

## Arsenal Summer School 2024

15. Arsenal Summer School

August 28–30 2024, at Arsenal cinema and silent green

### AFTER THE PERIPHERY, THE CENTER: CINEMA AS URBAN HISTORY

Like every year in August, the Arsenal - Institute for Film and Video Art is organizing a summer school. Over the course of three days - this time under the direction of Cornelia Klauß and Florian Wüst - 30 participants, Arsenal staff and invited guests will explore topics at the intersection between theory and practice, past and present.

In 2000, the Filmhaus opened in the Sony Centre and Arsenal, DFFB and the Deutsche Kinemathek - Museum für Film und Fernsehen moved in. The fact that three West Berlin film institutions came together in one office building at this location was due to the long-planned project of a joint film space. A "Filmhaus Esplanade" was supposed to be built in 1990, after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of the divided city. But this never happened: the wasteland where the Hotel Esplanade had once stood was privatized without further ado. The vision of a film center on Potsdamer Platz is now coming to an end, and will be moving at the beginning of 2025. After a nomadic year with changing venues, Arsenal will reopen at silent green in Wedding at the end of 2025/beginning of 2026.

On this occasion, this year's Arsenal summer school will focus on changes in Berlin's urban space and cinema history, from the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961 to the present. With the participants, we want to pay special attention to the relationship between East and West, which was reflected in the development of Arsenal, as well as of the Babylon cinema on Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz, which was established as the second municipal cinema in the 1990s. With experimental and documentary films, photographs and archive material, as well as a walk through the city, we will explore the visible and invisible memory landscape of Berlin's new Mitte district, which is so symbolic of the current state of German history.

With contributions by:

Cynthia Beatt, Lilly Grote, Cornelia Klauß, Gerd Kroske, Stefanie Schulte Strathaus, Florian Wüst

The events will be held in German.

## PROGRAM

**Wednesday, August 28**

**10.–11 a.m.**, silent green  
**Arrival and welcome**

**Note:** Formation of workshop groups to collect their reflections on the topic and the presentations over the 3 days.

**11:30 a.m.–1 p.m.**, silent green  
**Moving Images**  
Stefanie Schulte Strathaus

Arsenal moved from Schöneberg to Potsdamer Platz and is now moving on to Wedding. Three locations, three phases of life: What is the relationship between a cinema's environment and its practice? A past, a description of the present and a vision of the future, with many pictures and film clips.

**1:00 p.m.** silent green  
**Lunch in Mars restaurant**

**2:30–4 p.m.**, silent green  
**Cinema against dictates**  
Cornelia Klauß

In 1961, the Wall came up, the city was divided and gone were the days when people could watch films from the West in border cinemas for just a small amount of eastern marks. The Bezirksfilmdirektion (district film directorate) dictated the centrally managed program in East Berlin cinemas, which had become nationalized. Apart from DEFA productions, the program was dominated by films from Eastern bloc countries, which were not very popular with audiences. Films from the West had to be paid for with foreign currency and were rare. Only films that clearly articulated criticism of capitalism were permitted. But in the shadows, a lively niche culture began to develop. On the side of the state, a few cinemas were labelled so-called "studio cinemas", for example the Babylon in Berlin-Mitte and they were able to draw on the holdings of the state film archive and critical films from Poland and Hungary. Like the film clubs, they were granted a controlled degree of curatorial freedom. And in the mid-1980s, artists discovered the Super 8 medium, which could be produced autarkically, and used it for their cheerful anarchy and a canon of counter-images. These films were shown exclusively in private rooms or galleries. Audiences in the GDR developed the sensitivity and tools to decipher politically subversive messages in historical works and art films that managed to outwit the censors and were able to form like-minded communities.

In 1989, there were still 21 cinemas in East Berlin, and some were in a sorry state in terms of construction, which some described as having a "dilapidated charm".

