



Celluloid Critique: Documentary filmmaking and the politics of housing in Berlin's Märkisches Viertel

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Abstract

This is a paper about radical filmmaking and housing justice in the Märkisches Viertel in the 1970s. The satellite estate on the outskirts of West Berlin was one of the largest housing projects in West Germany and, for many residents, a space of increasing marginality and insecurity. As this paper argues, it was also a site of experimental filmmaking that documented the conditions faced by residents living in the Märkisches Viertel. The paper focuses on a group of students closely connected to the Deutschen Film- und Fernsehakademie (dffb or the German Film and Television Academy) who began in the late 1960s to film various political activities and discussions in the neighbourhood. It places particular emphasis on the work of Helga Reidemeister, a social worker and student at the dffb whose documentary films adopted a working practice that depended on the direct participation of the families and women, in particular, with which she collaborated. Through a close reading of her 1979 film, *Von wegen „Schicksal“* (1979), the paper foregrounds Reidemeister's role as a feminist filmmaker whose work explored the mechanisms of displacement faced by tenants living in the Märkisches Viertel and the wider 'structures of feeling' that they generated. At stake here, is a broader commentary on the history of housing struggles in West Berlin and the importance of documentary filmmaking as a methodology for housing justice.

Keywords

Documentary filmmaking, feminist activism, housing struggles, West Berlin, Helga Reidemeister.

Introduction

The group planned to shoot a film that would enlighten the population of the Märkisches Viertel about poor conditions in this area. But they soon discovered that this task was nonsensical, since no one was less in need of enlightenment than the residents of the Märkisches Viertel.

-Harun Farocki (1969, p. 96)

My main project is to make films for the people who are in them and who recognize themselves in them [...] My films [...] attempt to work out problems which remain unsaid and repressed. They are documents of what isolates me, what makes me angry, what I want to experience so that it will change, so that it won't stay the way it is.

-Helga Reidemeister (In Silberman, 1982, p. 45)

On 3 May 1970, a newly built shopping centre in the Märkisches Viertel, a large housing estate on the outskirts of West Berlin, became the scene of an unusual open-air film screening. Over 500 residents descended on the centre to watch a brief film documenting the brutal eviction of over 100 activists who had occupied an empty factory hall in the neighbourhood only a few days earlier to protest the recent closure of an after-school club and the lack of free social spaces for youth living on the estate (see Vasudevan, 2015; Lange et al., 1975). While the police locked down the neighbourhood and set up checkpoints to prevent the screening, the filmmakers were able to elude the authorities and the screening went ahead as planned.¹

The brief film – *Die Besetzung* (The Occupation, 1970) – was screened in two parts and consisted exclusively of footage in reversal film from the occupation and its eviction. The two parts bookended a performance by Hoffmann's Comic Teater, a radical theatre ensemble formed in 1969 by three brothers, Gert, Peter and Ralph Möbius. Wearing colourful costumes and masks and accompanied by a live band, the ensemble quickly developed a reputation for staging politically daring events that took place in the streets of West Berlin and in the city's many youth homes (Vasudevan, 2015, Brown, 2013, p. 172). The performances focused, in particular, on the everyday conflicts that shaped the lives of ordinary Berliners which, in this case, centred on the events of May 1. The largely improvised staging retraced the actions of one local youth who had been beaten up in the eviction only to return home and argue with his parents. The play concludes as he joins a neighbourhood newspaper to write his own eyewitness report of the occupation.²

While the history of Hoffmann's Comic Teater and their role in the formation of *Ton Steine Scherben*, one of the most important bands within the radical scene in West Berlin, is now well-established (Brown, 2009; 2013; see Sichtermann et al., 2000; Seidel, 2006), the work of the filmmakers involved in documenting the occupation of the factory hall in the

¹ Freie Universität Berlin, Archiv Außerparlamentarische Opposition und soziale Bewegungen (hereafter APO-Archiv), Boxfile 1294c, MV-Märkisches Viertel/Berlin Mieter, Brochure, "Kinogramme Märkisches Viertel," n.p. Translations are by the author unless otherwise noted.

² APO-Archiv, ibid.

Märkisches Viertel has received far less attention. The creators of *Die Besetzung*, Christian Ziewer and Max Willutzki, were former students of the Deutsche Film- und Fernsehakademie Berlin (German Film and Television Academy Berlin or dffb). Like many of their counterparts, they were inspired by the emergence of the new extra-parliamentary opposition (*Außerparlamentarische Opposition* or APO) in West Germany and became active in the student movement in the late 1960s. They were expelled alongside sixteen other students in 1968 from the dffb for occupying the academy in May 1968 in a protest against new Emergency Laws proposed by the West German government (Bowie, forthcoming, p. 1).

Zieher and Willutzki were also part of a wider group of dffb students who had begun to work in the Märkisches Viertel documenting the lives of its working-class residents (Drechsler, 1980). The construction of the satellite estate had been part of West Berlin's First Urban Renewal Programme initiated by then Mayor Willi Brandt in 1963. Scheduled for completion in 1974, the estate had become the largest housing project in West Germany with plans for over 17,000 units and a population of 50,000 residents (Figure 1). Many of its new residents had been 'decanted' from inner-city tenements slated for demolition and regeneration and were increasingly unhappy with their new homes, the high and rising rents they paid, the poor infrastructure they encountered and the acute undersupply of kindergartens, schools and youth centres they were forced to negotiate (see Vasudevan, 2021; Reinecke, 2014).

It is against this backdrop that the Märkisches Viertel became something of an experimental 'field site' for alternative forms of political organisation and representation that



Figure 1

The Märkisches Viertel, photo by Helga Reidemeister.
Source: Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek.

treated the city, the neighbourhood and the built form as both the setting and stage for new ideas and practices that were rooted in wider struggles around social services, housing and urban regeneration (Vasudevan, 2021; Brown 2009: 7; also see Gandy and Jasper, 2020; Jasper, forthcoming). A series of collaborative projects were established that brought university students and local residents together placing particular emphasis on grassroots organizing and community self-empowerment while seeking to challenge the housing insecurity that shaped the experiences of tenants living in the Märkisches Viertel (Lange et al, 1975). This included the work of Ziewer and Willutzki and other dffb filmmakers who documented the living conditions in the Märkisches Viertel and the active role played by residents in different community groups (Tietke, 2019, p. 108). Their films not only dramatised the growing marginalization and stigmatization experienced by tenants in the neighbourhood but also focused on the politics of social reproduction and the routinised demands and expectations that many women active in the same grassroots organisations faced, both of which, as this paper argues, spoke to new forms of feminist activism.

