

NEW GERMAN CRITIQUE



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Reviewed work(s):

Source: *New German Critique*, No. 38, Special Issue on the German-Jewish Controversy (Spring - Summer, 1986), pp. 3-27

Published by: [New German Critique](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/488073>

Accessed: 30/11/2011 17:42

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*Rainer Werner Fassbinder's Garbage, the City and Death: Renewed Antagonisms in the Complex Relationship Between Jews and Germans in The Federal Republic of Germany**

On December 17, 1985 about 40 people gathered at the Center for European Studies to hear presentations on various aspects of the controversy surrounding the Fassbinder play, Garbage, the City and Death, (Der Müll, die Stadt und der Tod). The event was sponsored by two of the Center's study groups: The Jews in Modern Europe Study Group and The German Study Group.

The immediate context for this seminar was set by the Bitburg incident and its aftermath in the late spring of 1985. Observers on both sides of the Atlantic were disturbed by the actions and statements of President Reagan and Chancellor Kohl and were disappointed by the concomitant lack of protest on the part of much of the West German Left. Two of the panel members in the CES roundtable contributed to this inter-continental debate. Moishe Postone's essay "Bitburg und die Linke," published in Pflasterstrand on June 1, 1985 and Andrei S. Markovits' letter "Ein offener Brief an die deutsche Linke: Kläglich versagt" appearing in die tageszeitung on May 9, 1985, both elicited lively and varied responses and fanned the flames of controversy over this sensitive topic in West Germany itself.

The text of the following discussion was edited by Stephen Hubbell and Andrei S. Markovits.

ANDREI S. MARKOVITS: Let me start my presentation, which — as you will see — bears a personal hue, by admitting that perhaps never in my academic career have I been so uncertain about where I stand on an intellectual or emotional issue as I am concerning the Fassbinder controversy. I continue to oscillate from one extreme position to the other

*A Roundtable Discussion with Andrei S. Markovits, Seyla Benhabib and Moishe Postone held on December 17, 1985 at the Center for European Studies, Harvard University.

in a matter of minutes. Thus, numerous times a day I am outraged that a play of such low artistic quality, filled with anti-Semitic invective, should be performed in one of the major intellectual centers of the very country whose immediate ancestors destroyed more than half my family in their brutal murder of six million Jews. But with equal frequency and similar emotional intensity I am also disturbed by the fact that freedom of speech and artistic expression was clearly curtailed by the Jews (some of them my friends), who occupied the stage of the Schauspielhaus on the night of October 31, 1986 thereby violating one of the most valuable attainments of advanced capitalism governed by a liberal polity. In my father's eyes — and I had a number of heated conversations about this event via telephone calls to his home in Vienna — I have degenerated into little more than a Nazi lover. Yet, at the same time, some of my greenish, pacifist and long-haired friends of the "scene" in Bockenheimer (in Frankfurt) and Kreuzberg (in West Berlin) have angrily placed me among a crowd of conservative and intolerant book burners. Strangely, but perhaps tellingly, part of me feels them both to be right.

By recounting the experiences of some of my relatives in Frankfurt since the early 1960s, I hope to illustrate the larger historical dilemmas, sociological developments and political problems confronting much of Frankfurt's and the Federal Republic's Jewish community. My father's first cousin arrived in Frankfurt from Budapest in 1960. He was accompanied by his wife and two children, a fourteen year-old girl and a twelve year-old boy. He had survived the horrors of the death camps, where he lost both of his parents, several siblings, as well as aunts, uncles, grandparents, and cousins. In short, he found himself virtually alone in 1945. Ready to start a new life "somewhere in the West," he arrived in Frankfurt, a temporary "way station" on his journey to his final destination, which was unknown at the time; Israel, Canada, the United States and South America were among the possibilities. Whatever the eventual destination, Frankfurt was a necessary — but despised — stop which allowed him to collect some financial restitution via the institutionalized repentance conceived and negotiated by Nahum Goldmann, the late father of this Center's director.

My father's cousin got stuck in Frankfurt. The temporary way station became a permanent one without ever developing into anything even faintly resembling home. Having grown up in a similarly ambivalent and temporary atmosphere in Vienna, I remember that my family, like my Frankfurt relatives, had little furniture in our apartment because we thought we would be leaving at any minute. Thus, a relatively wealthy lawyer in Frankfurt — and in my father's case a relatively wealthy businessmen in Vienna — both lived in quarters well below

their means and “station.” Consumption was limited to highly mobile and transitory goods such as fast and fancy cars, or taken outside the confines of these Nazi successor states via vacations in Israel, schooling in the United States, and trips to England and France. The alienation of these two men from their respective cultures went so deep that, despite their fanatically anti-communist attitudes and contempt for the Russians, they would passionately root for visiting Soviet soccer teams during their matches against West German and Austrian teams respectively. The only power and identity which these two East European Jews possessed in their environments was that of victims.