**4:30–7 p.m.**, silent green

**Beneath the Sands of History**

Cynthia Beatt, Florian Wüst

Potsdamer Platz, the most symbolic intersection of the divided world, was not only transformed into an urban desert after the Wall was built in 1961, but also became a "double periphery" (Wolfgang Kil). The two halves of the city concentrated, back-to-back, on the construction of seemingly unencumbered sub-centers. In West Berlin, however, at the end of the 1970s, there was a shift in thinking away from clear-cut redevelopment through demolition and new construction, and back towards the historic city - and thus towards the places and abysses of Germany's negative history of the 20th century. The so-called central area between Nordhafen and Yorckbrücken became the focus of urban planning, and also of the architectural competition for the Filmhaus Esplanade in 1985. Apart from exploring urban and historical inputs, we want to examine the following questions: What fascination did the wastelands and rubble landscapes conquered by nature exert on filmmakers? What role did the Wall play for the feelings of subculture in West Berlin in the 1980s?

Filmscreening and discussion: *BÖSE ZU SEIN IST AUCH EIN BEWEIS VON GEFÜHL* (Fury is a Feeling Too, Cynthia Beatt, West Germany 1983, 25 Min.)

One level of the film is spoken language, in this case German and English, with the appreciation that if a foreign woman speaks German, it does not mean that she is understood. Another level is the language of architecture, which is understood as a text that exposes the soul and history of Berlin. The film was shot over an area of one square kilometer in the pre-war center of Berlin. A third layer is the music, "Fire in the Lake", composed for Berlin by Maurice Weddington, a US composer who lived in Berlin for eight years. Throughout the film, there are scenes that are repeatedly observed and considered both by foreigners and Germans to be characteristic of "German" unfriendliness and rudeness. These scenes are commented upon and analyzed in conversations in the film. (Cynthia Beatt)

**7 p.m.**, silent green

**Dinner together in Mars restaurant** (included in price)

**Thursday, August 29**

**10:00–12 a.m.**, silent green

**A time of upheaval and uncertainty, a time of opportunity and open spaces**

Cornelia Klauß, Gerd Kroske

The eternal dilemma of film: Is it an economic or cultural asset? After German Reunification, at the beginning of the 1990s: the Treuhand trust reclaimed cinemas as real estate or gave them to (Western) cinema chain operators. One of the few exceptions was the Babylon cinema that was able to resist being seized thanks to a collective effort. The attractive building in Mitte, built in 1929 by architect Hans Poelzig as a silent film cinema with an organ, orchestra pit and boxes, was able to depend on a community of cineastes, which organized a demonstration in support of the cinema and its preservation. With difficult procedures, the cinema succeeded in establishing itself as a second municipal cinema alongside Arsenal.

With the director Gerd Kroske, who was temporarily on the Babylon board, we will reconstruct the difficult transitional phase for cinema and the film industry, which stands pars pro toto for both missed opportunities and necessary new beginnings. This situation was reflected in documentary and feature films that oscillated between coming to terms with the past and attempting to react to the present with cinematic means, while at the same time the economic mills were crushing the structures: the DEFA studios were sold, while filmmakers who until recently had been employed and faced repression and censorship, were now freelancers without producers, and few opportunities in the battle for budgets.

What does Berlin's urban history look like through the prism of the Wall and the city's inhabitants' attitude to life? Together, we will watch: GRENZPUNKT BETON (Concrete End Point, Gerd Kroske, 2015) as well as excerpts from DIE MAUER (The Wall, Jürgen Böttcher, assistant director: Gerd Kroske, 1990) and BERLIN - PRENZLAUER BERG. BEGEGNUNGEN ZWISCHEN DEM 1. MAI UND DEM 1. JULI 1990 (Petra Tschörtner, dramaturgy: Gerd Kroske, 1991).

