

GFL



German as a foreign language

Teaching Andreas Dresen

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ISSN 1470 – 9570

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The films of Andreas Dresen, a “last generation” director born and educated in the former German Democratic Republic, offer a rich variety of opportunities to teach the cultural, social and political complexities of the post-unification period in Germany. This paper establishes the context from which Dresen’s work emerges by introducing two of his early student films as well as two essays written during his studies at the Academy for Film and Television in Babelsberg/Potsdam. These two essays serve to describe the *Endstimmung* for many in the culture industry of the late 1980s and may be used as textual material in discussions that invite students to make comparisons to their own lives. In the sections that follow, this paper presents strategies for teaching two of Dresen’s films from the late 1990s, *Raus aus der Haut* (*Changing Skins*) and *Nachtgestalten* (*Night Shapes*). It places an emphasis on cultural awareness and comparisons in relation to *Raus aus der Haut* and higher-order thinking in relation to *Nachtgestalten*. These films are most suited for upper level courses at the university, though *Raus aus der Haut* may appeal to students in secondary education as well.

1. Andreas Dresen, Child of the GDR

Demographically speaking, Andreas Dresen comes at the tail end of a generation that has been called the “last” or “lost” generation of film directors in the GDR. Most individuals belonging to this group were born around 1949 or shortly thereafter, and struggled to make their debut films – three were required at the time – in the 1980s, at a time when the GDR was stagnating economically and politically. Examples of those working in the feature film genre are Jörg Foth, Andreas Höntsch, Dietmar Hochmuth, Peter Kahane and Evelyn Schmidt, to name a few. “Last” or “lost” generation directors were generally in their late teens when Soviet tanks rolled into Prague in 1968 and crushed its young democracy. In addition, they were acutely aware of atrocities in Vietnam, and thus developed a persistent political and social awareness that is apparent in the subject matter of their films. They wanted not the end of the GDR, but a better GDR. To achieve this, they wanted to show the problems of real existing socialism so that they could be discussed and improvements made, but this desire brought them into direct conflict with the state’s very limited tolerance for criticism. Lost generation films offer many excellent examples of this, one of which is Evelyn Schmidt’s 1981/82 film *Das Fahrrad* which, though brought to

completion, was shown in cinemas only in a limited fashion and for which Schmidt was heavily criticized by official sources.¹ In contrast, critical West German cinema of the late 1970s and 1980s was intended to and effectively did contribute to societal dialogue and change. A notable example from the same year as Schmidt's *Das Fahrrad* is Ulrich Edel's film version of *Christiane F. – Wir Kinder vom Bahnhof Zoo*, about the drug scene in the Zoo area of West Berlin.

Dresen and his cohort, among them Andreas Kleinert, also born in 1963, entered the stage on the coattails of this “last” or “lost” generation, studying under many of the same professors at the Academy for Film and Television in Babelsberg as their predecessors did, but finishing their studies *after* the fall of the Berlin Wall. Thus, they evince many of the same political and aesthetic influences, but were able to begin their careers in the unified Germany. Whereas the pre-unification debuts of “last” or “lost” generation directors mark them as East German, directors such as Dresen and Kleinert had the opportunity to choose their themes and therefore how they might be perceived.

1.1. Dresen's Early Films

Two of Dresen's earliest films show that from the beginning, he has taken a critical, yet sensitive stance on everyday topics. Born in 1963 in Gera in the former East Germany, Andreas Dresen made his first film as a teenager, a short film he titled simply *Unser Täglich Brot (Our Daily Bread)*. It was about a man and a woman who want to eat out, but who find their efforts thwarted because the tables in all the restaurants have signs on them saying *reserviert* as was often the practice in the former East Germany. Dresen's friends liked his little film, because it portrayed human frustration and poked fun at what was then a common practice – that of understaffing restaurants and limiting the number of persons they could serve by marking the tables “reserved”. As a result of Dresen's gently

¹ A more detailed study of the last/lost generation may be found in McGee 2003 (both articles); the larger cultural-political context of film in the GDR as well as the situation for last/lost generation directors are treated in Schittly and in Berghahn.

subversive film, the factory-based film club that lent the equipment was shut down. But for Dresen, this was just the beginning of a career in movie-making.²