It is this relationship between experimental filmmaking, housing insecurity, and emergent feminist screen cultures that forms the focus of this paper. The paper retraces the history of the Märkisches Viertel as a ‘laboratory’ for political filmmaking in the 1960s and 1970s (Tietke, 2019). It foregrounds the role of the dffb and its students, many of whom travelled to the housing estate to film the various political activities and discussions in the neighbourhood. The majority of these films focused on recording the broad range of actions undertaken by local residents. Few involved, however, their predominantly working-class subjects in the production process and many remained indifferent to questions of gender and sexuality (and for that matter, race).

This paper seeks to address this absence and omission. While it offers a comprehensive overview of films produced in the Märkisches Viertel, it places particular attention on the work of Helga Reidemeister (1940-2021), an activist, social worker and dffb student who was part of a small group of feminist filmmakers who adopted a documentary approach that not only explored the experience of women living in the district but actively encouraged a method of ‘close coordination between filmmaker and the persons filmed’ (Tietke, 2019, p. 116).³ Combining work on filmmaking and the New Left in West Germany (Bernstoff, 2019; Gerhardt, 2017, 2018; Gerhardt and Abel, 2019) with a now well-established body of geographical scholarship on radical housing politics and the lived experience of housing insecurity (Vasudevan, 2015, 2017; Ferreri, 2020; García-Lamarca, 2017; Lancione 2020b; Roy et al. 2020), the paper focuses on the new forms of political action that were catalyzed through the medium of documentary filmmaking. It highlights how specific political demands – the right to affordable housing, access to adequate social infrastructure and the transformation of reproductive labour – were captured in different ways through the lens of the camera.

The paper explores, in this way, the relationship between social action and visual representation and the role that alternative filmmaking played as ‘an educational and political

³ Reidemeister sadly passed away on November 29, 2021 after a long illness.

process' in the Märkisches Viertel (Roy et al, 2020, p. 19). This was a process that sought, on the one hand, to make visible the concrete experiences of displacement, loss and precarity felt by many local residents. On the other hand, it also generated intense criticism from many residents who became increasingly skeptical of the categories and concepts imposed on their working lives. This prompted some filmmakers – most notably Helga Reidemeister – to adopt a more collaborative approach and a working practice that ultimately depended on the direct participation of the women with whom she worked.

This paper emerges out of this effort. It proceeds in three interconnecting stages. In the first section, the paper re-traces the role that the medium of film played within the New Left in West Germany and the anti-authoritarian revolt of the 1960s and 1970s. The second section offers a detailed analysis of the relationship between activist work and documentary filmmaking in the Märkisches Viertel. In the third and final section, the paper develops a close reading of Reidemeister's work in the Märkisches Viertel and her dissertation film for the dffb, *Von wegen 'Schicksal'* (1979). The film follows the life of Irene Rakowitz, a community activist in the neighbourhood and single mother of four. The paper foregrounds Reidemeister's role as a feminist filmmaker whose work sought to capture the social conditions faced by tenants living in the Märkisches Viertel through 'the structures of feeling' – the antagonisms, attachments, and anxieties – they engendered (see Brickell, Harris and Nowicki, 2019). At stake here, is a critical meditation on the everyday conflicts and struggles experienced by the Rakowitz family and how they came to anatomise the persistent insecurities faced by tenants living in West Berlin in the 1970s. These are representations, as the paper concludes, that seek to not only advance our understanding of the history of housing struggles in West Berlin. They also encourage us to reflect on the relationship between critical geographical pedagogies, radical filmmaking and feminist activism and how we might ultimately come to re-claim a space of empowerment for a more just and sustainable urbanism.

Alternative Screen Cultures and the New Left in West Germany

In November 1966, a young student at the German Film and Television Academy in Berlin (hereafter, dffb) took up residence in a homeless shelter for men on Schlesischen Straße in the working-class district of Kreuzberg. Over the next few days, the student recorded the daily routine of a 65-year-old man named Oskar Langenfeld. Shot on an Arri M camera, the eleven-minute film followed Langenfeld reading in bed, washing clothes, collecting rags, chatting with other men in the home, visiting friends and relatives, and smoking alone in his dormitory room. Langenfeld, who was seriously ill with tuberculosis, died shortly after filming.⁴

Oskar Langenfeld 12 x was a student film made by Holger Meins for a first-year seminar taught by the filmmaker Peter Lillienthal. The twenty-five-year-old Meins was part of the initial cohort of thirty-five students who began classes at the newly established dffb in

⁴ A digitised version of the film is now available on the dffb website: <https://dffb-archiv.de/dffb/oskar-langenfeld-12-mal>

September 1966. He was also one of many students at the academy who were active in the extra-parliamentary opposition and would later gain notoriety for a 1968 film – never officially attributed to him – *Herstellung eines Molotov-Cocktail?* (How to make a Molotov Cocktail?, 1968) which showed how to build a Molotov cocktail before cutting to an image of the Springer press headquarters in West Berlin. The three-minute silent film became something of a call to arms for an increasingly militant student movement in West Germany which sought to ‘expand the horizons of the radical imagination, in a time of rapidly exploring protest, to include previously neglected possibilities’ (Brown, 2019, p. 46). For Meins, these were ‘possibilities’ that prompted him to join the Rote Armee Fraktion in October 1970 (Red Army Faction or RAF). He died in prison after a lengthy hunger strike in 1974.

While Meins was part of an emergent screen culture that explored the relationship between the medium of film and revolutionary political action, the cardinal significance of activist filmmaking to the New Left in Germany – as alternative public sphere and mode of social critique – remains understudied. This paper seeks to fill this gap. It builds on a growing body of scholarship that has begun to explore the role that West German cinema played in documenting, shaping and interrogating the ‘revolutionary happenings’ and social movements that emerged during this period (Gerhardt and Abel, 2019, p. 2; Bowie, forthcoming; Gerhardt, 2017, 2018; Scribner, 2014; Vogt, 2008). Much of this work also sets out to challenge the focus on auteur-based cinema and the attention given to a small group of well-known directors and the feature films they produced (Alexander Kluge, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Werner Herzog, Wim Wenders and Margarethe von Trotta). Recent studies have revealed a wider range of projects, formats, and subjects including experimental agitprop (Tietke, 2019), student-led initiatives (Reichard, 2008), workers’ films (Elsaesser, 2019) and feminist documentaries (Bernstoff, 2019; Gerhardt, 2019) while re-tracing the complex cultural, social and political vectors that went into their making.

