Stefan Aust, which tells, from an insider’s perspective, the story of the infamous RAF that terrorized West Germany in the 1970s. The blockbuster film achieved tremendous success, including an Oscar nomination, which can be partially attributed to the high energy and action-packed narrative, executed by an all-star cast, including Moritz Bleibtreu as the sexy, bad-boy terrorist, Andreas Baader. For the uneducated youth who flocked to theaters to be entertained, this film, which greatly downplays the social issues that plagued West Germany during this time period, is their main historical reference.

There is a significant contrast between Edel’s film and the films dealing with this topic that were created within the few years following the so-called German Autumn by the filmmakers associated with the New German Cinema (NGC) movement. As the first generation to grow up in the postwar divided Germany, the directors of NGC confronted topics surrounding German history and identity that were uncomfortable for the older generation. This artistic movement “has become as renowned for its formal and stylistic inventions as for its “working through” (*Aufarbeitung*) or “coming to terms with the past” (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*)” (Flinn 2). Unlike Edel, the goal of these directors was not purely to entertain the viewer, but to break the silence on tough issues that West Germans wanted to suppress.

The focus of this essay is on *Die dritte Generation* [The Third Generation] (1979), a film by Rainer Werner Fassbinder, the director who is considered the heart of the NGC, that addresses the terrorism issue, but has received very little attention. One reason for this is that among the 40 feature length films he created in two decades, this one had very little success at the box office. Fassbinder’s film editor, Juliane Lorenz expressed in a more recent interview that it was simply too soon for a comedy about terrorists. Additionally, the film was incredibly low budget due to loss of funding by WDR television and the West Berlin Senate, both of which withdrew financial support during “the first week of shooting when the nature of the project became clear” (Knight 97).

Another reason is that this film has been overshadowed by Fassbinder’s segment in the film *Deutschland im Herbst* [Germany in Autumn] (1978), which was

a collaborative work by eleven NGC directors that also addressed the events of the German Autumn. When looking at Fassbinder's reaction to the terrorism in West Germany, biographers prefer to use this film, because Fassbinder stars in it as himself with his mother and his partner and his message is very clear. For instance, in her book about NGC, Julia Knight has a section titled "The violence of politics" where she specifically addresses different NGC filmmakers' reactions to the terrorism. In this section Knight specifically talks about Fassbinder's segment in *Germany in Autumn* and interprets his meaning, but fails to even mention *The Third Generation* (Knight 54-62).

Most of the books written primarily about Fassbinder and his work do at least mention the film and some offer a bit of analysis as well. What is noticeably missing from these analyses is the comedic way in which Fassbinder deals with this issue. There is little mention of Fassbinder's excessive use of games and the theme of carnival. Christian Braad Thomsen, a biographer and personal acquaintance of Fassbinder, addresses this theme by writing that "making films was a game to [Fassbinder] and while working he achieved the most direct and concrete contact with the child in himself" (Thomsen 39). Instead of looking at how creating this film with a childlike perspective is significant specifically to this film, Thomsen addresses this aspect of the film with a generalization about the director.

Biographer Jürgen Trimborn addresses this question with a direct quote from Fassbinder, but there is little additional explanation about how the comedy in this film was executed and its real significance in relation to the games and the theme of play that is responsible for much of the comedy. Fassbinder is quoted as saying:

Ich dachte mir, dass ich, indem ich *Die dritte Generation* als Farce drehe, am besten verdeutlichen kann, dass diese Terroristen im Grunde lachhafte Figuren sind, weil ihnen jegliche ernsthaften Motive fehlen.

[I thought to myself, that I, by filming *The Third Generation* as a farce, can best illustrate that these terrorists are basically laughable figures, because they lack any serious motives whatsoever.] (Trimborn 313).

The child-like or childish aspects in *The Third Generation* do more than simply portray the terrorists as ridiculous, but rather they metaphorically represent the larger picture of the terrorist issue in the late 1970s. Through the use of games and playing, West Germany's social conditions and political history are manifested as the real, underlying causes of terrorism's emergence in the 1970s.