Let me give an example of this. When my father and I first visited our relatives in Frankfurt in 1964, we found a parking ticket on our hosts’ car as we exited from a movie theater.irate about this, my father’s cousin drove to the police station and demanded to speak to the officer who had penalized him for parking in a clearly prohibited area. Without attempting to justify his actions — indeed boasting of his contempt for what he called “this Nazi law” — he asked the officer in a hostile tone whether he (the officer) had taken showers during the war. When the startled policeman, who was probably in his mid-fifties, answered affirmatively, my father’s cousin shot back: “Well I just wanted you to know that you washed with soap which you Nazis made out of my family.” Shocked and speechless, the policeman tore up the parking ticket. My father’s cousin, exiting triumphantly from this Frankfurt police station, had been the beneficiary of what has been called the “Auschwitz bonus,” or as Günther Rühle, the Schauspielhaus’ director was later to put it, the “Schonzeit” or “no hunting season.”

I remember distinctly being very upset hearing for the first time that Jews were made into soap by the Nazis. Confronting my father on this matter, he confirmed what I had taken to be hyperbole of his cousin’s rather flamboyant style. I detected that my father was also upset about the parking ticket incident, though for different reasons than I was. In part, he was jealous that his cousin could cash in so profitably on this “Auschwitz bonus,” which was non-existent in Austria. My father was also worried that in the not too distant future this “Auschwitz bonus” would be depleted in the Federal Republic as well, especially once police officers such as the one who rightfully penalized his cousin began to be drawn from a generation which was born after 1945.

My father’s cousin made his living in Frankfurt as a real-estate lawyer. At first, he dealt mainly with rentals. Later he became involved in developing, reconstructing and “rehabing” various properties increasingly on behalf of the city of Frankfurt. He was especially proud of the fact that he attained financial success without having to resort to the “dirty Frankfurt,” the despised *Bahnhofsviertel*, one of the Federal Repub-

lic's most notorious red-light districts, where a number of establishments were owned by Jews — *Polish* Jews as my father's cousin was always quick to point out, trying to distance himself and his Hungarian Jewish compatriots from their own version of *Ostjuden*.

After his death in the early 1970s, his son took over the business. My second cousin, just like his father, has continued to lead a completely apolitical life in the Frankfurt neighborhood where he rents a small office and an even smaller apartment. His distancing from any political controversy and entirely privatized existence extended to all issues related to Jews as well. Be it the annual neo-Nazi demonstrations on June 17, the *Deutschlandtag*, many of which occurred in Frankfurt barely two blocks away from his apartment; the Majdanek trial in Düsseldorf; the frequent SS reunions; the proposed sale of Leopard tanks to Saudi Arabia; Ernst Jünger's receipt of the Goethe Prize, Frankfurt's most prestigious award for civilians; or the shameful episode surrounding the Bitburg visit; none of these could induce my cousin to shed his strictly-guarded privacy in Frankfurt and take a public stand on behalf of causes which have long concerned him. This is understandable, however, since an individual is unlikely to get involved in a place which he never considered home and always perceived as a way station.

But the Fassbinder controversy suddenly changed all this. Although he did not participate in the occupation of the Schauspielhaus stage on the night of October 31, 1985, my cousin demonstrated in front of the theater on behalf of the stage occupants and demanded the permanent banning of *Garbage, the City and Death*. Clearly, this incident must have touched something very deep in my cousin for him to abandon the comfort of his well-heated Mercedes and walk up and down on a cold Frankfurt sidewalk with a placard around his neck. Was it because he, like Fassbinder's "Rich Jew," was a real estate developer making deals with the city? Was it because he, too, was rich and a Jew? Or was it perhaps that for the first time the controversy surrounding the Fassbinder play conveyed to him — albeit in a rather paradoxical way — that Frankfurt was indeed his home?

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The city of Frankfurt, like the Federal Republic as a whole, experienced a major economic boom in the early 1970s. Led by the SPD, which Ulrich Greiner described as *fortschrittswütig* (obsessed with progress), the city's construction industry benefitted immensely from the grand design which was to transform Frankfurt into a "Main-hattan," a representation of the marriage between reform-minded social democracy and modern, export-oriented capital. Frankfurt became a living example

of *Modell Deutschland* at its best. Although ranking as one of Social Democracy's "successes," Frankfurt also highlighted some of its contradictions. Specifically, the city had concomitantly become one of Europe's most important centers of a radicalized and bohemian counterculture, part of which undoubtedly owed its existence to the SPD's "reform euphoria" of the time. The housing battles raging in Frankfurt's Westend — a district in which much of Frankfurt's Jewish bourgeoisie resided before 1933 — were thus in many ways manifestations of the irreconcilable conflicts troubling relations between Old and New Left: the former represented by a *Technologieglaubigkeit* and *Technologiehörigkeit* as evidenced by its enthusiastic support for edifices of steel and glass; and the latter characterized by its bitter opposition to the construction of what it regarded as ahistorical, anti-social, anti-communal, and anti-human "monstro-cities."