New attempts have, in this way, been made to recognize the anti-authoritarian revolt in West Germany as a ‘media revolt’ (Brown, 2019, p. 42). This was a revolt that openly resisted the rapid expansion of mass media during the 1960s and the capitalist methods of production and distribution that characterized an increasingly monopolistic press (Brown, 2013, p. 195). As a number of studies have shown, filmmaking practices adopted, in many cases, a DIY (‘Do it Yourself’) ethos that emphasized self-organisation, non-commercial distribution and the collectivization of the production process (see the essays in Gerhardt and Abel, 2019). This was an ethos that focused on the making of an ‘alternative public sphere’ (*Gegenöffentlichkeit*) that would, in turn, offer a counterweight to ‘mainstream depictions of social reality’ while supplying other alternative imaginaries (Brown, 2019, p. 47).

The argument developed in this paper seeks to extend and re-center the approach adopted by these studies. It returns to the question of social marginality captured in Meins’ first student film and which itself became something of a ‘shared basis for the work of the early dffb students’ (Bowie, forthcoming, p. 5). The paper develops a close reading of the critical documentary approach that came to characterize many of the early films produced by students at the dffb. These were films that not only expressed a desire for political

engagement but were equally marked by their commitments to representing and working with the most marginalized sectors of society. These were, moreover, films that had a major impact on the evolution of political filmmaking in West Germany in the late 1960s and 1970s (Gerhardt, 2017).

It is surprising, therefore, that, as the film theorist Tilman Baumgärtel (1996) has observed, ‘the short documentary and agitation films, which the collective of politically active students produced [...] at the dffb, have now [become] almost completely forgotten witnesses of the student movements.’ While the early history of the dffb has, to this date, received limited attention, the founding of the dffb in 1966 was widely seen, at the time, as a direct response to the Oberhausen Manifesto. The Manifesto, which was signed on February 28, 1962, by twenty-six directors, called for a ‘new style of film’ and the radical restructuring of the West German television and film industry, its funding mechanisms as well as the establishment of film schools across the country (Gerhardt, 2017, p. 26).

As a result of the Manifesto, West Germany’s first film school, the *Institut für Filmgestaltung, Ulm* (Ulm Institute for Film Design) opened the same year. It was followed by the dffb in 1966 and the *Hochschule für Fernsehen und Film, München* (University of Television and Film, Munich) which opened in November 1967. In the case of the dffb, over 850 applications were whittled down to an inaugural cohort of thirty-five students which included a number of students who would go on to become well-known filmmakers in their own right: Hartmut Bitomsky, Harun Farocki, Thomas Giefer, Wolf Gremm, Hans-Rüdiger Minow, Wolfgang Petersen, Helke Sander, Max Willutzki, and Christian Ziewer.

New efforts to re-examine and re-assess the impact of films produced during the early years of the dffb have tended to zoom in on their relationship (and proximity) to the West German New Left. A number of students were active members of the extra-parliamentary opposition and participated in, and often recorded, the protests taking place on the streets of West Berlin. They also acted in solidarity with many of the movement’s key preoccupations including the ratification of new emergency laws (*Notstandsgesetze*) in May 1968 which prompted a group students to occupy the dffb between May 30 – June 10, 1968 and, in the words of *Der Spiegel*, ‘socialise’ their ‘means of production.’⁵ They draped a red flag from the top floor of the academy which they renamed the Dziga Vertov School after the famous Soviet filmmaker whose working practices had become a key touchstone for many of the occupiers. The 18 students were later expelled from the academy in November 1968 on the grounds of trespassing though the charges were later dismissed and the students reinstated (Gerhardt, 2017, p. 29).

It would be tempting to, therefore, revisit the work produced at the dffb during this period as an exemplary representation of the anti-authoritarian revolt. This paper nevertheless parts company with such an approach. It responds to Laura Bowie’s recent call for a ‘more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between urban space and film production in West Berlin during the 1960s’ (forthcoming, p. 5). More specifically, it argues that one of the most important contributions of the alternative screen cultures that emerged

⁵ “Empfindliche Störung,” *Der Spiegel*, 01.03.1970.

out of the dffb in the late 1960s was an engagement with local everyday struggles over housing, work, education and social welfare. This was an engagement that drew attention to the role that different urban spaces played in conditioning the ‘possibilities of radical action’ (Brown, 2013, p. 26). It was also an engagement that focused on new pedagogical possibilities and the role that the documentary film might come to play in shaping emergent identities, solidarities and strategies (Brown, 2013, p. 26).

The paper, thus, connects work on West German screen cultures - and political filmmaking in general (Grant, 2016; Nichols, 2016; Sites Mor, 2012; see also Bathla and Papanicolaou, 2021; Vasudevan and Kearney, 2016) - with a more expansive geographical approach to the study of emancipatory urban politics and how they are assembled, represented and shared. Recent scholarship on housing activism and radical politics (Anti-Eviction Mapping Project, 2021; Gibbons 2018; Gonick, 2021; Lancione 2020b; Maharawal, 2021; Roy et al. 2020) takes on, in this context, an added significance in regard to the kind of collaborations initiated by student filmmakers and residents in neighbourhoods such as the Märkisches Viertel. These were collaborations that produced alternative media practices that sought to expose and render visible the structural mechanisms of displacement and dispossession that condemned significant numbers of Berliners to misery and insecurity. At the same time, they foregrounded an ‘orientation towards housing justice’ that was rooted in grassroots community organising and the life stories of tenants shaped by division, displacement and precarity yet marked in equal measure by anger, desire, and endurance (Roy et al., 2020, p. 14; see Vasudevan, 2021). In reconstructing this largely forgotten archive of participatory filmmaking, the paper advances an optic that highlights the conspicuous role of film as a collective pedagogical tool - both experimental and fragile - for engaging with the felt realities of urban marginality while re-thinking how we might come to research and inhabit cities otherwise (Lancione, 2020a).

Community Cameras: Documentary Filmmaking in the Märkisches Viertel

The emergence of new grassroots initiatives between ordinary residents and student activists in the Märkisches Viertel remains one of the most significant if often overlooked chapters in the development of the anti-authoritarian revolt in West Germany (see Vasudevan, 2021; Brown, 2013). As the activist, social worker and filmmaker Helga Reidemeister later recalled in an interview published in the journal *Jump Cut*, ‘in the late sixties most leftist students sought out factory work. In contrast, I decided to become involved in community grassroots organizing in the “Märkische Viertel” [...] where I became fascinated with my own ignorance about working class daily life.’ ‘I was suspicious,’ she added, ‘about how we student leftists tried to learn about the proletariat theoretically. We read books, engaged in endless discussions and held meetings. Yet no one felt the need to go simply where workers live — the sphere of reproduction — and to develop an independent perspective about their daily misery’ (Silberman, 1982, p. 44).