**12 a.m.**, silent green

**Lunch in Mars restaurant**

**1:30–3:00 p.m.**, silent green

**Center, power, metropolis**

Florian Wüst

After November 1989, unprecedentedly free cultural spaces opened up in East Berlin - some only for a short time. For the sale of the most lucrative properties in the heart of Berlin, the "metropolis of the future", as the private investors, bankers and politicians never tired of proclaiming, began as soon as the Wall had come down and German Reunification was decided. While the Sony Center's steel and glass towered into the sky, critical reconstruction petrified the center of Berlin at eaves height. Modernist GDR buildings were torn down wherever possible. Now, the remains of that central area have either been preserved as sometimes wild, sometimes well-designed park landscapes, or extensively built up: to the north of the main train station, Europacity is nearing completion, according to a 2014 promotional video by the Groth Group, it will be the center of the future. We will embark on a journey of film aesthetics and social spaces, from the now aging new Potsdamer Platz to Wedding, where Arsenal's cinema and archive will soon share the same location again.

**3:30–5 p.m.**, silent green

**Inner walls**

Cornelia Klauß, Florian Wüst

In her 1988 documentary film DIE TÜRHÜTER, which was produced for Sender Freies Berlin, the actress and director Selma Poyraz asks German Turks in West Berlin about their relationship to the Berlin Wall. But the film is only superficially about the inner German border. It is more about the walls the former "guest workers" and their children face in the minds of Germany's mainstream society and the bureaucratic barriers they have to overcome on a daily basis. These walls become all the more visible after the fall of the Berlin Wall. On the basis of the post-migrant perspectives and voices in the film, we will discuss how the Reunification, whose early years, which were marred by racist attacks and the tightening of asylum laws, resonate disturbingly with today's political situation, inscribed itself into the topography of Berlin.

Move to Arsenal cinema

**8 p.m.**, Arsenal cinema

**Screening followed by a Q&A, with Lilly Grote as our guest**

**BERLIN BAHNHOF FRIEDRICHSTRASSE 1990** (Konstanze Binder, Lilly Grote, Ulrike Herdin, Julia Kunert, Germany 1990, DCP, original version with English subtitles, 88 mins.)

In its idiosyncratic collective collaboration, this film about the reconstruction of Berlin's Friedrichstraße border station in the summer of 1990 constitutes an intertwined, multi-perspective memory, whose artistic and clear feminist approach exposes the contacts that the as yet unresolved clash of two societies brought with it. Made at a time when "démontage-journalism", often staged with both pity and arrogance, reduced the GDR to decay and decline, the film works against narratives that were common back then, and is all the more impressive today as a cautious and skeptical evaluation. The authors/directors/camerawomen bring their experiences, questions and backgrounds into the film. This leads, regardless of the documentary-like reserved observation, to an impression that is full of depth and nuances. The train station appears as a blurred, hypermobile image of a society's restructuring. "Would you take to the streets for your rights," Lilly Grote asks the Intershop assistants. Yes, they would, they say, for the right to self-determination regarding abortion. (Madeleine Bernstorff)

**Friday, August 30**, outside in the streets and at Arsenal cinema

10:00–12 a.m., meeting point: tbd

**Walk around the city**

We will walk around Potsdamer Platz together to get an idea of the past and present of the former intersection of the divided world.

**12:00–1:30 p.m.**

**lunchtime**

**1:30–3:30 p.m.**, Arsenal cinema

**The Site**

Cornelia Klauß, Florian Wüst

The photographer, filmmaker and DFFB graduate Riki Kalbe documented the area around Potsdamer Platz for many years before and after the fall of the Berlin Wall. She called the area between the Brandenburg Gate and the so-called Prinz-Albrecht-Gelände, which has been known since 1987 as the Topography of Terror, simply "Gelände" ("site"). The ephemeral uses and appropriations of the site, a "chance to remember", which did not only quote architectural history and transform it in a postmodern way, were swept away by neoliberal urban redevelopment and the establishment of Berlin as the capital and seat of government of a reunified Germany. Is the concrete site a monument or is it merely the area, on which a monument should be placed? We discuss this question in the light of Riki Kalbe's work, as an introduction to the screening of Hito Steyerl's essay film DIE LEERE MITTE (The Empty Center, 1998).