Enter Rainer Werner Fassbinder (1946-1982), who lived in Frankfurt during the housing battles, having arrived from Munich in 1974. He joined the Theater am Turm (TAT), an avant-garde experimental theater group led by a very able director named Hilmar Hoffmann. Fassbinder was fascinated by Frankfurt politics and theater for a brief period, wanting to merge the two, only to give up this experiment abruptly in 1976 and return to his more familiar medium of film. *Garbage, the City and Death* ranks as the most important — and controversial — legacy of Fassbinder's brief Frankfurt interlude.

As was his habit, Fassbinder wrote *Garbage* in a workaholic frenzy during an overnight flight back to Frankfurt in March 1975. The play was loosely based on a book by Gerhard Zwerenz, a left-wing intellectual who — like Fassbinder — had also migrated from Munich to Frankfurt. Zwerenz was hard at work on a trilogy dealing with the problems of urban renewal, city modernization, and all the contradictory aspects of the SPD's *fortschrittswütige Städtepolitik* described above. The first part of the trilogy, entitled *Bericht aus dem Landesinneren* [*Report from the Country*], appeared in 1972 with the second part, called *Die Erde ist unbewohnbar wie der Mond* [*The Earth is as Uninhabitable as the Moon*], published one year later. Having read both, I am of the opinion that these are sophisticated and very knowledgeable analyses of Frankfurt's construction problems at the time. Jewish developers do appear, as do bankers, social democracy's city planners and other key participants in this concerted effort of urban modernization in Frankfurt's Westend. Zwerenz in no way portrays the Jews in his books unfavorably. Zwerenz's main Jewish character, Abraham Mauerstamm, may appear as somewhat of an equivocating and weak figure, but he is certainly devoid of any evil intentions. Moreover, Zwerenz's world is populated by explicitly "good Jews," such as the character based on Fritz Bauer, the

prosecutor in Frankfurt's Auschwitz trial of the 1960s. If anything, Zwerenz's culprits are the banks and their international financial networks, most certainly not the Jews. The third volume, which has yet to appear, was to have dealt with the conflicts in greater detail. The Fassbinder controversy has accounted in large part for Zwerenz's failure to complete Part 3.

In Fassbinder's dramatization of Zwerenz's work, Mauerstamm becomes the "Rich Jew." This figure becomes the link between a corrupt, hypocritical and ruthless establishment representing Frankfurt's modernizers on the one hand, and a milieu of social outcasts consisting of prostitutes, pimps, transvestites and sado-masochists on the other. Zwerenz objected to Fassbinder's creation of the "Rich Jew," whereupon Fassbinder promised to rewrite the role calling the new character "Rich Poor Jew" thereby trying to convey that after Auschwitz even the richest Jew remained poor as well. But nothing came of this. Fassbinder's play was never rewritten for TAT because the author left Frankfurt for Munich after an extended sojourn in West Berlin. Fassbinder did, however, write a screenplay based on Zwerenz's *Die Erde ist unbewohnbar wie der Mond* which — according to Zwerenz — remained very close to the original novel.

In early 1976, the controversy heated up. Suhrkamp, one of West Germany's most prestigious publishing companies, released *Garbage, the City and Death* at the beginning of March. On March 12, Helmut Schmitz, a noted Fassbinder critic, wrote a devastating review of the play in the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, the Federal Republic's leading left-liberal daily and cross-town rival of the country's main conservative newspaper, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ). Exactly one week after the appearance of Schmitz's article, Joachim Fest, one of the FAZ's senior editors, published a scathing review of his own entitled "Reicher Jude von links." In this piece Fest argued that Fassbinder's *Garbage* was the most blatant manifestation of a long-simmering and increasingly noticeable left-wing anti-Semitism, which was gaining acceptance in the fashionable circles of West Germany's intelligentsia, precisely the circles where Fassbinder films and Suhrkamp books had become *de rigueur*. (It should be added that this article was authored by the same person who a few years earlier had written a rather apologetic biography of Hitler which initiated the notorious "Hitler wave" of the mid-1970s). Whether as a consequence of these attacks or for other reasons, Suhrkamp discontinued the publication of *Garbage* in the spring of 1976.

The play was nevertheless made into a film which was directed by Daniel Schmid and released in 1979. Entitled *Schatten der Engel* it is regarded as cold and sober, though not anti-Semitic, by several critics

on whose opinions I have to rely, never having seen the movie myself. But this did not relegate the stage version to oblivion. Seven attempts were made between 1976 and 1985 to have *Garbage* performed in various Frankfurt theaters (Fassbinder stipulated that the world premiere could only be held in Frankfurt, Paris, or New York.) The last of these attempts, before the current controversy, took place in 1984 when *Garbage* was to have been performed in Frankfurt's newly refurbished and renovated Old Opera. One of the most vociferous opponents of this project was Günter Rühle, who — as the feuilleton editor of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* — used his considerable positional prestige to polemicize successfully against the showing of the play. Indeed, it was partly on account of Rühle's passionate opposition to the performance of the play that the director of the Old Opera resigned his post.