At the Academy for Film and Television “Konrad Wolf” in Babelsberg, near Potsdam, Dresen studied to become a feature film director in the 1980s. It was common for students to make a series of shorter films in various genres before moving to longer projects. An early student film was a documentary titled *Was jeder muß* (*What Everybody Has to Do*). It showed young soldiers completing their required military service, as Dresen himself also did before being allowed to attend the film academy. Dresen chose to portray the painful realities of these young men far away from home, who had limited or no leave time on holidays, and who spent many hours waiting and bored – the fate of the soldier. Fortunately for Dresen, politics at the film school were loosening up by the time he made this film in 1988. A few years earlier, he might have been strictly censured for portraying a part of the state apparatus in a negative light. In an unpublished interview with this author in 2003, Dresen explained that Lothar Bisky, the academy’s new director, called Dresen into his office and suggested they keep this one quiet for a while. Dresen understood. The country was in upheaval. Weekly demonstrations made it clear things would not continue as they had in the former East Germany, but no one knew what the future of the nation held.

1.2. Dresen’s Student Essays

Bisky’s arrival at the film academy was responsible for a liberal phase in the last year or so of the GDR. His unprecedented step of taking a group of film students to attend an international film festival in Paris in the spring of 1989 allowed Dresen to see the capitalist West for the first time in his life. He returned to the academy and wrote a reaction titled *Nach Paris ...!!!* that he pinned to the so-called *Wandzeitung* at the film academy. Someone removed it. Bisky had it put back up. In his essay, Dresen captured the overwhelming experience of Paris in May and compared it to the dreariness of his home country, from which most citizens could not travel freely. He wrote:

ich spüre meine Unfähigkeit, über das Erlebte zu reden. Zuviel Schizophrenie ist dabei im Spiel – weil Westreisen eben leider noch ein Privileg sind. [...] Und wie soll man sie auch

² For a brief overview of Dresen’s career, see McGee (2004a).

beschreiben, die Fülle von Lichtern, Klängen, Gerüchen, den Trubel auf den Straßen, in den vielen Cafés und Bistros bis weit nach Mitternacht. Und natürlich diese Mentalität, die nicht in verbissener Arbeitswut Erfüllung sucht, sondern sich auch treiben läßt, von Genuß zu Genuß. Man arbeitet, um zu leben. Die Charme dieser Stadt, dieser Menschen ist wie eine Umarmung, der man sich nicht entziehen kann und möchte. Vielleicht ist er das Leben schlechthin. (Dresen 1988a: 288f.)

Dresen's positive emotional response to the beauty and liveliness of Paris is simultaneously one of loss vis-à-vis his homeland, a mourning of the lack of life in the everyday and regret about the inability to travel. Dresen goes on to ask the key questions that were on the minds of many that summer of 1989 – and I paraphrase from the same essay – “how much longer can we close ourselves off from the world? Can our nation afford to block its citizens' access to the experience of other cultures? A nation as a closed cultural system – is that even still possible in our world?” (289).

History showed it *was* no longer possible. In the summer of 1989 thousands of GDR citizens were leaving the country by way of Hungary's now-opened border to Austria. It was even difficult to complete films at the Babelsberg film studios because cast and crew of films-in-progress were shrinking daily. And yet Dresen chose to stay. He remained idealistic, arguing for an engaged position, wherever one decides to live: “Mir scheint, daß ein engagiertes Leben nicht ortsgebunden ist. Pro und Kontra findet man wohl immer und überall. Die Frage ist nur, ob man weiß, *wofür* man sich überhaupt engagieren will” (Dresen 1988b: 291). He titled an open topic paper written in a cultural politics course in August of 1989 *Warum ich immer noch hier bin*. Dresen described his attachment to East Germany, saying “ich bin ein Kind der Provinz DDR”, a product of this land and yet aware of its problems. He saw the course that his nation had taken as wrong, because its socialism had become perverted, and he felt it important to stay and help correct the course, rather than abandon ship. Making films would be his way – not of providing answers – but of helping to explore issues and contribute to finding a better way. In the essay, Dresen wrote “wahrscheinlich werde ich in den Filmen keine Antworten finden, aber ich kann *zeigen* – und Klarheit über die Zustände ist nun mal eine grundlegende Voraussetzung für ihre Veränderung” (1988b: 291).