Reidemeister was not alone, however, in her commitment to grassroots organising in the Märkisches Viertel. While many students involved in the extra-parliamentary opposition

in West Berlin sought to extend the struggle within universities to include new rank-and-file groups (*Basisgruppen*) working in factories (see Arps, 2011; Brown, 2013), many other activists also began to collaborate with local residents in the Märkisches Viertel, a large satellite estate on the outskirts of West Berlin which had itself become a key front within a wider ecosystem of dissent and protest (see Vasudevan 2021). A number of self-help initiatives were, in this way, designed to overcome the growing stigmatization that residents associated with their new homes and the increasingly precarious circumstances in which they found themselves (Reiniecke, 2014; see Autorengruppe “MVZ” 1974) (see Figure 2). According to a 1972 study by the geographer Karl-Heinz Hasselmann, over half of the district’s residents were unhappy with their living circumstances. More than 26% complained about the transport connections with some residents commuting upwards of 2 hours a day. A further 23% singled out high rents and another 14% highlighted the development’s lack of spaces and services for children and young people (Hasselmann 1972). The same study concluded that over a quarter of residents were preparing to move out of the neighbourhood.⁶

It is against this backdrop that recent scholarly efforts have been made to re-trace and re-construct the history of student organising in the Märkisches Viertel in the late 1960s and 1970s and the broad repertoire of political practices and direct-action techniques (rent strikes, ‘public’ happenings, eviction resistance networks, tenant groups, etc.) that were developed



Figure 2

Housing struggles in the Märkisches Viertel.

Source: Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek.

⁶ Other government surveys of the district showed greater support for the new neighbourhood (see Reinecke, forthcoming).

and ‘tested’ by activists working in the neighbourhood (Vasudevan, 2021). They were first initiated by a group of architects and urban planning students at the Technische Universität Berlin (TU-Berlin) and soon encompassed a five-year research scheme on ‘social pedagogy’ that was set up at the Pädagogische Hochschule (Institute of Education, hereafter PH) (Autorengruppe ‘MVZ’ 1974; see Gribat, Misselwitz and Görlich, 2018). According to the research team who led the scheme at the PH later explained, these were projects that were designed to ‘compensate for the lack of infrastructural facilities [in the neighbourhood] through self-help initiatives that would, at the same time, help residents to overcome their isolation [...] and encourage them to collectively represent their interests and needs to the housing association and the district office’ (Müller and Schröter quoted in Drechsler, 1980, p. 52)

These were, moreover, projects that sought to re-assemble the ‘communication structures of old working-class districts in predominantly proletarian new-build neighborhoods’ (Lange et al. 1975, p. 77). A core project, in this context, was a neighbourhood newspaper, the *Märkisches-Viertel-Zeitung* (MVZ) which was set up in June 1969 though there were other efforts to construct an alternative public sphere in the district while developing different modes of political education. This included, most notably perhaps, the work of a group of film students who had been earlier expelled from the dffb for their involvement in the occupation of the academy in the spring of 1968. The four – Thomas Hartwig, Jean-François Le Moign, Max Willutzki, and Christian Ziewer – pooled the funds that had been allocated by the dffb for their second and final year (around 60,000 DM in total) to acquire equipment which would allow them to independently produce their own films (Tietke, 2019, p. 109; see also Drechsler, 1980). The group became known as Basis-Film in reference to the student-led *Basisgruppen* that had turned to local neighbourhoods and other institutions (clinics, schools, factories, youth centres, etc.) as a source of new political initiatives and solidarities (Arps 2011). For ‘organisational reasons’, Willutzki and his family moved to the Märkisches Viertel in 1969 and set up a makeshift studio in his apartment.⁷

Basis-film, as Fabien Tietke reminds us, drew particular inspiration from their counterparts at the dffb and a group of nine students (among them Sander and Farocki) who were responsible for setting up a working group (‘Group 3’) that explored the collectivisation of the production process and the development of new methods that pushed the boundaries of documentary filmmaking (Tietke, 2019, p. 106). In practical terms the group focused on generating a platform that would, in the words of Farocki, ‘make films *for* the evolving political left’ (Farocki and Alexander, n.d.; emphasis added). These were films that stressed the articulation of a new visual grammar that, in the eyes of the group, connected documentation with a form of political ‘education’ that was capable of addressing and representing key political themes and demands.

Another point of reference for the Basis-film group was the concept of *Zielgruppen* (target audience) which has been introduced by dffb students in 1968 to challenge the

⁷ APO-Archiv, Boxfile 1294c, MV-Märkisches Viertel/Berlin Mieter, Press release, “Kinogramme aus dem Märkischen Viertel. Filmarbeit mit Unterprivilegierten aus den Jahren 1970-1972,” n.p.

representational limits of a ‘capitalist-organized film industry’. This was a concept that targeted the dissolution of well-entrenched habits of perception while articulating the interests of disadvantaged social groups including workers and other marginalized groups as means of raising political awareness (Drechsler, 1980, p. 59). While many early *Zielgruppen* films were unsurprisingly rooted in the space of the factory, Basis-film turned its attention to documenting the range of ‘activities, discussions and actions in the Märkisches Viertel’ (Tietke, 2019, p. 109). ‘We are interested,’ they proclaimed, ‘in the cinematic representation of situations that show people in certain social conditions.’ The group aimed to overcome the ‘dualism’ between production and consumption and advocated the ‘formation of production units in which a specific target group would work together with the filmmakers from planning through to the completion of the project’ (Hartwig et al., quoted in Drechsler, 1980: 59, 60). Footage was carefully selected – in theory at least – by student researchers from the PH and the local residents with which they collaborated.

Hartwig and Le Moign, for their part, focused on the construction of a much-needed adventure playground for children as well as on the activities of ‘Die Brücke’, a youth centre that had been established in the district and was threatened with closure (see Ebert and Paris, 1976). The two filmmakers adopted a ‘critical position’ which aimed to document and facilitate the community work undertaken by the groups that had taken up the cause of ‘Die Brücke’ and other youth services in the Märkisches Viertel.⁸ At the same time, many of the young people that met at the centre were deeply unimpressed by ‘the stupid chatter from the students’. Tensions between them and the filmmakers led Hartwig and Le Moign, in the end, to eschew the collaborative approach to filmmaking that they had originally advocated so that they could finish their documentary *Wir wollen Blumen und Märchen Bauen* (We Want to Build Flowers and Fairytales, 1970) which aired for the first time on German television on December 15, 1970.⁹ A second film, *Rudi* (1972), which featured the central character from *Wir wollen Blumen*, was screened in 1972, after which Hartwig and Le Moign parted company (Drechsler, 1980, p. 60).

