

# Introducing Margarethe von Trotta

The Personal is Political

# Biography

- Born 1942 in Berlin; moved to Dusseldorf at war's end
- Raised by mother, Elisabeth von Trotta, with only occasional visits from father, painter Alfred Roloff, who died when she was ten
- Childhood included stint at Protestant boarding school, where von Trotta rebelled against repressiveness of rules, and experiences of being cared for by authoritarian elderly people at boarding houses where mother rented room

# Education

- Attended commercial school and worked in office before deciding to study art history
- Semester at Sorbonne → interest in filmmaking, discovery of French New Wave and other European art cinema (Bergman, Antonioni)
- Political awareness also began to develop in Paris
- Return to Germany → few job prospects for women filmmakers or art historians; turned to German studies, Romance languages and literature and drama

# Career as Actor

- Began getting stage roles in 1963
  - Actor with goal of becoming film director
- Cast in first movie role in 1968(*Schräge Vögel*)
- Career as actor and director concomitant with rise of social and political protest movements, women's movement and New German Cinema
  - Worked in films by Fassbinder, Hauff, Achternbusch and Schlöndorff



Still from *Gods of the Plague* (Fassbinder, 1970).  
Image source: [Home Cinema @The Digital Fix](#)

# Career as Director

- Began working as writer and assistant director for Volker Schlöndorff in 1970 (married him in 1971)
- Co-directed *The Lost Honor of Katharina Blum* (1975)
- First solo feature: *The Second Awakening of Christa Klages* (1978)
- Other films include *Sisters, or the Balance of Happiness* (1979), *Marianne and Juliane* (1981), *Sheer Madness* (1983), *Rosa Luxemburg* (1986), *The African Woman* (1990), *Rosenstrasse* (2003)
- Films noted for subverting traditional image of woman, motif of doubles/mirror images, theme of role switching, house or public sphere as prison, portrayal of relationship between events and interior state of mind, difficulty of heterosexual couplings



Image source: [University of Glasgow Advanced Technology & Information Institute](#)

# Protest Movements of 1960s

- Post-WWII generation's disillusionment and suspicion re: their parent's generation
  - In 1966, German Chancellor Kurt Georg Kiesinger was former member of Hitler's National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP)
  - Universities as overwhelmingly conservative, both in terms of faculty and curriculum
- Student protest movements in the late 1960s
  - Anti-Vietnam war and wanting to address conditions in the Third World
  - Curriculum reformation
  - Desire for more democratic society
  - Reduction of biased conservative media influence
- Other political activism/issues during period
  - Focus on repression and inequality that exist even in modern capitalist democratic states (Marxist critiques of class division within capitalist societies)
  - Implication of media's role in state's ideological indoctrination of peoples
  - Woman's liberation
  - Racial freedom
  - Anti-imperialism
- Key protests:
  - June 1967 protest of Shah's visit
  - 1968 "Easter Riots" after shooting of student activist leader Rudi Dutschke

# RAF (Red Army Faction, Baader-Meinhof Gang)



Image source: [BBC](#)

- Formed 1970
- Kidnapping of prominent officials, highjackings
- Alignment with African and Palestinian groups
- Gudrun Ensslin's (Marianne) participation in Frankfurt department store fires
  - Arrested April 1968, serves a year before release on appeal
  - Escapes to France when appeal is denied
  - Arrested again in 1972 and convicted
  - Dies by hanging in Stammheim Prison October 18, 1977 (along with 2 other B-M gang members in the same prison, who were shot in their cells)