Then something very bizarre happened. In early 1985 Rühle left the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* to become the director Frankfurt's prestigious Schauspielhaus. Once there, he promptly placed *Garbage* on the theater's fall schedule for reasons which seem to elude any reasonable explanation. Opening night was set for Thursday, October 31, 1985.

As we know, the play was not performed that night. About 30 members of the Frankfurt Jewish community occupied the stage just before the play was to begin, unfurling a banner which read "Subventionierter Antisemitismus" ("Subsidized anti-Semitism"). Engaging in a debate with the audience, the actors and the theater management, the Jewish protesters held their ground and succeeded in stopping the performance. Fearing further disruptions, Rühle reluctantly canceled all other scheduled performances of *Garbage* at the Schauspielhaus. Nevertheless, a world premiere of sorts did occur on Monday afternoon, November 4, 1985. Before a select group of theater critics and other media representatives, with the public deliberately excluded, Fassbinder's *Garbage, the City and Death* was finally performed on a theater stage ten and one-half years after its conception. This temporary accommodation may have abated the immediate crisis; however, it definitely failed to offer a permanent and satisfactory resolution for the parties involved.

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In the last part of my presentation, I would briefly like to delineate the peculiar alliance and cleavages which developed in the course of this controversy. The pro-play representatives included among many others the vast majority of the Frankfurt left-wing intelligentsia, the

city's literati from center-Left to far Left, the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, the *tageszeitung*, virtually all the Greens, parts of the SPD, Theo Sommer and other key journalists of *Die Zeit*, and a small part of the Jewish Left.

In the ambivalent middle I would place two very different and unlikely figures, both of whom — I am certain — would emphatically object to being grouped together. They are: Walter Wallmann, Frankfurt's youthful "yuppie" mayor, who strongly believed that the play should not be performed under any circumstances yet refused to use state power to enforce his views, citing the importance of artistic freedom; and Daniel Cohn-Bendit, the charismatic "sponti," who emerged as the only hero of this affair. Cohn-Bendit, like Wallmann, maintained a foot in both camps. Unlike the city's mayor, however, Cohn-Bendit welcomed Fassbinder's play and wanted it performed on its merits. Yet, he also rejoiced in the Jewish community's active stand against the play which he assessed — correctly in my opinion — as this community's first decisively public stand in any political controversy in the postwar period.

Lastly, the anti-play forces included most of the CDU, the FDP, parts of the SPD, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Rudolph Augstein from *Der Spiegel*, Marion Countess Dönhoff from *Die Zeit*, leading representatives of the two main Christian churches in the Federal Republic, and, of course, virtually the entire Jewish community in Frankfurt and West Germany. Before elaborating briefly some of the motivations of these two opposing alliances, a few comments are in order concerning the anti-play forces. The FDP's liberalism must have been overridden by its latent philo-Semitism, which has traditionally been strong in the party's Frankfurt and Hesse branches. Moreover, the consensus between the trade unions and the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* on stopping the play was quite extraordinary. I was particularly suspicious of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung's* vehement anti-play and — at first glance — pro-Jewish position, since it did not fit with the paper's editorial posture, especially following its reprehensible commentaries during the Bitburg incident.

As to the reasons given by both sides, the pro-play forces first and foremost anchored their argument in the sanctity of the right to free speech and unimpeded artistic expression. "Wehret den Anfängen!" ["Beware of the beginnings!"] they warned, reminding their opponents that Auschwitz, too, started with book burnings, suppression of thought, censorship of the arts and a general curtailment of personal freedoms. Moreover, the pro-play advocates believed that it was better to deal with Germany's still considerable anti-Semitism as openly as possible rather than to keep it hidden under a fake veneer of civility. Some

voices on this coalition's left-wing submitted a particularly disturbing and ahistorical defense of the play by arguing that the Jews were like everybody else and thus should not be spared criticisms, or even denunciations, to which nobody else in West German society was immune. The fact that many leftists, who heretofore, would have sided with the Jews against the Right under similar circumstances, were invoking the universalistic language of liberalism, testifies to the rapid disappearance of the Jews' "Auschwitz bonus" in the Federal Republic. Another common argument in defense of the play's performance was the view that Fassbinder's "Rich Jew" was the only humane and decent character in the play, and that he would inevitably win the sympathies of any thinking audience. The final — and to my mind, most convincing — argument of the play's supporters was their condemnation of the political orientation and motivations of certain core elements within the anti-play forces, among whom they correctly detected some of the most conservative figures in West German public life. It was precisely these forces which, in past debates of importance to the Jews — expiration of the statute of limitations for Nazi war crimes and Bitburg being just two examples — always lined up against Jewish interests on the side of German "victimization."