Ziewer and Willutzki, in contrast, adopted a different working practice that extended the concept of *Zielgruppen* to the pursuit of a project that would capture all of the grassroots organising in the Märkisches Viertel in ‘one coherent contemporary document’ (Tietke, 2019, p. 109). They became involved in a number of self-organised groups (the parent-child group, the self-published newspaper, the working group on housing struggles otherwise known as ‘*Mieten und Wohnen*’) and produced footage some of which was never intended for public screening or was used to make short agitprop films that dramatised the demands of local residents in the neighbourhood. Their main focus, however, was on the production of *Kinogramme*, agitational documentaries, which spotlighted the housing insecurity and social marginality that many residents experienced. As the two filmmakers themselves concluded in a 1970 position paper, this was a ‘filmpraxis’ with five main goals: 1) to work collectively to change behaviour; 2) to work with specific target groups; 3) to highlight the situation of

⁸ APO-Archiv, Boxfile 1295a, MVZ, *Märkisches Viertel Zeitung*, “Die Brücke wird abgebrochen,” September, 1969.

⁹ No author, “Gescheiterte Aktion,” *Der Spiegel*, 13.12.1970.

the target audience; 4) to create concepts that allow the target audience to overcome barriers to self-consciousness; 5) to enable social needs to be met and, in so doing, create new forms of social emancipation (Drechsler, 1980, p. 62-63).

Only three of the four *Kinogramme* that were made by Ziewer and Willutzki survive.¹⁰ The first, *Kinogramm I: Die Besetzung* (The Occupation, 1970) was a short three-minute film that consisted almost exclusively of reversal film footage from the occupation of a factory hall in the Märkisches Viertel on May 1, 1970. *Kinogramm II: Mietersolidarität* (Tenant Solidarity, 1970), documented local community resistance to the eviction of a family in the neighbourhood. The thirteen-minute film combined footage from the eviction resistance campaign jumping between shots of a ‘go-in’ protest at the local housing office with interviews with the family as well as other protest actions that took place during the campaign. The final surviving *Kinogramm* took on a more conventional documentary approach. *Kinogramm III: Nun kann ich endlich glücklich und zufrieden leben* (Now I Can Finally Live Happily and Satisfied, 1970) is a much longer film (forty-eight minutes) that follows the political development and transformation of one worker, Hans Rickmann, and his family who moved to the Märkisches Viertel so that they could live ‘happily and satisfied’. Rickmann soon realizes that this dream is unrealizable, and the film retraces his efforts, together with other neighbors and colleagues, to change the social conditions in the housing estate.¹¹ For Ziewer and Willutzki, the film ‘makes it clear that [...] the real interests of workers, on the one hand, and the bourgeois citizenry, on the other, are so fundamentally different from each other that common solidarity must fail.’¹²

A fourth *Kinogramm: Sanierung für wen?* (Regeneration for whom?, 1972) emerged out of the actions of a working group on tenant struggles (*‘Mieten und Wohnen’*) that later evolved into a self-organised tenants’ council. The film was primarily organized around the impact of the new *Städtebauförderungsgesetz* (Urban Development Act, 1971) on local residents and explored the role that the medium of film could play into transforming the ‘theoretical’ dimensions of the ‘housing question’ into a meaningful pedagogical tool. A fifth unfinished *Kinogramm: Chronik eines Mieterprotestes* (History of a Tenant Struggle) retraced the history of housing struggles in the Märkisches Viertel and the enduring possibilities of building grassroots infrastructures of care and solidarity. The main aim of the film, according to its directors, was to refute ‘the common prejudice surrounding citizens’ initiatives in newly created satellite towns. Namely that [such initiatives] would simply come to a standstill and impasse [...] once the initial causes for the political mobilisation of residents would appear to have been resolved.’ The filmmakers countered that a long-term process of ‘mutual

¹⁰ There is some debate as to how many *Kinogramme* were actually made. One press release by Basis-Film refers to seven films though other records confirm that only four were ever screened. The same document describes five of the seven films. See APO-Archiv, Boxfile 1294c, MV-Märkisches Viertel/Berlin Mieter, Press release, “Kinogramme aus dem Märkischen Viertel. Filmarbeit mit Unterprivilegierten aus den Jahren 1970-1972,” n.p.

¹¹ APO-Archiv, Boxfile 1294c, MV-Märkisches Viertel/Berlin Mieter, Brochure, ‘Kinogramme Märkisches Viertel – Kinogramme 3’, n.p. ; Press release, “Kinogramme aus dem Märkischen Viertel. Filmarbeit mit Unterprivilegierten aus den Jahren 1970-1972,” n.p.

¹² APO-Archiv, Ibid., Brochure, ‘Kinogramme Märkisches Viertel – Kinogramme 3’, n.p.

teaching and learning' could turn an episodic protest into a 'long-term struggle against the nature of the contradictions that characterised existing society.'¹³

The Kinogramme produced by Ziewer and Willutzki not only recruited workers from various grassroots groups that had been set up in the Märkisches Viertel. They were also consonant with a movement-wide effort to assemble an alternative public sphere in the estate and, in so doing, generate broader geographies of action and solidarity. The directors decided to screen their films at irregular intervals in the center of the Märkisches Viertel's main shopping centre while other open-air projections featured alternative news programmes which attracted over 200 spectators as well local municipal authorities who tried to ban the screenings while organising events that featured less critical productions (see Tietke, 2019, p. 111).¹⁴

In the end, Ziewer and Willutzki found that the open-air screenings generated a range of views and discussions that often pulled in different competing directions that, in their eyes, disrupted the forms of political consciousness that they sought to cultivate. They began to scale back their efforts and concentrate their film work on more 'homogenous' groups within the Märkisches Viertel such as the self-organised tenant council.¹⁵ A feature-length documentary by Willutzki, *Der lange Jammer* (The Long Sorrow, 1973) was, in this way, produced and included Hans Rickmann and other local activists who reflected on the difficulties – emotional and political – in overcoming the isolation that many residents felt. The film juxtaposed footage from local protests against rent hikes that were jointly organized by students and residents with scenes that were re-enacted based on actual events. At the heart of the film, as one commentator recently reflected, was 'the gradual (affective and political) self-empowerment of the working-class tenants who overcame their fear, called a rent strike, and organized a protest convoy' (Reinecke, forthcoming, p. 11).