The above-mentioned essays lend themselves to discussion in upper level culture and film courses. The first one in particular is brief but powerful prose, written largely in everyday

language, making it more readily accessible to language learners. The questions Dresen posed in that 1989 essay about a citizen's access to information and responsibility to be informed beyond his or her own borders are questions that arise again and again in the context of globalization and internationalization today. Are our students readers of international news? Is the media they tend to use for their information reliable, or does a specific bias underlie it? These are excellent questions for those who may have the illusion they live in a completely "free" nation. Further, of what relevance are the actions of neighboring nations or those far away? How do they affect us over the long and short term? Dresen's description of his society and the one he visited invites a comparison to the reader's own culture, and emphasizes the value of travel to and study abroad in foreign cultures.

In the second essay, Dresen expresses his feelings, attachments to and dislikes of GDR society, in some instances contrasting the GDR to the capitalist model of West Germany. He also expresses principles that guide his thoughts – saying for example that he no longer wants to follow an ideology, but rather to allow his conscience to guide his actions. The tone is at times impatient and youthful, but it is clearly passionate – and is likely to offer good material for class discussion on the subject of civic engagement: i.e. what responsibilities does a citizen have towards the society in which he/she lives? Through what meaningful actions does a citizen contribute to his/her society? Have students reflected on what society asks of them, demands of them, and/or what they choose to contribute? Are they aware of individuals or groups in their society who take a stance in this regard? If so, what is their motivation and what is their reward?³ Both texts were reprinted in Dietmar Hochmuth's 1993 volume DEFA NOVA, along with documents and interviews that relate to the careers of many last/lost generation directors.

2. Film Suitability and Availability

Before moving to a discussion of approaches to teaching *Raus aus der Haut* and *Nachtgestalten*, some notes on the suitability and availability of these films are appropriate.

³ See <http://www.aascu.org/programs/adp/about/default.htm> for more on the idea of civic responsibility and civic engagement as a component of academic study at the tertiary level.

That both films have the German FSK rating of “Freigegeben ab 12 Jahren” may *not* necessarily mean the material is suitable for pre-teens, but rather that it could offend even some university students. *Raus aus der Haut* has brief partial nudity and very limited violence; *Nachtgestalten* has some nudity, more violence, and includes scenes showing homelessness, prostitution, random crime, alcohol abuse and domestic abuse – all of which is not to say it is completely unsuitable for the classroom. After a showing in my upper level film course at the university, none of the students regretted having seen the film. It is probably true that *Raus aus der Haut* may be shown all or in part at secondary or tertiary level. *Nachtgestalten*, should probably be reserved for those studying German or Film Studies at tertiary level. As for availability, *Raus aus der Haut* was released on DVD in the US early in 2005, and is being released in 2006 in Germany on DVD. The *Kinder- und Jugendfilmzentrum* offers the DVD with rights for noncommercial showing (<http://www.clubfilmothek.bjf.info>). *Nachtgestalten* was issued on VHS some years ago and on DVD in Germany in February 2005 with English subtitles.⁴

3. Teaching *Raus aus der Haut*

3.1. About the Film

Raus aus der Haut (1997) is entertaining for its combination of political intrigue with a love triangle. It will appeal to teen and young adult viewers because it takes up such themes as love and disappointment, independence from parents, relations with teachers, and the making of decisions about the future. It is of historical and cultural value as it shows the rigid ideological framework of everyday life in the GDR as well as the inevitable deviance from it. Further – unlike many films about the former GDR – and this aspect is important for understanding east-west conflict in the post-unification period – it presents victims and perpetrators with a high degree of complexity. For all these reasons, it will therefore offer fertile material for classroom discussion.

⁴ The purchase of a code-free DVD player will enable the showing of DVDs released in various regions without requiring special settings.