## **Identifying the Third Generation**

Following the capture and incarceration of the first generation of the RAF (Ulrike Meinhof, Gudrun Ensslin, Andreas Baader, etc.), a second generation quickly surfaced and continued to carry out acts of terrorism, most notably those surrounding the events that make up the German Autumn.<sup>2</sup> Fassbinder explained that the title of his film is a direct reference to the evolutionary stages of this particular terrorism:

The first generation was that of '68. Idealists, who thought they could change the world with words and demonstrations in the street. The second generation, the Baader-Meinhof Group, moved from legality to the armed struggle and total illegality. The third generation is today's, who just indulges in action without thinking, without either ideology or politics, and who, probably without knowing it, are like puppets whose wires are pulled by others. (Elsaesser 38)

Therefore, Fassbinder's "third generation" is actually referring to the second generation of terrorists. From his perspective, this group did not possess strong ideological convictions and had joined the "revolution" for the excitement of it. Fassbinder does not sympathize at all with any of the characters, but uses this film to be critical of both terrorist groups and the West German government's counter-terrorism response.

### **Film Summary**

When a top executive of a computer company, P.J. Lurz (Eddie Constantine), notices that computer sales are down due to decreased terrorist activity, he decides to collude with August (Volker Spengler) to finance his own terrorist group in order to boost computer security sales. This group, made up of middle-aged and middle class men and women, does not follow any ideology, but rather are individuals who participate in this group as an escape from their mundane daily lives with the excitement of carrying guns, dressing up, and using codes. In reality the group is being manipulated by August. While Lurz is financing this terrorist organization, he is also being protected by a policeman Gerhard Gast (Hark Bohm), who is unknowingly hunting an organization to which his son Edgar (Udo Kier) and daughter-in-law Susanne (Hanna Schygulla) belong.

The members of this terrorist group communicate via their secret code: "Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung" [The World as Will and Representation].<sup>3</sup> Their illegal activities throughout most of the film involve passing documents to each

other and arranging secret meetings. They typically meet in Rudolf's (Harry Baer) large, Berlin apartment where they play games, watch television, and create new identities. Other terrorists include a teacher, Hilde Krieger (Bulle Ogier), a housewife, Petra Vielhaber (Margit Carstenson), and an experienced terrorist, Paul (Raul Gimenez).

Rudolf also allows a heroin addict, Ilse Hoffmann (Y So La), to live in his apartment. One day, her old friend and lover, Franz Walsch (Günther Kaufmann) shows up with his friend Bernhard von Stein (Vitus Ziplichal) and asks to stay. Walsch, an explosive expert who has just been discharged from the military, only joins the group after being unable to find work and after Ilse dies from an overdose. Bernhard, the only character with marginal ideological leanings, is cast out by the group and made fun of for carrying a suitcase full of books by Mikhail Bakunin, a Russian philosopher and anarchist.

When Paul is brutally killed by the police, the entire group is forced underground and must assume their new identities. They then come up with a plan to rob a bank, blow up a building, and kidnap the capitalist Lurz. While attempting to plant explosives in the Schöneberger Rathaus<sup>4</sup>, Petra is also brutally killed by the police. The same thing happens to Franz while he is simply visiting Ilse's grave.

Bernhard is picked up by Gerhard at Ilse's grave, where Bernhard had followed Franz who is also gunned down. Gerhard interrogates Bernhard, who cannot answer his questions and nervously repeats the same sentences over and over. Bernhard suddenly falls down a stairwell and dies.

The remaining terrorists dress in ridiculous Carnival costumes and kidnap Lurz from his car. Lurz is placed in front of a camera and forced to read a message from the terrorists. The film concludes at the end of the message with Lurz smiling at the camera.

### **Spiele und Spielen [Games and Playing]**

Throughout the film, Fassbinder plays extensively with the word *Spiel*, meaning game, match or play. For example, a tennis match is a **Tennispiel** and a theatrical performance is a **Schauspiel**. Likewise, the German verb meaning "to play" is *spielen*, which is used in relation to games, musical instruments, role playing or acting, and gambling, all of which the terrorists perform at some point in the film. Additionally the German word for "toy" is **Spielzeug** (literally meaning play-thing), a number of which are hidden in the *mise-en-scène* throughout the film, including Hilde's yo-yo and random stuffed animals.