The relative success of the film also prompted Ziewer to shift focus away from documentary filmmaking to feature films that concentrated on the struggles of workers in the Märkisches Viertel and the various conflicts, contradictions and solidarities that had come to characterise and shape their lives. While the films were generally well-received, many critics, at the time, also countered that the interests of the working class, or so they presumed, were 'by no means automatically identical with those of the filmmaker' (Beringer quoted in Elsaesser, 2019, p. 124). This was a sentiment that was applied to other films that were produced in the Märkisches Viertel in the early 1970s and which, if anything, amplified longstanding tensions between residents and students. Many residents worried that they had been left out of the production process and that their experiences were simply the object of a filmmaker's gaze who did not really understand their 'inner life' or their most basic needs and desires not to mention their anxieties and material insecurities. It is, in this very context and the representational challenges it assumed, that a group of feminist filmmakers working

¹³ APO-Archiv, Ibid., Press release, "Kinogramme aus dem Märkischen Viertel. Filmarbeit mit Unterprivilegierten aus den Jahren 1970-1972," n.p.

¹⁴ APO-Archiv, Ibid., Brochure, 'Kinogramme Märkisches Viertel – Kinogramme.

¹⁵ APO-Archiv, Ibid., Brochure, 'Kinogramme Märkisches Viertel – Kinogramme.

in the Märkisches Viertel – most notably, Helga Reidemeister – began to develop a different kind of collaborative project.¹⁶

The 'Inner World' of Housing Insecurity

In the opening scene of Helga Reidemeister's *Von wegen, Schicksal?* (Is this fate?, 1979), the documentary's main character, Irene Rakowitz, a community activist in the Märkisches Viertel, is shown at the editing table in front of a monitor watching a clip from the film (Figure 3). In the clip, we see one of Irene's daughters blaming her for the problems that have torn their family apart. The camera shifts to Irene who responds, countering that all of this isn't, in fact, about their problems and 'screw-ups' but, ultimately about the nature of the 'family in our society.' The film quickly cuts to a shot of a tower block in the Märkisches Viertel with Irene's son, Konstantin, riding a skateboard in the foreground.

The opening of *Von wegen, Schicksal?* gathers together a number of themes that are central to the documentary work that Reidemeister produced in the Märkisches Viertel and that distinguished her working practice from other student filmmakers; namely the commitment to overcoming 'the classic division of labour between professional filmmakers and those being filmed' by including local families in all aspects of the production process (see Tietke, 2019, p. 112); the development of a critical ethos that highlighted the experience of women in the neighbourhood who had often been silenced within various activist groups; and, finally, the focus on emotional labour in the sphere of social reproduction with a particular emphasis on the everyday realities that had come to shape the insecurities that many residents experienced (see Vasudevan, 2021, Reinecke, forthcoming).

Figure 3

Irene Rakowitz
sitting at the cutting
table in *Von wegen*
,Schicksal? (Is This
Fate?, 1979)

Source: Stiftung
Deutsche
Kinemathek.



¹⁶ The work of the filmmaker (and dffb student) Cristina Perincoli is also worth highlighting in this context. Perincoli's thesis film *Für Frauen – 1. Kapitel* (For Women – The First Chapter, 1971) focused on a group of women who were active in the tenants' group in the Märkisches Viertel. Perincoli's work merits further attention though is beyond the compass of this paper.

Reidemeister, like so many students in West Germany in the 1960s, was active in the extra-parliamentary opposition and was, as early as 1966, a member of the Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund (Socialist German Students' Union, or SDS). Reidemeister later worked as a social worker and community organiser in the Märkisches Viertel where she joined a number of working-groups that had been set up by students from the Technische Universität and the Pädagogische Hochschule respectively.¹⁷ It was, moreover, Reidemeister who, between 1968 and 1974, recorded and transcribed a series of conversations between local residents and student activists. The conversations began as a way of documenting how residents felt about their new urban environment, though they soon became a source – and, later, an often neglected archive – that captured something of the wider sense of marginality that shaped and structured the lives of residents in the district not to mention their anxieties surrounding these experiences and how they were imagined and represented by their student counterparts (see Vasudevan, 2021).

It is also during this time that Reidemeister began to experiment with the medium of film as a way of challenging the stigmatization of the Märkisches Viertel that many residents associated with the mainstream media. Reidemeister adopted an approach that departed significantly from the efforts of other filmmakers working in the district such as Ziewer and Willutzki who focused almost entirely on male activists in the neighbourhood and were greeted with suspicion by many residents. 'They are always,' in the words of one family, 'making films about us, not with us. They never show us the way we really want to be shown' (Silberman, 1982, p. 44). Reidemeister focused, in contrast, on a 'process of self-portrayal.' 'Those affected [residents],' she argued, 'should be able to portray themselves as subjects.' To this end, Reidemeister developed an alternative documentary method which stressed the 'direct participation of those involved in the production process' (Reidemeister quoted in Drechsler, 1980, p. 94). As she later remarked, 'I felt safest beginning work *with* families in *their* homes' (Silberman, 1982, p. 44; original emphasis).

Reidemeister was hoping to give cameras to several families in the neighbourhood so that they could 'take stock of the world around them' on their own terms (Reidemeister quoted in Drechsler, 1980, p. 94). She was unable, however, to secure the funds that she needed for her project and was forced to scale back her efforts and concentrate on one working-class family, the Bruder family, which she knew through protests against rent hikes and forced evictions in the Märkisches Viertel and for whom she acquired a single Super-8 camera (she was later able to secure three cameras) (Stempel, 1977, p. 16). As the family themselves later recalled, 'we want to do something ourselves rather than always have to see what others make of us' (Reidemeister, 1977, p. 12). Reidemeister handed over the process of filming to the family though illness, a period of unemployment and a string of accidents meant that only four hours of film were recorded over a five-year period (Tietke, 2019, p. 115). Reidemeister was forced, in this way, to re-examine her own commitments to

¹⁷ Reidemeister lived for many years in the same communal flat as the student activist Rudi Dutschke and his partner Gretchen. See Waltraud Schwab, "Die Letzte aus der Dutschke-WG," *die tageszeitung*, 07.03.2005.

collaborative production – not to mention the wider relationship between precarity and free time experienced by many district residents – just as she began her studies at the dffb in 1973 (Drechsler, 1980, p. 95).