Filmscreening and discussion:

DIE LEERE MITTE (The Empty Center, Hito Steyerl, Germany 1998, DCP, original version with English subtitles, 62 mins.)

The unbroken topicality of DIE LEERE MITTE is evident from the very first words: "There are many ways to break through a border. There are many ways to erect new borders." Although Hito Steyerl is referring to Berlin in 1998, the realization that borders are cyclically dissolved and redrawn is valid across time, both in this film and well beyond. After the fall of the Wall, much thought was given to Berlin's derelict city center, its complex history, and the role it could play for the image of the new Germany. Steyerl skillfully makes connections - between the squatters of the "death strip", the Mendelssohn family, Haus Vaterland, all kinds of protests and parades as well as colonialism and acts of resistance - and repeatedly finds the same trends running through history: The rejection of foreign workers\*, ideologized construction projects and the never-ending attacks on non-white people. Even if the center is no longer empty - there is no end to it.

**4–6 p.m.**, Arsenal cinema

**Discussion in the workshop groups, presentations of the results in the plenum, final round**

**6 p.m.**, DFFB, rooftop terrace

**Drinks**

## Contributors

**Cynthia Beatt** grew up in Jamaica and the Fiji Islands. She studied at Bath Academy of Art and then moved into film. After working with 24 Frames in London, she travelled for a year through the Middle East, Iran, Afghanistan, India, and then moved to Berlin. In the 1970s and 80s she worked with the Arsenal and the International Forum of New Cinema, programmed major retrospectives of Roberto Rossellini, Fritz Lang, Jean Rouch, Powell and Pressburger, Max Opühls. She began directing films in 1979. FURY IS A FEELING TOO had its world premiere at the Forum in 1984. **Films:** 1980: Beschreibung einer Insel / Study of an Island (200 min.). 1983: Böse zu sein ist auch ein Beweis von Gefühl / Fury is a Feeling Too. 1986: Dakui Gau Trio, Namosi. 1988: Cycling the Frame (27 min.). 1991: The Party – Nature Morte (89 min., Forum 1992). 2009: The Invisible Frame (60 min.). 2014: A House in Berlin (96 min.). 2024: Heart of Light (in postproduction).

**Lilly Grote** lives and works in Berlin as a film director, artist and sound woman for feature and documentary films. 1970-75 study at the Kunsthochschule Kassel. 1975-77 photography in Frankfurt am Main. 1977-82 study at the German Film and Television Academy Berlin, DFFB. 1986 she founded the production company SO 36 FILM together with Ulrike Herdin.

She realized films such as "Daily Chicken" (1997) and "Berlin Bahnhof Friedrichstrasse 1990" (together with Konstanze Binder, Ulrike Herdin and Julia Kunert) and worked as a sound recordist on Elfi Mikesch's films "Mondo Lux - Die Bilderwelten des Werner Schroeter" (2011) and "Krieg oder Frieden" (2024). She has been a guest lecturer at the German Film and Television Academy Berlin, DFFB, for many years.

**Cornelia Klauß** grew up in East Berlin. First films on Super-8. Studied film science at the KONRAD WOLF Academy for Film and Television in Potsdam-Babelsberg. 1990-2002 cinema program director at Babylon, Berlin. Member of the selection committees of the International Short Film Festival Oberhausen and the International Leipzig Festival for Documentary and Animated Film for many years. She has made several documentaries for television, such as "Die subversive Kamera" (The subversive camera) about the East German underground film scene. She is an author for radio features, dramaturge for documentaries, curator and co-editor of "She. Female DEFA-directors and their films", among others. Since 2017 head of the film and media arts section at the Akademie der Künste, Berlin.