The anti-play forces anchored their arguments first and foremost in what they perceived as the blatant anti-Semitism of the play. Compounding this was the fact that in their eyes *Garbage* was just that, i.e., trash; Fassbinder had written a poor play which was being produced merely because its author had accumulated worldwide fame (or notoriety) and because, by producing it, those associated with the production would achieve a certain fame/notoriety of their own. Prominent in the arsenal of the anti-play forces was a different interpretation of "Wehret den Anfängen." According to this coalition, the play would add to an already alarming revival of open anti-Semitism in the Federal Republic. By contributing to making anti-Semitism once again *salonfähig* in the successor state to the Third Reich, the play would inevitably bear incalculable consequences. Letting it all hang out, so to speak, may have some psychological justification and may indeed be morally correct in abstract situations, but barely four decades after the fall of the Nazis, certain restraints are not only politically prudent, but also ethically imperative.

It is in this context that I would like to conclude my remarks by paraphrasing Marion Countess Dönhoff's most insightful point in her passionate plea against the showing of *Garbage*. Inverting Heinrich Heine's famous dictum that the Jews are like everybody else, except more so, Dönhoff argues that after Auschwitz the Germans, in relation to the Jews, are like everybody else, except more so. Deeply convinced

by this argument, I believe that Fassbinder's *Garbage* should indeed be performed in Paris or New York, though not yet in Frankfurt.

SEYLA BENHABIB: Let me begin by echoing the point that Andy made at the very beginning. I too have been rather ambivalent about the play. I first read it two years ago in the context of a discussion in a Jewish left group in Frankfurt, which at the time was preparing to protest the intention of Schwab, director of the Old Opera, to put the play on stage. And my impression at the time was, indeed, *Garbage, the City and Death* is a piece of trash: it is avant-gardist art, psychoanalysis for beginners, and it parades prejudices without working them out or resolving them. And I had a gut feeling of repugnance at most characters of the play.

Since then something has changed in me, in my reaction to the play, and when I reread it several days ago in preparation for this talk, I noticed dimensions in it which I had missed before. I have come to the conclusion that the play is not about anti-Semitism. It is about something else in which anti-Semitism plays a role. Now I don't quite know how to account for the transformation in my attitude, but what I feel has happened is partly a kind of purging effect. The worst arguments have been already voiced in the German public sphere, and I feel less offended and upset by the play because I have in my own mind — and via the public discussion — gone through the various interpretations, and the play feels less threatening to me than it did two years ago.

It seems to me that Fassbinder's play has become a metaphor. In fact, the main theme I want to develop concerns what happens when allegory becomes metaphor. The play itself is an allegory, and in becoming a metaphor it involves some very complicated, symbolic dimensions. This is not a social realistic play about the housing battles in Frankfurt. Rather, the play has become a metaphor for how, 40 years after the end of the Second World War, Germans and Jews understand the meaning of their past, how they remember it, and the images of self and other they're willing to live with.

The Garbage, the City and Death is an allegorical play. Some call it, in fact, a Christian morality play. The allegory concerns the metropolis, the big city that eats its children, a city which has become as uninhabitable as the moon. The play, as Dan Diner has correctly remarked, is not about what is taking place on stage — the performance — but what is taking place around the city and in the streets of the city. Therefore, it is no longer possible to dissociate Fassbinder's play from the context of meaning and interpretation into which it has fallen. This context is captured in short phrases like, "Forty years after," "normalization," "the willingness to forgive," and as Chancellor Helmut Kohl stated it, the wish of the grandchildren and the children to free themselves from

the history of their parents and to emerge into the European community.

Fassbinder himself did not live to experience Bitburg, the award of the Goethe Prize to Ernst Jünger by the city of Frankfurt, nor the failure of the Bundestag to pass a law exclusively concerning the denial of the Jewish Holocaust. I doubt that Fassbinder would have been surprised. As the iconoclast and outcast of German post-war respectability, he would have probably found in these recent events a confirmation of his doubts and fears concerning what lay below the veneer of reconstruction and respectability in the Federal Republic. Yet, in the present context, Fassbinder's play has not been seen by its critics as the destroyer of the myth of normality, which it is. Instead, it is viewed as an extension of the logic of normalization. It is seen as anti-Semitism that disguises itself as anti-capitalism, as anti-Jewish resentment presented in psychoanalytic language for beginners, or in the words of Augstein, as anti-Semitism that dresses itself up as philo-Semitism.

Matters would be simple if one could clearly distinguish between the text of Fassbinder's play and the context of its reception and say that it is the context of its reception which is creating the charge of anti-Semitism, not the text itself. However, in the case of a theatrical play, one is actually dealing with a three-fold reality. We have to be aware of the many layers of symbolic dimension. A play is a text, but one which is meant to be staged, and the staging itself is an interpretation. Then there is the reception of this interpretation, the understanding of this interpretation by the audience once the play is staged. The recent staging of Fassbinder's play, according to a large consensus — I have not seen it myself — bent over backwards in an attempt to remove from the play what appeared to be its most offensive feature, namely, the presence of a character named "der reiche Jude," the Rich Jew. In the performance, this character was instead called Herr A or Mr. A. And although Mr. A, or the Rich Jew, is referred to in the play as fat and ugly, the particular staging gave him a suave, worldly, wise, and sensitive character, and indeed, he does appear as the most attractive character. This has led some theater critics to charge that this particular performance was trying so hard to repress what was unpleasant that it ended up giving a positive meaning to what Fassbinder left ambiguous. Thus, I think we cannot fully capture the meaning of a play simply from reading a text because we miss the level of mediation and interpretation. Nevertheless, I want to ask the question, why call Fassbinder's play an allegory, and how can an allegory become a metaphor?