This Spiel-motif is established distinctly at the very beginning of the film, projected on the screen in electronic green text:

<b>Original Text</b>	<b>Translation</b>
eine Komödie in 6 Teilen	a comedy in 6 parts
um Gesellschaftsspiele	about parlor games
voll Spannung, Erregung und Logik	full of suspense, excitement, and logic
Grausamkeit und Wahnsinn	cruelty and madness
ähnlich den Märchen	similar to the fairy tales
die man Kindern erzählt	one tells to children
ihr Leben zum Tod ertragen zu helfen	to help them endure life until their death

The above translation, which is my own, does not match the English subtitles created for this film, which completely omit the second line of text containing the term **Gesellschaftsspiele**. This can be translated as parlor games, table games, board games or party games. It is not clear why this line is not translated, but it is the most important part of this message. This line identifies what this comedy is about and very explicitly alerts the viewer that games are going to play a major role. One possible reason why this line was omitted from the subtitles is that Fassbinder seems to be playing with the literal translation of *Gesellschaftsspiele*, which is *society-games*. Although there are a number of parlor games and board games present in the film, they are not driving forces in the film's plot. By informing the audience that the film is about parlor games, which is not actually the case, the German-speaking viewer is more inclined to make this connection to society. By comparing the games shown in the film to Fassbinder's representation of West German society, the viewer is ultimately encouraged to see the relationship between left wing and right wing politics in the FRG as a (childish) game or circus that repeats over and over.

The games being played by the characters are very clearly related to the film's plot. This is best illustrated when the terrorists are sitting on the floor and ironically

playing the capitalistic game of Monopoly. August, who takes the Monopoly game very seriously, later names the group's terrorist mission "Operation Monopoly".<sup>5</sup> In deciding whether or not to purchase Schlossallee,<sup>6</sup> he gets up and walks away from the rest of the board game in order to count his Monopoly money in private. This act is reflective of his secretive, scheming role throughout the entire film. The dice-rolling aspect of Monopoly makes it partially a game of chance, yet August is very careful to make sure that he will come out on top. August is shown on more than one occasion manipulating games of chance. Whenever the group needs to pick members for an operation, August hands out small pieces of paper, a few of which have an X on them. It is obvious that he is manipulating the game since he never receives an X, which he even points out.

In another scene, August surprises Lurz in his office, interrupting a game of chess, which he had been playing against his secretary Susanne, who is also a terrorist. Lurz angrily concedes to August's request for more funds, throwing a handful of cash onto the chessboard. The close-up shot of the chessboard covered in money is reminiscent of an earlier close-up shot on the Monopoly board with the game money. In addition to the money, these two images of board games are linked together by the use of a familiar American icon in the form of a pack of Marlboro cigarettes.



The connection of these two images once again indicates that the entire terrorist operation is a game, and that the two games are reflective of the people playing them. Lurz, the executive, is playing chess, a game of strategy and August, the double agent, is playing Monopoly, which is a game that emphasizes ending up with the most money by investing in multiple things. Moreover, while August is taking his time with his purchase decision, Rudolph is impatient with how seriously he is taking the game. Rudolph's attitude reflects how the terrorists approach their whole operation. For them, it is an escape from real life and their decisions do not have any real consequences, because it is all just a game.

## Newton's Cradle

A reoccurring prop that receives a lot of attention both from the camera and the characters is the Newton's cradle, five spheres suspended from a metal frame that demonstrates the conservation of energy. When the sphere on one end is lifted and released, its energy travels through the other spheres and is transferred to the sphere on the opposite end. The energy is conserved within the device and the end spheres continue in a rhythmic motion.

This object, which is usually found sitting in offices, is often described as an executive toy, a term that also exists in German: **Managerspielzeug**. In the film it is described in two separate instances as a "komisches Spiel" [strange game] and as a "Spiel, mit fünf silbernen Kugeln" [game with five silver spheres]. This game and/or toy represents the political spectrum and functions as a metaphor for the central conflict in the film.