Reidemeister continued to work with the Bruder family alongside another student at the dffb, Sofoklis Adamidis, who contributed to the project and a broader re-imagining of the production process. The two filmmakers adopted a more central role and shot new material on a 16-mm camera which was combined and edited alongside the earlier Super-8 footage to form Reidemeister's first documentary film, *Der gekaufte Traum* (The Purchased Dream, 1977). The film showed 'how the circumstances under which the [Bruder] family labours are caused by socio-political behaviour patterns and therefore not to be seen only as individual problems'.¹⁸ In so doing, it sought to capture and document the life of the family and the various frictions and insecurities that had come to shape their everyday experiences both within the 'four walls of [a] 98 m² apartment' and the 'specific living conditions' of the family at work, at school, and at the youth detention centre where one of the sons was staying (Stempel, 1977, p. 16; Reidemeister, 1977, p. 12). Reidemeister was unsuccessful, however, in securing permission to shoot outside the home. She also worried that the filming – with its all of its equipment – had come to dominate the space of the family's apartment and impose and project its own kind of 'authority' on their daily life (Reidemeister, 1977, p. 15). For Reidemeister, the film 'bristled' with a kind of naiveté that undercut its political message. 'Reduced to a primitive level, my political commentary,' she wrote in retrospect, 'rather clumsily showed statistics against building facades; I could find no better way to visualize a critical perspective' (Silberman, 1982, p. 44).

While Reidemeister lamented the limitations of her approach in *Der gekaufte Traum*, others, including the journalist and writer Gesine Stempel, singled out its feminist commitments and, in particular, the film's portrayal of Irene Bruder, the thirty-three-year-old mother of five whose everyday struggles reflected contemporary debates about unwaged housework and the politics of social reproduction. How could, for example, the 'Wages for Housework' campaign, itself an important (and widely debated) touchstone for feminists in West Germany in the late 1970s, empower Irene Bruder, Stempel speculated, and what did the film have to say about the private sphere and the re-politicisation of family life (Stempel, 1977, p. 17; Schlaeger, 1978; Schwarzer, 1973)?

The 1970s are often described as 'the decade of feminist filmmaking and film theory' and, in a West German context, numerous scholars have drawn attention to the development of a 'film feminist public sphere' (Bernstoff, 2019, p. 87; see Bernstoff, n.d.; Knight, 1992). Helga Reidemeister was, in this context, one of a small group of women who studied at the dffb and whose work featured prominently in new magazines such as *Frauen and Film* and was widely screened at festivals that highlighted the work of feminist filmmakers. Reidemeister was also included in Marc Silberman's two-part catalogue of women filmmakers in West Germany that appeared in *Camera Obscura* (1980, 1983). Her work received little scholarly attention at the time, however, which gravitated instead towards the

¹⁸ Press release, Neue Deutsche Filme 76/77, *Der gekaufte Traum*.

aesthetic preoccupations of filmmakers such as Helga Sanders-Brahms, Ulrike Ottinger and Margarethe von Trotta. Reidemeister's own commitment to the documentary form nevertheless reflected wider concerns with the 'material conditions of social reproduction' and what we might now understand as an intersectional approach to the experiences of working-class women (Mueller, 1998, p. 188-190).

These were concerns that Reidemeister explored in *Der gekaufte Traum* and returned to in *Von wegen ‚Schicksal‘* (Is This Fate?, 1979). The film focused on another working-class family in the Märkisches Viertel, in this case the Rakowitz family. Irene, a trained seamstress, was a single mother of four who had recently divorced her violent husband, former miner, Richard (Figure 4). She had been active in a number of grassroots organisations in the district in the late 60s and early 70s including the working group on tenant struggles as well as the community newspaper that had been set up with students from the Pädagogische Hochschule. The film re-traced the emotional afterlife of these struggles and explored, in particular, the tensions between Irene and her children who blamed her for the separation. It encompassed a series of highly charged scenes set in the Märkisches Viertel in Irene's flat as well as the flat of her ex-husband and the partner of one of her daughters (Reinecke, forthcoming, p. 10). Where Reidemeister's earlier film, *Der gekaufte Traum*, struggled to document and mediate between an 'outer world' of social marginality and an 'inner world' of anxiety and alienation, *Von wegen ‚Schicksal‘* shifted attention to the 'structures of feeling' – the pervasive atmospheres of lived insecurity and violence – that represented the collective sense of crisis that characterised the lives of many residents living in the estate and precarious urban context they inhabited (see Brickell, Harris and Nowicki, 2019). The Märkisches Viertel only figures briefly in *Von wegen ‚Schicksal‘* as a spectral space of tower blocks and suburban wastelands in which we see Irene Rakowitz's son, Konstantin, playing. As Reidemeister later recalled, describing the documentary approach that that was adopted in the film, 'there is nothing left of the outer world' (Silberman, 1982, p. 45).

Figure 4

Irene Rakowitz with
her son Konstantin
from *Von wegen
‚Schicksal‘*

Source: Stiftung
Deutsche
Kinemathek.



Reidemeister was perhaps overstating her case though she was also at pains, in this context, to distance herself from what she described as a 'pure documentary' methodology whereby the filmmaker 'waits patiently until something happens "on its own" in front of the camera.' For Reidemeister, the filmmaker does not have access to some unmediated reality. Rather, she argues that the 'filmmakers' presence forces those who are being filmed into a role which responds to the filmmakers' expectations. My film work begins at the point where I am able to undermine this "role"' (Reidemeister, 1982, p. 46). In the case of *Von wegen, Schicksal*, this prompted Reidemeister to devise a mise-en-scene in which she engaged directly with Rakowitz and her family – asking questions, provoking responses - in order to portray the breakdown of the family under the social circumstances that they faced. 'We have to recognize,' in Reidemeister's own words, 'that working through this kind of family life is necessary before we can emancipate ourselves' (1982, p. 45).

The film received the Deutsche Filmpreis in 1979 though some critics remained sceptical of the interventionist approach that Reidemeister adopted (see Berg-Ganschow, 1979). The director was accused of voyeurism and that she had, ultimately, crossed the line in seeking to capture and stoke the antagonisms that were breaking the Rakowitz family apart. When the film was screened at the Duisburger Filmwoche in 1979, a number of commentators singled out a dramatic dinner table confrontation between Irene and her son, Konstantin, in which the boy burst into tears. Other audience members worried that the various scenes with Irene's daughters were edited and manipulated in such a way as to portray them only in relation to Irene whose personal development was foregrounded at the expense, in their view, of other family members (Opitz, 1979). Reidemeister, for her part, rejected the criticisms and insisted that her working practices were developed in close collaboration with Irene and that she did not intend to analyse the Rakowitz family as a 'case study' but wanted to 'show where her strength came from to go on living' (Silberman, 1982, p. 45).