The Garbage, the City and Death is a short text — barely 50 pages and divided into two parts. The first consists of eight scenes, and the second consists of three. The stage directions for the first scene of the first part

tell us — and this is a direct reference to Zwerenz’s book — that the scene takes place on the moon, precisely because it is as uninhabitable as the earth. The so-called housing battles over the modernization of an area in Frankfurt called Westend provide the immediate backdrop for the portrait of the Rich Jew, who is widely believed to have been modeled after Ignaz Bubis, a real estate speculator and developer, and currently a member of the Board of Directors of the Jewish Community in Frankfurt. In the play, this historical context concerning the role of Bubis — or the Rich Jew — in the destruction and modernization of the Westend is alluded to several times.

The play, in typical Fassbinder fashion, opens with a breakfast among prostitutes discussing the consequences of having denounced one of their pimps. The Rich Jew, who is offstage as the play opens, sends in two of his companions, the little prince and the dwarf, to solicit one of the prostitutes. Later, he himself comes on the scene and sees that the prostitutes who are waiting around are freezing. He says, “The cities are cold, and therefore the people in them freeze. Why do they build themselves such cities?” The dwarf starts howling with laughter, and the prostitutes ask why he is laughing. The dwarf explains he’s laughing because the Rich Jew buys old houses tears them down, and constructs new ones.

The monologue by the Rich Jew in scene four is one of the most oft-cited passages as evidence of the anti-Semitism of the play. I will present the passage in German, because it is important to catch some nuances. After all, we are dealing with a piece of literature. The Rich Jew begins:

Wissen Sie, dass ich manchmal Angst habe?

[Are you aware that sometimes I have *angst*?]

This word (*Angst*) should remain untranslated because it is a crucial word in the play.

Sie wissen es nicht, und warum auch. Die Geschäfte gehen zu gut, das will bestraft sein. Das sehnt sich geradezu nach Strafe. Aber statt Strafe zu empfangen, straft es, das Ängstliche — ich.
[I, iv]

[You don’t know it, and why should you? Business is going too well. That will be punished. That *longs* for punishment. But, instead of experiencing punishment, it punishes that anxious one, I.]

Here Fassbinder is discussing the unconscious and the consciousness of this individual: “I punish,” the Rich Jew says. Then the Rich Jew turns to the prostitute:

Sie sind schön, scheint mir. Aber das ist egal. Sie könnten sein, wie Sie wollten. Schönheit, wem ist das genug.

[It seems to me you're beautiful. But that's irrelevant. You could be however you want to be. Beauty, for whom has that ever been sufficient.]

Next comes the passage that is so often cited:

Ich kaufe alte Häuser in dieser Stadt, reisse sie ab, baue neue, die verkaufe ich gut. Die Stadt schützt mich, das muss sie. Zudem bin ich Jude. Der Polizeipräsident ist mein Freund, was man so Freund nennt, der Bürgermeister lädt mich gern ein, auf die Stadtverordneten kann ich zählen. Gewiss — keiner schätzt das besonders, was er da zulässt — aber der Plan ist nicht meiner, der war da, ehe ich kam. Es muss mir egal sein, ob Kinder weinen, ob Alte, Gebrechliche leiden, es muss mir egal sein.

[I buy old houses in this city, tear them down, build new ones and sell them for a profit. The city protects me. It has to. I am, first of all, a Jew. The Chief of Police is my friend, for what it's worth, the Mayor likes to invite me over. I can count on the members of the City Council. To be sure, none of them particularly appreciates what he is allowing, but the plan is not mine, it was there when I came. I must not care whether children weep, whether old people are harmed, I must not care.]

The Rich Jew is saying the city needs the unscrupulous businessman, who enables it to change itself.

Despite this background, the play is, I believe, not about real-estate speculation, Jewish capital, or even anti-Semitic prejudice, although these are all themes in the play. It is about the metropolis, the big city. It is about those who live in its pits: prostitutes, pimps, homosexuals, transvestites, and the Rich Jew, who happens to be a customer of the prostitute, Roma B.

It's a play about despair, about *angst*. Each of the major characters in the play speaks of *angst*. The play examines the inhumanity of humans toward each other, and of the city toward them all. In his own way, Fassbinder has tried to write a symphony of the big city by letting those most down-trodden and desperate come to voice in it. And as one of the prostitutes in the play, Miss Violet, laments, the city becomes bigger day by day, the human in it becomes smaller and smaller.