### A History of Polar Politics

The viewer is first introduced to the Newton's Cradle in the content of a multi-generational family as Opa (Grandpa) Gast discusses Schopenhauer's philosophy with his grandson, Edgar. The camera captures Opa Gast's face through the strings of the Newton's Cradle as he explains that it is people who follow Schopenhauer's thought who forget how good things are between wars and will thus inevitably repeat the past. Thus war will lead to peace, which will lead back to war, illustrating a theme of back-and-forth motion where opposite forces fuel each other.



The scenes preceding and following Opa Gast's argument use historical examples to summarize the interdependent relationship between the extreme left-wing and extreme right-wing politics in German history.

These two bookend scenes show the rise and fall of both right-wing and left-wing politics, suggesting that the extremes of the political spectrum played off of each other and prevented the FRG from establishing a balanced and stable government. In the image of the Newton's Cradle, Fassbinder's film captures how a radical swing to the right will cause a radical swing to the left and this cycle will continue.



The very first shot of the film captures an image of the new and the old Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedächtniskirche [memorial church] towering over a gray and frozen Berlin, bringing the memory of the Third Reich to the forefront. The ruins of the old church were left standing after the Second World War as a reminder to the German people of the destruction caused by Hitler's fascist regime. As the camera retreats from the window, revealing a corporate office with a computer and television,



it becomes clear that the church is actually not the dominant structure in the city, but is being looked down upon from an even taller building. The camera slowly circles the room until the Gedächtniskirche is almost completely hidden by the television. Next to the television sits a small object, reminiscent of the symbol of the Schutzstaffel (⚡) [Protection Squad], the section of the Nazi military responsible for the most heinous crimes against humanity. Within these first few minutes it is revealed that this is the office of P.J. Lurz, an executive of a multi-national corporation. The implication that Lurz, a former member of the SS, has once again risen up in society



reflects the reality in the FRG at this time.<sup>7</sup> The window acts as a divide between an inside and an outside perspective of West Germany. Despite the outward gesture of guilt and remorse, on the inside nothing has really changed and the people who were in charge during the war remain in control.

The Gedächtniskirche is mentioned again later in the film as the terrorists deliberate on what they are going to blow up. When they say it must be something symbolic, it is clear that they have lost sight of their predecessors' original cause. By razing the memorial church and wiping clean Berliners' memory of the Nazi regime, their message would be to forget and repress the memory of the war, contrary to the goal of the '68 idealists and the original RAF.

Fassbinder's incorporation of historical context to comment on both the actions of the terrorists and the government are not limited to the Third Reich, but reach back to the revolution of 1848.<sup>8</sup> Near the beginning of the film, the viewer is introduced to Hilde who is leading a seminar. After covering the blackboard behind her with the year "1848," she poses a question regarding the National Assembly in Frankfurt and its importance for the development of the German Revolution. Two students answer her questions and continue, unprompted, to explain why the revolution ultimately failed. One of them explains that the National Assembly was politically ineffective and describes the revolution as "typisch" [typical]. His condescending tone suggests that all revolutions naively come to the same end when the middle class decides at the last minute that it does not actually want to give up its middle class values. He elaborates that it was the desire to hold on to these values that led to the rise of the Third Reich and that these values are carried on by the current middle class. This characterization of the revolution of 1848 draws a direct connection to the RAF's revolution, which was made up of members of the educated middle class. Despite advocating left-wing ideology, the group did not succeed in gaining the support of the German working class, much like the revolutionaries of 1848 failed to gain support from workers. In the film the terrorists are quite obviously and comically portrayed as middle class. They work very normal jobs during the day and gather in the evenings in Rudolf's apartment for what looks more like a dinner party than a terrorist cell planning its next attack.

While her student makes a clear and logical statement, Hilde simply dismisses his answer without offering a counterargument. She tells the student that the Third Reich is irrelevant to the topic at hand. When he asks if that is her opinion, she tells him that they are only to discuss proven historical connections. Not only does her response expose her lack of free thought, but it also comments on the authoritarian structure of the universities in the sixties and seventies.

