



# DIE EHE DER MARIA BRAUN

## INTERVIEW WITH THOMAS OSTERMEIER

### What is your relationship to the work of Rainer Werner Fassbinder?

Thomas Ostermeier: Fassbinder is among the most important German film directors since the end of the Second World War. But I think he also played a great part as a dramatist. Marieluise Fleisser, who was also from Bavaria, once said she considered Fassbinder, Franz Xaver Kroetz, and Martin Sperr like her three sons. Since I am also from Bavaria, confronting myself to Fassbinder—but also to Kroetz, to Herbert Achternbusch, and to Marieluise Fleisser—has always been a way for me to try to understand where I come from, to understand the Bavarian mind. What fascinates me with Fassbinder is his political intelligence and his anarchist tendencies, as well as his sincerity when it comes to eroticism.

### What makes adapting a movie different? How did you let go of Fassbinder's images to create your own scenography, or did you let them inspire you? What about the performances of his actors and of yours?

I didn't watch the movie before we started working on the play. A friend of mine told me the story of the movie and I read the screenplay. It's a reflection based on the text, not on the film.

### Why such a small, contrasting cast?

The small number of actors allowed me to recreate on a theatre stage the rapid rhythm created by the editing of a movie. It makes things very simple as well: an actor puts on a wig, he becomes a different character, and we have a new scene.

### Are you trying to come back to a period in history that would be somewhat less central than World War II itself?

I think the role of Maria Braun is interesting because she is a woman. The generation of the so-called *Trümmerfrauen* (the "rubble women")<sup>1</sup> had to rebuild Germany and therefore enjoyed a certain form of economic supremacy. The question at the heart of the play is how women got into that position, and how they then lost this power again.

### What does this play have to say about the Europe of today? What does this feminine figure say about the women of Europe now?

We're touching on the question of power in our society which, given the realities of our capitalist world, is always tied to economic power. Most of the economic wealth in Europe is still in the hands of men. That's what makes this play important.

### In the play, who is manipulating whom?

Maria tries to manipulate the men that surround her, but she doesn't notice that they also manipulate her.

### What is the dream that was crushed by the postwar period and the economic recovery? What dream replaced it?

Every crisis, such as the fall of the Berlin Wall or World War II, is followed by this question: on which principles are we going to rebuild our country? This explains why, for a long time, even the conservative branch of the CDU<sup>2</sup> believed that Germany should remain entirely demilitarised. In 1955, that ended with the rearmament of West Germany. But the image of a demilitarised Germany, right at the heart of Europe, always seemed like a beautiful idea to me.

1. After the war and the bombing of Berlin, it was German women who rebuilt the city and the country in ruins, most men being on the front or prisoners.
  2. *Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands*, Christian Democratic Union of Germany, a liberal-conservative party.
- Interview conducted by Marion Canelas.

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