Set in 1977 in the former GDR, *Raus aus der Haut* presents a revolution on a small scale. High school student Marcus is head over heels in love with Anna, who in turn is deeply impressed with Randy, a long-haired school dropout and member of a rock band that occasionally sings songs by the Klaus Renft Combo, a musical group that really did exist and was forbidden by GDR authorities to perform as of 1975. Anna is caught with print material about the kidnapping in West Germany of Hans Martin Schleyer, who was killed when the government refused to give in to the demands of the RAF terrorists holding him. Possession of material from the Western press is forbidden, and Anna and Marcus find themselves in even deeper trouble when school director Rottmann catches Marcus in his office trying to steal the evidence in order to save Anna. The strict ideologue Rottmann determines that Anna, who wants to attend medical school, will first spend a year working in a factory and that Marcus, who wants to read Latin American Studies, must volunteer instead to enter officer training with the military. Horrified, Anna persuades Marcus that the only solution is to imitate what they have seen in the Western news and kidnap Rottmann. They plan to hold him until the teachers have finished writing their recommendations for students who want to attend the university. Of course, holding Rottmann hostage proves more difficult than they had anticipated (McGee 2004b).

3.2. Cultural Awareness and Comparisons

Teaching *Raus aus der Haut* will be most productive if students have some awareness of the cultural and historical context in which the story is set. For instance, the film opens with a gathering of pupils. Many – but not all – are wearing their Free German Youth (*Freie deutsche Jugend*, FDJ) uniforms. As potential background material, the *Kollektives Gedächtnis* section of the German Historical Museum web site offers an autobiographical account of what the FDJ might have meant to this age group.⁵ Students might be invited to discuss what groups for young people exist in their own society and how the functions of such groups compare to that of the FDJ.

The German title of *Changing Skins* is taken from a verse of *Als ich wie ein Vogel war* by the Klaus Renft Combo, a music group forbidden to perform in 1975. Two years later,

⁵ http://www.dhm.de/lemo/forum/kollektives_gedaechtnis/019/index.html.

Randy's band occasionally performs songs by the Renft Combo, disobeying the authorities. The power outage they suffer during a concert in the film is therefore no coincidence. Students can examine the Renft song lyrics to see what parts might have been offensive to the state. Two sites offer Renft lyrics: <http://www.ostmusik.de/> (→ Deutschland → Klaus Renft) and the official Renft web site: <http://www.renft.de/> (→ Texte).

Because Marcus and Anna imitate a terrorist kidnapping, students should know about the significance of the Red Army Faction terrorist acts in West Germany. The German Historical Museum offers a brief overview of related events from the late 1960s to the kidnapping of Hanns-Martin Schleyer in 1977.⁶ Streaming video material helps put events in chronological order and stress the extreme nature of the terrorist acts and the instability they caused in West German society.⁷ In discussion, students can consider what might have motivated the terrorists to act as they did at the time, and what are acceptable ways to try to influence political events.

Thus, working with *Raus aus der Haut* invites students to expand their cultural awareness in three areas: with regard to youth groups, the socially-critical potential of popular music and political activity. In addition to cultural awareness, the additional step of guiding students through some of the cultural comparison mentioned above makes the film particularly valuable as a teaching tool.

3.3. Victims and Perpetrators

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of the film for discussion is the victim-perpetrator roles reversed in it. Anna and Marcus have broken the rules, but Rottmann's extremely harsh punishment of them victimizes them – at least from their point of view. Rottmann, however, becomes a victim first when he is kidnapped and then again after he is released and attempts to resume his position as headmaster. Anna and Marcus, initially his victims, become perpetrators who are increasingly uncomfortable with their role as they learn more about their victim and he becomes more human to them.

⁶ <http://www.dhm.de/lemo/html/DasGeteilteDeutschland/NeueHerausforderungen>
→Linksterrorismus → Angriff auf den Rechtsstaat.

Before the kidnapping, both sides had objectified the other and failed to look beyond the superficial role and function of the other. Rottmann becomes for Marcus and Anna a more complex figure as they observe his physical infirmity (he needs his medicine) and his physical strength (he threatens Marcus despite being tied up), as well as Rottmann the romantic (Marcus and Anna read Rottmann's letters to a former lover in the West while looking for his medicine in his apartment) and Rottmann the grandfatherly figure (at times what he says makes surprising sense to Marcus and Anna and reveals the ridiculousness of their situation). These factors lead Marcus and Anna to appreciate the various dimensions that make up the person Rottmann. There is a kind of "changing of skins" as Rottmann loses his place as an authority figure, yet gains respect in Marcus's and Anna's eyes. As the pupils attempt to take unprecedented control of the situation, they discover their own limitations – and the limitations of their opponent.