These images and ideas representing German history appear right at the beginning of the film to set the foundation upon which the rest of the film is built. By citing the left-wing revolution in 1848 and the fascist takeover in the 1930s, the viewer is forced to make connections and recognize how history repeats itself and shows how the opposing political forces seem to play off of each other. It is as if moving to the far right will cause an equal and opposite reaction to the far left. The two sides gain momentum from each other, just like Newton's Cradle.

The same concept is further illustrated through a series of posters on the wall in Rudolf's apartment. The first poster shows a piggy bank, the second shows this

piggy bank breaking, and finally the third shows the money from the piggy bank falling into a bag and then that bag dumping out. The same money simply keeps switching hands, going back-and-forth as it is with August and Lurz. By giving money to August, Lurz is going to sell more computers and acquire more money. Lurz understands the interdependence between capitalism and terrorism, thus explaining his financial support of the terrorists. Ultimately the force fueling both sides is not ideology, but money.



### Violence in Games

Gerhard suspects that money is the root of all of the violence as well when he unknowingly summarizes what is actually going on between Lurz and the terrorist organization: “Ich hatte neulich einen Traum... da hat das Kapital den Terrorismus erfunden, um die Staat zu zwingen, es besser zu schützen.”[I recently had a dream... where capital invented terrorism, to force the state to better protect it (capital).]

In a Newton's cradle, the two opposing spheres do not just propel each other, but the original amount of applied energy is conserved and the reactions of the two end spheres are roughly equal. Although the two balls are pulling in opposite directions, they are completely dependent on each other, which is reflective of this film's provocative storyline. In the film we see that violence on the side of the police increases violence on the side of the terrorists and ultimately the dichotomy between the sides allows them both to become more polarized. The two foes are completely dependent upon drawing energy from each other. Thus there is no hero or villain, but rather simply two interdependent violent forces.

In *The Third Generation*, the police are actually portrayed as more violent than the terrorists. The only person killed by a terrorist is Hans Vielhaber, whom Petra shoots several times out of her own personal spite rather than for ideological reasons. On the other hand, the police do not just kill Paul, Franz and Petra, but spray them with bullets as if it is an execution by firing squad. This film that is meant to be “similar to fairy tales” as it says in the beginning and is filled with games and



playing, is, also filled with violence. On the surface these two ideas do not go together well. However, the original German Märchen [fairy tales] are in fact often gruesome and violent. Violence is present in society starting with childhood.

Some of the games presented in this film demonstrate a normalcy of violence in the West German cul-

ture. For example there is a dart board, which is considered a game, although it is really nothing more than target practice for hunting. At the dinner table in the Gast household, Edgar asks his father, Gerhard: “Wieder Menschen gejagt heute?” [People-hunting again today?]. The sole function of the police in the film is to hunt down the terrorists. For the terrorists that are killed, there is no warning, arrest, or due-process. The terrorists are shot as soon as they have been spotted. This game is reflective both of the conflict in the film and in 1970s West Germany between the police and the terrorist groups.

The opening sequence of the film, which contains a quote from the former Chancellor of the FRG, Helmut Schmidt of the left-wing Social Democratic Party, which was printed in *Der Spiegel* in January of 1978 and that reflects the antidemocratic tendencies of many people in West Germany at this time, including government officials: “Ich kann nur nachträglich den deutschen Juristen danken, dass sie das alles (gemeint ist die Aktion in Mogadischu. Und vielleicht auch anderes um Mogadischu herum?) nicht verfassungsrechtlich untersucht haben.” [I can only retrospectively thank the German lawyers that did not investigate all of this constitutionally. (in reference to the action in Mogadishu. And perhaps also others apart from Mogadishu?)]

The head of the West German government explicitly praises these lawyers for deviating from the constitution to solve a terrorist problem and save the lives of innocent people. The problem lies with what appears to be the fallibility of the constitution. If exceptions can be made to the law whenever it suits whoever is in power, then that is essentially authoritarianism and consequently “many on the left (including Fassbinder) were convinced that the official response was more dangerous than the terrorist threat” (Watson 25). The question that Fassbinder poses at the end of the quotes suggests that there are probably other unconstitutional ac-

tions that have take place Marionettes

Another example of violence in a game takes place in the record store where Rudolph works. His boss alludes to the children's game of "Cops and Robbers" when he asks Rudolph whether he is currently playing the part of "Räuber oder Gendarm" [the robber or the cop]. This simple game perfectly illustrates the relationship between the terrorists and the police. By characterizing this violence as a game, it suggests that this struggle is in actuality fun for all of the players involved and undercuts the severity of its consequences.