**Gerd Kroske**, born in Dessau/GDR, completed an apprenticeship as a concrete worker, worked as a telegram messenger and in youth cultural work. He studied cultural studies at the Humboldt University in Berlin and directing at the KONRAD WOLF Academy of Film and Television in Potsdam-Babelsberg. Worked as an author and dramaturge at the DEFA documentary film studio [1987-1991]. Collaboration with the directors Jürgen Böttcher, Thomas Heise (†), Petra Tschörtner (†) and Volker Koepp. He has been directing his own films since fall 1989 and has been working as a freelance author and director since 1991. realistfilm producer since 1996. Former member of the Berliner Filmkunsthaus Babylon e.V. association and temporarily on the board. Various jury and teaching activities, e.g. on the selection committee of the Duisburger Filmwoche and the documentary film jury of the 68th Berlinale. Film courses and lectures in Karlsruhe, Vienna, Stuttgart, Potsdam-Babelsberg, Amherst, Yale, Williamstown and Wesleyan. Film awards for his work at Cinéma du Réel, Paris, Visions du Réel, Nyon, DOK Leipzig, Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival, among others. Recent retrospectives at the Austrian Film Museum, "Gerd Kroske - Deutschlandbilder" (2020), and at the Zeughauskino (2024), under the title "Dokumentarische Positionen".

**Stefanie Schulte Strathaus** is the artistic director of Arsenal – Institute for Film and Video Art in Berlin. From 2001-2019 she was a member of the selection committee of the Berlinale Forum. From 2006-2020 she was the founding director of the Berlinale section Forum Expanded. She curated film exhibitions, such as "LIVE FILM! JACK SMITH! Five Flaming Days in A Rented World" (2009, with Susanne Sachsse and Marc Siegel), „A Paradise Built in Hell“ (2014, with Bettina Steinbrügge), and "From Behind the Screen" (2018), as well as research and exhibition projects such as "Living Archive – Archive Work as a Contemporary Artistic and Curatorial Practice" (2010-2013) and "Archive außer sich" (2017-2022). In 2021 she launched the biennial festival "Archival Assembly". Her work is dealing with the intersections of film restoration, exhibition and distribution, focussing on collaborative and decolonial thinking and practice. Schulte Strathaus is serving on the boards of the Harun Farocki Institut and the Master program Film Culture at the University in Jos/Nigeria.

**Florian Wüst** is a Berlin based film curator and publisher. He has curated film programs and exhibitions for international art institutions, cinemas, and festivals. His most recent curatorial projects include, among others: „Studio Stadt. Peripherien elektronischer Musik“, Kunstraum München and Scharaun, Berlin (2023, with Ralf Homann, Jaro Straub and Tim Tetzner), IMPAKT Festival 2022 „The Curse of Smooth Operations“, Utrecht (with Erik Bünger), as well as two exhibitions at the Centro Internacional de Cultura Contemporánea Tabakalera, San Sebastián, „Zin Ex. Body and Architecture“ (2021) and „Zin Ex. From Abstraction to Algorithm“ (2020). From 2016 to 2020 Wüst was the film and video curator of transmediale. He is editor of the DVD edition „Die moderne Stadt. Filmessays zur neuen Urbanität der 1950/60er Jahre“ (2015, with Ralph Eue) and the book „How says concrete doesn't burn, have you tried? West Berlin Film of the '80s“ (2008, with Stefanie Schulte Strathaus). Wüst is co-founder of the Berlin Journals—On the History and Present State of the City.

**Registration**

The number of participants is limited to 30 persons. Slots will be allotted according to when the application is received. Participation fee: 175 Euro / 155 Euro (members, students, Berlin-Pass) / 135 Euro (members in the Arsenal Freundeskreis)

**Registration deadline: August 5, 2023**

**Venues**

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Gerichtstr. 35  
13347 Berlin

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Potsdamer Str. 2  
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