

**A Letter from Yvonne Rainer**

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To the Editors:

I find it necessary to correct certain impressions that may have resulted from the advance publication of segments of my filmscript, "Journeys From Berlin/1971," in *October* 9. As of the date of this writing, Sept. 10, 1979, the film has been shot and is being edited. When I submitted the script to *October*, sometime in early spring, although the main body of the film had not yet been shot, I had reason to believe that there would be no further revisions of any importance in the text. How wrong I was can be measured by comparing the opening titles as published with the latest, and hopefully final, revision:

Let's begin somewhere:

In 1950 a draft for a political criminal law in the Federal Republic of Germany contained the following sentence: "The danger to the community comes from organized people."

In the intervening months I underwent a quite radical shift in my sense of priorities with regard to how Germany would be "presented" in this film. Previously I thought I had a plentitude of reasons for keeping my distance from the "German question." After all, the film was not going to be an analysis of why political violence occurred in West Germany when it did, and after all my work is more or less autobiographical, isn't it, and Germany is not my country, and besides, most of the information available to me in English was hearsay or, worse yet, in the style of *Time* magazine condescension. Well, yes, I did have direct contact with a few victims of police harassment and surveillance tactics when I was living in Berlin; in fact the woman whose apartment I rented had fallen under the *Berufsverbot* and was forced to find work outside of the country in order to continue her profession; but, yes, I had mentioned some of these things in the film. Hedging aside, I felt a caution. Insofar as the reasons for the emergence of the Baader-Meinhof people and the RAF (Red Army Faction) did not seem central to the concerns of the film, I could conveniently evade entanglement with what might after all be "nothing more" than a prolonged McCarthy era. And, for the same reason, I didn't see how the reality of the situation could be accurately conveyed in the space I was willing to allot to it in this particular work. And, of course, the old dichotobears of form and content, art and politics were cooking—and continue to cook—my porridge just like that of a lot of other people these days, in many cases compounding the problem of political analysis.

But then a book came into my hands that changed all that: Sebastian Cobler's *Law, Order, and Politics in West Germany* (Penguin, 1978). This book is a meticulous, obsessed, painstaking documentation—by way of endless quoting of constitutional amendments and public utterances by police and government officials—of the augmentation of police and military powers, the perfecting of surveillance techniques, the growing influence of police "experts" on criminal legislation, and the consequent constriction and elimination of civil rights. It describes a situation in which social conflicts have since the end of World War II

been consistently “translated into the practical logic of permanent, latent threats and dangers” to the State. So what else is new? Two things were new to me: One was the indisputable proof of the *extent* to which both a climate of repression and outright anti-libertarian legislation predated the events of, and following, 1968, a relationship the liberal press in America has always concealed by playing up the Baader-Meinhof violence and *subsequent* moves by the German government.

And the other new thing was the language, the language in which the curtailments of civil liberty have been recommended and brought into law in West Germany. It is indeed a language of technocrats, as Hans Magnus Enzensberger points out in his revealing piece on Germany in the same issue of *October*, for the police are a new breed of academically trained “scientist.” But even more horrifying to me is the combination of a technocratic “detachment” with an Orwellian double-bind religiosity. The term *State* appears everywhere. The State has supplanted God. The State is absolute, unchanging, sacrosanct, apart. The evidence for this impression is overwhelming, and in its light one can readily unmask the lie contained in the vicious tautology “The danger to the community comes from organized people.” Decoded, it says, “The danger to the State comes from the community, and the community is, by definition, people under suspicion.”

One final example from my revision of “Journeys From Berlin/1971” is in order. The film closes with crawling titles:

The aim of all enemies of the State is the deliberate creation of an opposing power over and against this State, or the denial of *the State's monopoly of force*.

—H. Herold, head of the Federal  
Criminal Investigation Bureau  
(BKA), 1975 (*italics added*)

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