The objection by those who argue that the play is anti-Semitic would run as follows: Is it not precisely a basic motive of all modern anti-

Semitism to portray the Jew, especially the rich Jew, as part of that dehumanizing and abstract power of modern society that destroys, alienates, and uproots a national community? After all, the theme of linking Judaism and capital, Jewishness and modernization, Jewishness and the impersonality of the metropolis is not a new theme in modern anti-Semitism. Is the Jew, in that sense, not the destroyer of *Gemeinschaft*, the representative of the cosmopolitan, lifeless principles, the principle of money. Fassbinder is clearly conscious of this motive of modern anti-Semitism and has one of his most unsavory characters of the play, Hans von Gluck, express it. This passage is also cited very frequently in the discussion. And it's even more offensive than the previous passage. Hans von Gluck says:

Er saugt uns aus, der Jud. Trinkt unser Blut und setzt uns ins Unrecht, weil er Jud ist und wir die Schuld tragen. Ich grüble und grüble und zerre an meinen Nerven und sterbe eigentlich aus. Ich wache nachts auf, und leibhaftig den Tod vor Augen ist mir die Kehle wie zugeschnürt. Das sind Bilder, sagt mein Verstand, Mythen aus der Vorzeit der Väter. Und es sticht auf der linken Seite. Ist es das Herz, frag ich mich, oder die Gallenblase? Und Schuld hat der Jud, weil er uns schuldig macht, denn er ist da. Wär er geblieben, wo er herkam, oder hätten sie ihn vergast, ich könnte heute besser schlafen. Sie haben vergessen, ihn zu vergassen. Das ist kein Witz, so denkt es in mir. [II, x]

[He sucks our life's blood, the Jew, drinks our blood and puts us in the wrong because he's a Jew, and we bear the guilt. I ponder and ponder and tug at my nerves and I become extinct. I wake up at night, and death incarnate before my eyes and I'm choking. My brain tells me these are the only pictures, myths from the past of our fathers. And it stings on my left side. Is that my heart, I ask myself, or my gall-bladder? And the Jew is to blame for making us guilty by being here. Had he stayed where he came from, or had they gassed him, I'd sleep better today. They forgot to gas him. This is no joke. This is how I think.]

A better translation of that last line is: "this is how it thinks in me." Notice here that Fassbinder uses the passive voice: "Es denkt in mir."

Despite the offensiveness of this language we have to ask where Fassbinder himself is standing as his characters utter these words. The mere fact that such statements are made in a play is not proof of its anti-Semitism. Unfortunately, it seems to me that it is precisely at this point where Fassbinder fails his audience: he does not make his disposition

clear. These statements are not interpreted. They are placed in no context. The play portrays prejudice without dealing with its roots, or bringing it to what I would call a redemptive resolution. There is no moment of humanity that breaks through this insanity of prejudice towards a reconciliation of the parties involved. These statements hang around the plot, which itself is as banal as it is aggressive in its attempts to *épater les bourgeois*.

Let me recount briefly the outlines of the plot. The Rich Jew becomes a regular customer of the prostitute Roma B., whose pimp of Yugoslav origin, Franz B., a homosexual, is brutalized in one of the later scenes of the play by various characters for his homosexuality. Among his tormentors is the chief of police, Müller II. The involvement of the Rich Jew with Roma B. is accounted for by the fact — this is an important dimension — that her father, Herr Müller, an old Nazi, is believed by the Rich Jew to have been responsible for the death of his parents. Herr Müller is himself a transvestite, who takes the clothes off his wheelchair-ridden wife.

In one key scene, Roma B. finally understands that the Rich Jew is having an affair with her and trying to make her his mistress because he wants to get back at her father. She confronts her father, with whom she's also said to have an incestuous relationship, about this fact, and asks: What does the Rich Jew have against you? Herr Müller replies that the Rich Jew thinks he was to blame for the death of his parents. Roma B. counters, "but times have changed," and her father says he no longer feels guilty for what he did. The times may have changed, he declares, but fascism will once again triumph.

Many critics have failed to comment on the rather heavy-handed significance of the fact that the Nazi is a transvestite, becoming something at night that he is not during the day. I think this is an allegory for the way in which Fassbinder sees West German society. He finds fascism lurking beneath the complacent exterior of technocratic capitalism.

As I mentioned, the chief of police is called Müller II. Who is Müller I? Fassbinder doesn't tell us, but it's obvious that it's Roma B.'s father. Fassbinder's message seems to be that society is full of crypto-Nazis. This confusing array of characters meets one another, but does not really interact with each other. They speak, but they do not communicate.

The crucial scene between Roma B. and the Rich Jew is left fatally ambiguous. After the brutalization of Franz, her pimp and lover, Roma no longer wants to live. She asks the Rich Jew to kill her, to do her at least the last favor of ending her life. The Rich Jew, upon her request, kills her. The little prince, who works for the Rich Jew, comes upon the scene and says something which often gets omitted in the discussion.