Moreover, the way in which Rudolph's boss asks this question is also significant because he literally asks Rudolph what type of role he is playing. In addition to the chasing aspect of this game—the hunt—there is also an element of role-playing. Children must choose which character they want to be and embody that persona. By viewing everything as a game, the terrorists enjoy taking on new identities to escape reality and submerge themselves in the fantasy of the game.

The excessive role-playing of the terrorists also demonstrates how they are being manipulated and controlled, instead of acting on the basis of their own ideology. Going back to Fassbinder's definition of the third generation, he describes a group with neither an ideology nor a political conviction, which acts as a "Schar von Marionetten" [band of puppets] (Uka 390). During the scene when Susanne and Gerhard (her father-in-law and a police detective) are having an affair, the two are role-playing, but only Susanne plays a part, dressed in a trench-coat and hat. Gerhard feeds every line to her, which she then repeats back to him. He controls her like a puppet. Hilde regularly acts in a similar manner. For instance, when August comes to tell her that Paul has been killed, she begins to sob until he tells her to stop; she stops instantly. He then tells her to smile and she smiles immediately, so immediately in fact that it is noticeably unnatural to the viewer. She is simply a marionette, who changes from sad to happy at the pull of a string.<sup>9</sup>

In Marionette Theater the subjects are trapped within the confines of the stage and are at the mercy of the manipulator, the person pulling the strings. In the scenes taking place in the Gast house, there are few shots from taken from an extreme high angle that makes the characters appear powerless and places the viewer in the perspective of the manipulator. The idea of marionettes, once again relates to the Newton's cradle, a metal frame containing spheres suspended on strings. In Rudolph's apartment the terrorists are often framed within large double doorways. Using a doorway as a frame is a common cinematic technique used to portray visually that a character is or feels trapped, but the doorways in this film also invoke the

proscenium of a stage. Although the terrorists believe they are breaking down the walls of society, Fassbinder shows that they are still very much trapped within its frame and the game continues, back and forth, back and forth.

The theatrical theme is further accentuated by the excessive use of ridiculous costumes. When the terrorists are forced underground, they seem to be playing dress-up, rather than actually disguising themselves for protection. Petra immediately becomes excited and asks if she can be Chilean and go by the name Michaela Angela Martinez, which is problematic since she neither looks nor sounds Chilean. Petra sees the chance to go underground as an opportunity to escape her life and become someone else. With some of the other disguises, the terrorists think they are being incredibly clever by choosing a disguise that they think no one would expect, such as putting a black man in black face, which, like most of the disguises, is ineffective and simply comical.

The character most obsessed with dressing up is the ringleader of the group and the double agent, August. His excessive use of disguises prompts Lurz to criticize him for being addicted to playing dress-up and fears that their entire scheme will be ruined by this “kinderlicher Zirkus” [childish circus]. In Germany the name August is also associated with the circus through the clown figure widely known as Dummer August [Stupid August]<sup>10</sup>. A lot of the humor in this film comes from the ridiculous manner of the actors and the physical comedy, much in the same way that a clown acts. The circus or carnival theme is subtly ever-present through props such as large stuffed animals such as one would win at a carnival and invoked by Ingrid Caven’s song “Carnaval”<sup>11</sup> which is playing in the background at the record store. The scene towards the end of the film in which the terrorists



finally kidnap Lurz is best described as a circus with guns. All of the terrorists are dressed in costumes for Karneval, which, in addition to Edgar as Miss Monaco dressed in a woman’s bathing suit and a few fantasy characters, also included a few clowns. While the guns are being fired and Lurz, who is blowing on party noisemakers, is forced from the car, a group of bystanders also in Karneval costumes watch the entire kidnapping take place and laugh hysterically. The role-playing and

circus finally has an audience that is completely ignorant of what it is actually seeing. Thus it is not just the terrorists who are ignorant and passive, but perhaps Fassbinder is suggesting that audience members of this film are just as ignorant as the second generation of the RAF and are sitting idly by, letting this violent society game continue.