Discussion of the film's resolution will reveal multiple layers of causality, as the positive end of the film is due only in part to the kidnapping that Marcus and Anna undertake. Once set free, Rottmann surprisingly does not turn in Marcus and Anna as they had feared, but rather tries to regain his position as school director – without revealing the true reason for his disappearance. Not convinced with his explanation, the school administration lets him know he will not return as director and will be forced to retire. Soon afterwards, while watching the news of the Schleyer killing on television, Anna also receives the news that Rottmann has died, apparently quietly in his sleep. Only Marcus and Anna know what else might have contributed to his early demise, such as the stress of being kidnapped. With Rottmann out of the picture, Anna's and Marcus's futures are no longer threatened, and life seems to return to a kind of normalcy. And yet it will never be the same for Marcus and Anna who are much less likely now to see the world in clear blacks and whites, but rather to appreciate the gradations in between that represent human character and motivation.

⁷ <http://www.dhm.de/lemo/html/DasGeteilteDeutschland/NeueHerausforderungen/>→ Linksterrorismus → Rote Armee Fraktion.

4. Teaching *Nachtgestalten*

4.1. About the film

Whereas *Raus aus der Haut* was clearly set in the former GDR, *Nachtgestalten* (1998) takes place in the sprawling metropolis of post-unification Berlin. Districts reaching from Tegel in the northwest to Hellersdorf on the far eastern side of the city are represented, but what makes *Nachtgestalten* interesting is not the division between east and west, but rather the disenfranchised and marginal who move about it on this one night in which the film takes place. The story line is driven by the actions and fates of the three pairs of very different characters central to it. While the choices that some of the characters make and the lives they live may seem in whole or in part alien to students, the basic feelings, needs and desires that motivate them will not be, for instance the feeling of exclusion, the search for love, and the need for shelter. For this reason, the film may bring students closer to the experience of segments of the population normally unfamiliar to them, and lead them to question their preconceptions about the homeless, foreigners and other outsiders.

With the opening sequence the film establishes its focus on the bottom rung of society. The very first shot shows a rain-soaked Berlin sidewalk at night, where the homeless woman Hanna is seated with her dog, hoping for a mark or two from passersby. Distracted by the sight of a plane overhead that is probably bringing the Pope for a visit to Berlin, she looks down to find a 100 Mark bill has been deposited with her. Hanna and her partner Victor pool their money and go in search of a hotel room where they might for once escape the cold and wet night. The 100 Mark bill serves as a motif that connects this pair with another: the young farmer Jochen has arrived from a village north of Berlin with a wad of 100 Mark bills to spend, ostensibly in the search for sex – a desire he can hardly bring himself to articulate. The course of the night finds him in romantic pursuit of the underage prostitute Patty, whose cold heart repeatedly has her rebuff his naïve and well-meant advances. For Patty, prostitution is business in the service of her drug habit. Not until the penultimate scene involving the two does she show she has developed a degree of compassion and returns to Jochen's wallet one 100 Mark bill of his fortune she has just stolen. The third pair is an even more unlikely one. Little Feliz ("the happy one", or *der Talisman*) has arrived at Tegel airport from Angola. Perhaps more than any other figure, Feliz, who

appears to be roughly twelve, and his interactions with the businessman Peschke represent the humanity and hope that Dresen develops in the course of his film. Although Feliz is quite young, he was most likely sent by his family in Africa to work and send money home from Germany. The hapless and racist Peschke first accuses him of stealing, then begrudgingly takes the child under his wing and subsequently spends the night trying to deliver him to his rightful host. It is Peschke who says in a scene late in the film: “I am and remain a zero”, and yet his caring for Feliz made a huge difference in both Feliz’s life and in his own. In the final scene between the two, Peschke seems to have become attached to little Feliz, and expresses his desire to care for him by presenting him with some money – a 100 Mark bill.

