

How to Live in the FRG

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This text was written for the 20th International Forum of the Berlinale Film Festival in 1990.

Translated from German by Antje Ehmann and Michael Turnbull

In 1989, the production year, we filmed acted scenes in 46 locations. Scenes from psycho-dramas, socio-dramas and other hyphenated-science dramas. We filmed in schools, public administration offices, higher education institutions and clinics, when fragments of life were acted out. When life was acted to demonstrate something, to instruct, to practice, to exorcise, to cope with something.

A few years ago we filmed an exercise in negotiation techniques at a business school where the employees and the managers argued about the question of whether salaries should be paid in cash or not in future. The managers who played the employees did it really well; some of them knew exactly how to represent the spiritual narrowness of working life, others revealed a longing to be a proletarian who doesn't have to pretend to be emphatically interested in work, leisure, the company, the economy or the world. They all took part in an endeavour to suspend being a proletarian through being managers – it was a playful triumph.

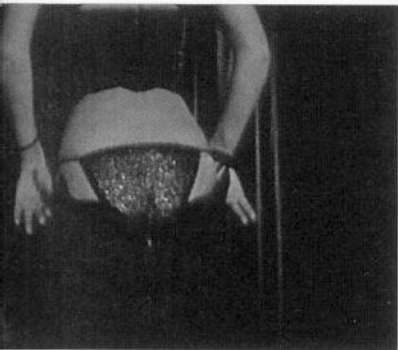
The managers who played the managers also did it really well. In a conference room of a hotel in a health resort, beneath the light from shaded fluorescent tubes, at reconfigurable desks with nameplates, on stackable chairs on an anti-static carpeted floor, they made a company, a negotiation, and an economic life imaginable. At the same time they turned every imaginable company into a fake company, they imagined real money into fake money. The role-play of the managers depicted their work and revealed that the work of managers is depiction and play. There were managers practicing a technique, and the one thing could be seen in the other.

I resolved to make a film entirely made up of scenes in which something is practiced, exorcised, acted out. We filmed a training scene in a training firm, whose personnel exchanges real letters and fictional economic goods with other training firms. A man applies for a job. It is not long before he speaks of his having had an alcohol problem some years before, and he declares not only that he no longer drinks, but that he is in therapy and is attending self-help groups. Instead of salary and work experience, the soul is spoken about, because business enterprise affiliates itself to therapeutic enterprise.

We filmed a man instructing a woman how to strip effectively, and when she is exhausted, he directs her in an exercise, which teaches her how to relax. After the attempted titillation comes the therapy. Perhaps the sexual titillation is already a therapeutic measure.

We filmed soldiers with the Federal Defence Forces, who were practicing envisaging the enemy. The officer of the manoeuvre directs them and rehearses their lines, as if they were practicing in a provincial theatre.

We filmed in a police office, where an entire ensemble of actor-civil servants was under contract. Five days a week, in fully equipped sets, they role-played a criminal or an anti-social man drunkenly banging away in his flat. Young police students had to play the part of the patrol cop who has to try to search and disarm him. The scene is recorded on video and discussed as a Lehrstück.



We filmed exercises in washing babies, giving birth and delivering babies, which could appear to be religious ceremonial acts. Where do these customs derive from and what kind of God is it that they serve?

The real-life games of banks, self-help groups, unions and social-welfare offices give rise to many different kinds of play. We filmed participants of self-help groups who were drawing their fear – which was sometimes so great that they couldn't leave their flats – as a diagram on a piece of paper; 10 years of fear on one piece of paper. We filmed a church group dramatising a woman's very brief dream scene as a mass performance lasting several hours. The unions of the employees and the police showed us a hyper-realistic way of role-playing, and in a diet clinic and a table-manners course we came across an imaginative game that had different courses of food appear on empty plates.

I filmed games, because games have rules and establish rules. There are all too few rules determining the speech and actions of people in documentary films today. For a long time, I have been thinking of films in which the dismissed workers sing their dismissal, the development workers make rhymes of their adventures, the intermediate persons of contemporary history dance their experiences. For a long time, I have been thinking of documentary films with actors, but I don't want to tell them how to act. They would only document that I was their director and that they were my actors. Here, they document the conception of the world made by the military, the church, the social services, the insurance companies.

The plasticity of life and work processes decreases everywhere. At the same time more and more games are played, which are intended to expose what lies hidden within human beings. The rules by which we are supposed to live are increasingly uncertain, and there are more and more games where life is trained, like a sport. Instruction manuals for life: in the commodity society, the instruction manual is the only record of theory.