In one of the most important scenes in the film, Irene recounts to Helga the struggles with her ex-husband over their children and how the world in which she lives is governed by a kind of pervasive violence:

Irene: Everything only works through the use of violence [...]. Whether it is psychological or physical [...] And the stronger one wins....

Helga: But you are still trying..

Irene: I tried but it just doesn't work [...] I cannot fight the whole world. The whole world and this system run only through violence.

The scene, set in Irene's kitchen, highlighted the intimate violence that had devastated her family and pointed, in a rather different way, to the socio-psychological precarity that many tenants in the Märkisches Viertel lived on a daily basis (see Vasudevan, 2021).

As the theorist and political organiser Eric Stanley reminds us, 'violence holds us to the world, an atmospheric constant whose consistency must be fundamentally disturbed if we



Figure 5

Final scene from *Von wegen, Schicksal?*

Source: Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek.

are to survive' (2021, p. 16). The subject of Stanley's remarks is admittedly rather different from those that animated Reidemeister though they both point to the stakes involved in cultivating other liveable futures and, in Reidemeister's case, a feminist politics rooted in the representation of women as autonomous political subjects. As Reidemeister recalled, despite her fatalism, Irene insisted that there was no point to the film 'if she saw in it only her misery [...] those were her demands, and I always try to stick closely to the needs of those people with whom I work' (Silberman, 1982, p. 45). The film's final scene must be seen in this context. It shows Irene ironing and in conversation with her youngest daughter Astrid (13 years old) who reflects on the nature of freedom (Figure 5). 'Freedom,' for Astrid, 'is to live my own life, to work and do my professional shit in such a way that I can live how I want and arrange my life for myself [...] And I want my mum to hang in there so that she knows that we belong together.'

While Reidemeister, ultimately, recognised that the scene might be seen by some as 'artificial and optimistic', it also pointed to a 'principle of hope' that some kind of happiness was, in fact, still possible for Irene and her family and that there was an alternative to the emotional landscapes of alienation, insecurity and violence that had come to characterise the Märkisches Viertel as a place of urban marginality (Silberman, 1982: 45; Reiniecke, forthcoming; see Häberlen, 2018). At stake here, as this paper concludes, was a recognition that political filmmaking involved not only the documentation of particular struggles and the

demands they produced but a different kind of ethos – collaborative, makeshift and experimental – that challenged and re-imagined the very relationship between urban activism and documentary cinema.

Conclusion

The overarching aim of this paper is to retrace the history of documentary filmmaking in the Märkisches Viertel, a large housing estate in West Berlin that was constructed between 1968-1974 and which came to house thousands of working-class residents who had been displaced from inner-city neighbourhoods that were slated for demolition and regeneration. It was also during this period that the neighbourhood became a key new front in the extra-parliamentary opposition and a ‘laboratory’ for student activism and community organising (Vasudevan 2017, 2021). The Märkisches Viertel was, therefore, re-imagined as an experimental field site that brought students and local residents together collaborating on a number of grassroots initiatives which were designed to empower and educate residents and help them to overcome the growing marginality that they associated with their new homes.

As this paper shows, political filmmaking occupied an increasingly important place within the repertoire of activist practices developed in the Märkisches Viertel by students and residents alike. These were practices that emerged, in particular, through the work of a group of students who were connected to the Deutsche Film - und Fernsehakademie Berlin (German Film and Television Academy Berlin or dffb) and for whom the neighbourhood or district represented an opportunity to assemble an alternative public sphere and, in so doing, adopt a collectivist approach to artistic production (Brown, 2019). These were, moreover, practices that documented the housing insecurity that many residents encountered and the lack of social infrastructure that characterised the new housing estate. They also served as a tool of political organising and provided a detailed representation of the tactics and strategies that were taken up by residents in their struggles over housing justice.

‘Film,’ according to the philosopher and critic, Theodor Adorno, writing in the same year as the founding of the dffb, ‘provides models for collective behaviour.’ ‘Such collectivity,’ he adds, ‘inheres in the innermost elements of film.’ Adorno, for his own part, lamented the limitations of popular filmmaking though he did speculate on the possibilities of ‘the liberated film’. It is in the service of the ‘emancipatory intentions’ imagined by Adorno that the modest claims of this paper must be seen (Adorno, 1981/1982 [1966], pp. 203-204). Here, the camera lens offers a critical point of purchase on the making of an emancipatory urban politics rooted in tenants’ struggles around affordable housing, inaccessible health care and the unskilled labour market that they were forced to navigate. At the same time, many residents in the Märkisches Viertel were still concerned that the films produced in the neighbourhood left them out of the production process and drew on predetermined categories that objectified their daily lives. While some student directors saw their efforts, in this respect, as a form of critical pedagogy that was designed to educate and mobilise, most of the films that were created in the neighbourhood shied away from a truly communal form of film work and ignored the role that women played in various community groups not to

mention the impact of the new housing development on the social division of reproductive labour (Tietke, 2019, p. 108).

It is against this backdrop that the paper develops a critical reading of emergent feminist screen cultures in the Märkisches Viertel with a particular focus on the work of Helga Reidemeister, a student activist, social worker and dffb film student who worked closely with tenants in the neighbourhood and whose methods ultimately depended on the direct participation of the women (and families) with which she collaborated and a certain ‘accountability to communities on the frontlines of housing precarity’ (Roy and Rolnik, 2020, p. 13). If this is a reading that reminds us of the role that documentary filmmaking played in representing the history of housing insecurity in West Berlin, it also speaks to wider conceptual (and practical) concerns over the methods that we – as critical urbanists – use in our struggles for housing justice not to mention the limitations of documentary verisimilitude and the forms of scholarship we adopt.

The paper advances, in this respect, a particular understanding of documentary filmmaking as a form of radical pedagogy that not only exposes the structural mechanisms of displacement that condemned so many Berliners to a life of misery. It also opens up a modest critical space that seeks to develop a feminist approach to filmmaking *and* housing justice and therefore recognize the various ways in which these ‘structures’ are encountered, embodied and felt. As Irene Bruder, one of Helga Reidemeister’s key interlocutors, ultimately recalled reflecting on her experiences working with the filmmaker on *Der gekaufte Traum*:

The film was necessary to recognize all of this, and I believe and I hope that others will also recognize what is *important* in life so that one can actually *live* in our society. Anyone who recognizes and overcomes the seemingly banalities in everyday life can also assert themselves against society. Especially in our case, everyone should see and recognize that the hunt for material objects, as a substitute for lost love, understanding and belief in others, *destroys so much* in people. Now, the question is how can we *change* that? (Bruder, 1977, pp. 19-20; original emphasis).

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