### Conclusion

Although the narrative of the *The Third Generation* focuses completely on this fictional story of a band of ridiculous terrorists, who are naïve, ignorant, and have chosen a life of terrorism because it seems fun, the real root causes of the terrorism in West Germany are brought to the forefront of the film through the use of *Spielen*, or playing. The arguments that came out of the 1960s Student Movement can be divided into two categories: international and domestic. Internationally the students took issue with NATO and American imperialism and thus a lot of protest was directed at the Vietnam War. The domestic issues were complaints that the country had not completely undergone de-nazification and that there were many remnants of fascism in West German society and government. The international issues are not completely absent from the film, but are literally included simply as background noise. There is constant sound throughout the film from television and radio and some of the content is news concerning Vietnam. None of the characters seem to pay any attention to it and the viewer may not notice it either. It is clearly not something that Fassbinder finds crucial to understanding the German Autumn. The real problems are much deeper and stem from a long history of extreme political movements. By presenting terrorists in a child-like manner, there is almost something hereditary in the violence that continues to emerge based on political ideology. Fassbinder's film does not display the actions of the RAF as part of an international revolution, but as a uniquely German struggle with the impossibility of creating a utopia.

### Notes

Stephanie A. Rhodes, who is from St. Louis, graduated *summa cum laude* from the College of Charleston in 2013 with degrees in German and International Business. "Polarized Politics" was originally part of her Honors Bachelor's Essay, advised and guided by Dr. Nancy Nenko of the German Department. Following her graduation from the College, Stephanie promptly began her career in international finance with a German company in the Charleston area.

1. All of the German-English translations that are in brackets are my own.
2. A third generation of terrorists identifying as the RAF did later emerge, however this was a number of years after the creation of Fassbinder's film.
3. *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* is the title of a book by the German philosopher, Arthur Schopenhauer.
4. On the steps of the Schöneberger Rathaus President John F. Kennedy delivered his famous speech in 1963 when he made the famous proclamation: "Ich bin ein Berliner."
5. Playing Monopoly also demonstrates how the terrorists have no regard for political ideology. Another example of this occurs when they play a game of keep-away from Bernhard von Stein with his book on Mikhail Bakunin, who was a Russian revolutionary writer and is considered by some to be the "most important anarchist political philosopher" (Hoselitz 13).
6. Schlossallee is the most expensive colored street-property on the German version of the board game, equivalent to the Boardwalk space on the American version.
7. During the war Hanns-Martin Schleyer, who was later kidnapped and murdered by members of the RAF, had been a member of the Himmler's SS. This paper does not support the idea that Rainer Werner Fassbinder had any intention of suggesting Schleyer participated in organizing his own kidnapping although there are similarities between him and the character of P.J. Lurz. Such a message is not a common reading or interpretation of this film.
8. The revolution of 1848 was the first attempt to bring democracy to the German states. Though it ultimately failed, the constitution created at the National Assembly in Frankfurt would later serve as a model for the Weimar Republic
9. The women in this film seem to be more controlled and more manipulated than the men within the terrorist cell, showing how the patriarchal structure of society remained even within these radical left-wing groups. Fassbinder explains his use of women in his films by saying that "women are more exciting...because while being oppressed they are also likely to use their oppression as an instrument of 'terrorization'" (Watson 133). The treatment of women in this film brings up issues that are reflective of the feminist movement that was also very politically active at this time and ultimately separates



the feminists from the female terrorists.

10. The Auguste clown is considered the red clown, opposed to the white clown. Mutter Gast, played by Fassbinder's mother Liselotte (Pompeit) Eder, is portrayed as insane and is dressed eccentrically in a long white dress and white makeup. It can be argued that she represents the all-knowing white clown, since she is dressed in the part and is mysteriously able to tell Bernard von Stein where to find her son.
11. Singer and actress Ingrid Caven was married to Fassbinder for a short period of time. Two of her songs that she sang in French are played in this film during scenes in the record store.

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