Appearing to be in the tradition of *Night on Earth* by Jim Jarmusch or *Short Cuts* by Robert Altman, the strands of Dresen’s plot crisscross the expanse of Berlin’s urban landscape during a single time frame without conscious contact being made between one pair of characters and another. Peripheral characters such as the homeless man, Zombie, a taxi driver or the punks serve to connect them without bringing them into actual contact with one another. Thus, Dresen weaves a web of individual fates that touch upon one another.

4.2. Keeping a Journal and Discussion

As studies by Choi (2000) and Donley (2000) show, teaching through film is most effective if students are guided in their viewing through questions or even very structured activities. In the film course I taught most recently, students were given guiding questions for their reactions to be recorded in a film journal written in German after each film viewing and before class discussion. The aim in designing the course this way was to make the students responsible for beginning the thought process about the films before coming to class. In the case of *Nachtgestalten*, I assigned students to choose a character to write about in detail. The task was phrased this way: Beschreiben Sie eine Person. Wie ist er/sie? Was will er/sie? In the course of the scenes throughout the film, the students gathered a fairly solid impression of each of the characters. As they wrote about a character intensively, they began to explore that character’s traits, motives, choices, and relationships to others and to the social environment. They began to see how an individual can be described as having a

series of traits and motivations that may even conflict with one another, and how the individual acts or is acted upon as part of a societal system.

After seeing the film and producing the journal, the class brainstormed the names of the six core characters on the board. The students then worked in groups with other students who had chosen the same character so they could share and compare their responses for some 10 minutes in small-group discussion. Afterwards, the groups then reported to the entire class, and in the process the class collected many adjectives and verbs on the board under each character's name. The class assembled and through discussion fine-tuned a substantial amount of vocabulary. To illustrate what rich character portrayals the film offers, student responses to a single scene in which Hanna and Victor are taken to the police station after Hanna is caught riding without her subway pass yielded some of the following adjectives:

Hanna – unruhig, frech, hoffnungslos, aussichtslos, frustriert, beleidigt, dramatisch, streitsüchtig, bitter, kritisch, hysterisch, aggressiv, verzweifelt, hilflos, traurig, vorlaut, unerzogen, kindisch

Victor – geduldig, liebevoll, ungeschickt, hilfreich, hilflos (beide!), verständig, beruhigend, ausgleichend

Polizist – verständnisvoll, streng, skeptisch, unsensibel, sachlich, ungeduldig, genervt

In gathering material produced by the students, each group member was required to speak, and the other class members could make additions or suggest modifications.

In establishing what they knew about the characters, students were automatically motivated to explore the things they did not know. They naturally began to ask more complex questions, such as - and I paraphrase these in English - Why does Hanna react so violently? Why doesn't she have a home? What image does she have of herself? What image does she think others have of her? How is Viktor the same or different from Patty? What was Jochen looking for when he came to Berlin? What did he end up wanting? What made him change his mind? What kind of person is he? What does he love? What - if anything - does Patty love? In this manner, discussion was lively, and students were stimulated to ask critical questions. For this character-driven film, such an approach was extremely helpful and in some senses raised more questions than it answered.

An alternative and more structured approach that emulates the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy (RBT) may also be very productive for discussion of the film. RBT advocates for the development of higher-order cognitive skills and distinguishes between six levels of thinking of increasing sophistication. These are: remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating. An instructor planning discussion with students can refer to Bloom's Taxonomy to keep his or her guiding questions on target.⁸ A discussion of *Nachtgestalten* could be structured according to RBT by asking the students to:

Remember: Choose one of the six main characters and list adjectives to describe his/her behavior.

Understand: Summarize what your character did in the course of the film.

Apply: Construct a theory as to why the character acts as he/she does.

Analyze: Explain how the character's behavior is changed through interacting with the other main character paired to it.

Evaluate: Assess the extent to which the character has created the situation he/she is in or is the victim of outside circumstances.

Create: Compose a next scene for your main character that might follow the end of the film as you saw it.

The outcome of this second approach may be similar to that of the first approach outlined above, but with a clearer delineation between the analytical steps and ultimately more clarity for discussion participants. An advantage of the first approach is the beauty of seeing students themselves take the analysis to a higher level.

5. Conclusion

Although some of the topics Dresen portrays in *Nachtgestalten* are harsh ones – as mentioned above – homelessness, prostitution, battery –, his sensitive handling of the

⁸ Originally described in a handbook published in 1956, Bloom's Taxonomy was reissued by a working group in the 1990s as RBT, or Revised Bloom's Taxonomy. A comparison between the original and updated versions is made at <http://www.coe.uga.edu/epltt/bloom.htm#end>.

personalities involved engages the viewer in their plight. Dresen shows the urban setting for what it is – a microcosm in which lives are linked, even if those living there are not always aware of the connections. It is such connectedness that comes through in this film, as in *Raus aus der Haut*. Dresen's films are interesting precisely because he shuns the black-and-white portrayals that make judgements easy. Instead, he takes the viewer beneath the surface of his characters better to appreciate the dilemmas they face and the choices they make. As he did from the early days of his film career, he holds up a mirror to the everyday – in *Nachgestalten* it is the downside of a modern capitalist society. And as he did in his student essays, he asks in his more recent films – is this the society we want? Who are we in it? Who do we want to be? Students will surely identify with his dilemmas.

Author's note: The author wishes to thank Elin von Törne, Ph.C., for her valuable comments and suggestions during the revision of this paper for publication.

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Annotated filmography

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- So schnell es geht nach Istanbul* (1990) Short feature film; Preis der Unterzeichner des Oberhausener Manifests 1991; Preis des DGB - Oberhausen 1991; Prix Europe 1992.
- Stilles Land* (1992) Feature film; Hessischer Filmpreis 1992, Deutscher Kritikerpreis 1992.
- Raus aus der Haut* (1997) Feature made for TV; on DVD from <http://www.umass.edu/defa> DVD with English subtitles or from <http://www.clubfilmothek.bjf.info> without subtitles; Hauptpreis Spielfilmwettbewerb 8. Filmkunstfest Schwerin 1998, "Lucas" für den besten Jugendfilm / Internationales Kinder- und Jugendfilmfestival "Lucas" Frankfurt/Main 1998.
- Nachtgestalten* (1998) Feature film; on DVD and VHS from <http://www.arthaus-video.de> or <http://www.amazon.de>; Berlinale 1999 / Wettbewerb – Silberner Bär für den besten Darsteller Michael Gwisdek; Hauptpreis Spielfilmwettbewerb 9. Filmkunstfest Schwerin 1999; Nominierung für den Deutschen Filmpreis 1999 in 5 Kategorien; Prix Europa 2000.
- Die Polizistin* (2000) Feature made for TV; Preis der Akademie der Darstellenden Künste Baden-Baden 2000; "Stern des Jahres 2000" Münchener Abendzeitung.
- Halbe Treppe* (2000) Feature film; on DVD from <http://www.amazon.de>; Berlinale 2002 / Wettbewerb – "Grosser Preis der Jury": Silberner Bär; Preis der Gilde Deutscher Filmkunsttheater; Regiepreis 12. Filmkunstfest Schwerin; Deutscher Filmpreis 2002 in Silber; Preis der deutschen Filmkritik 2002.
- Herr Wichmann von der CDU* (2002) Documentary; on DVD from <http://www.amazon.de>; Berlinale; opened in cinemas April 2003.
- Willenbrock* (2004) Feature film; <http://www.willenbrock-derfilm.de>; on DVD at <http://www.amazon.de>; adaptation of the novel by Christoph Hein with Axel Prahl in the lead role; Berlinale 2005.

Sommervorm Balkon (2005) Feature film; <http://www.x-filme.de/html/sommervormbalkon.html>; adaptation of the novel by Wolfgang Kohlhaase; several prizes, including six nominations for the Deutscher Filmpreis 2006.

Biodata

Dr. Laura McGee is Associate Professor of German at Western Kentucky University (USA), where she teaches courses in German language, culture and film. In 2002-2003, she researched the “last” or “lost” generation of directors educated in the GDR and their film production since unification with the support of a Fulbright Grant. She has published articles on the reform efforts by the last generation (*Film History*) and on last generation films in progress as the Wall fell (*German Studies Review*).