Oh mein Gott, ich danke dir. Er hat sie getötet, er hat sich selbst disqualifiziert, er hat sie geliebt. Wer liebt, der hat seine Rechte verspielt. (II, xi)

[Oh God, I thank you. He killed her. He disqualified himself. It is clear he loved her. He who loves forfeits his rights.]

So the interpretation of the little prince is that the Rich Jew ultimately kills Roma B., not simply because she asked for it, but because he had fallen in love with her, and to have fallen in love with the daughter of his own executioners might have been too much for him. But this is a small statement which does not get interpreted in the play. We only have the evidence of the little prince as to what could have been the motivation of the Rich Jew in killing Roma B.

The final scene in the play shows the Chief of Police, Müller II, and another of his cohorts, Kraus, hearing the testimony of the little prince, who stands to receive the Rich Jew's money upon the latter's imprisonment. They try to rid themselves of this unwanted witness, and they do so by throwing him out of the window of the building. Then the brutalized corpse of Franz B. is dragged onto the scene and presented as the body of the murderer of Roma B.

Is Fassbinder's point then, that the Rich Jew himself is also the victim of the system that dehumanizes all? Did he really kill Roma B. out of love? Did he have to kill at the moment he loved her? Or is the Rich Jew the one who gets away with murder, who has a kind of immunity because he has been a victim in the system that makes victims of everybody involved? There is no easy answer to this question. The play remains fatally ambiguous, and we have to live with this ambiguity. But my final point is as follows: this play is about victims, outsiders, the "others". It is about the woman as a commodity, as prostitute, the homosexual and the Jew. It may be no accident that only a female commentator, writing in *Pflasterstrand*, asked why it was that in a play full of victims everyone chose to focus on the issue of anti-Semitism alone, and not on the solidarity among the outsiders, the victims of respectable, bourgeois, Christian society? Why is the treatment of women in the play less offensive to us than the treatment of Jews?

This question is important because it has been at the heart of Fassbinder's work, at least the parts of his work that I know. For Fassbinder, the victims become as brutal as the victimizers, and the desired solidarity of the oppressed does not come to pass. I think that, like Foucault, Fassbinder's perspective on society is that of the outsider, the alien, the other. And as in Foucault's work, the victim is portrayed always from the perspective of the one who victimizes and has power.

The victim remains the perpetual other. This perspective may be one of the main reasons why the play was offensive to so many Jews. Whereas a Daniel Cohn-Bendit can immediately identify with and exercise solidarity with the Jews — precisely because they *are* the outsiders in this case — the Jews who live in post-war Germany find the company into which Fassbinder has thrown them abhorrent. Once again, they see themselves identified as the other, and this otherness — which they have not defined for themselves nor chosen to identify themselves with — is threatening. In other words, a Cohn-Bendit can accept a political message and the political community into which Fassbinder has put him, because he sees the moment of redemption in that otherness, whereas the Jewish community in Germany, which in the post-war period gained or has tried to gain respectability, seeks to rid itself of this otherness. As a result, both sides of the debate are talking past each other. What Fassbinder can love, precisely because of its otherness, Ignaz Bubis hates and is threatened by. “My religion,” he said in an interview with *Der Spiegel*, “would forbid me from ever killing somebody, even for mercy. I don’t know any Jews like the Rich Jew. I don’t know anybody who’s gotten away with murder as a Jew.”

Cohn-Bendit, in an imaginary dialogue with Fassbinder, which appeared in *Pflasterstrand*, discusses the debate with the deceased playwright. He says, “From the standpoint of [the Jews] ‘hava negila’ culture, your love for their otherness is an unintelligible as it is hateful.” I think Cohn-Bendit hits hard here. Very hard. But it becomes clear in the debate between him and Bubis that the question involves not only anti-Semitism, but Jewish identity as well. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, there is no glory in the kind of otherness that Fassbinder attributes to the Jews. There is no redemption through his ruthless critique of the normality into which they have fallen and within which they live in post-war Germany.

Hence my conclusion. Fassbinder’s play has become a metaphor for German identity after 40 years, expressed in the desire of large numbers of West Germans to be able to speak not only about themselves, but also about the others, the Jews, without being suffocated by the censure of guilt and the past. It has also become a metaphor for the right of the Jews in Germany to determine how one will speak and write about them, and how they view themselves. As such, the debate has extended far beyond the question of how they are viewed by an avant-garde artist with good intentions. For this reason, I support the action of the Jewish community, although I disagree with their understanding and their criticism of Fassbinder’s play. I support their action because I think it has transformed them from the status of objects in the monologue or in the imagination of other Germans, into subjects

in a conversation or a dialogue. They have begun to negotiate the meaning of their identity and are not simply letting their identity be defined as their otherness, even if it is an otherness that Fassbinder loved and in which he saw politically redemptive moments.

MOISHE POSTONE: I was asked to give background information, and because there is a great deal to cover, my summary necessarily is going to be highly oversimplified. This is unfortunate because the issues are very complex and ambiguous.

The main issue is not one of whether or not Fassbinder's play is anti-Semitic, or what the limits of artistic free speech should be. Rather, as Seyla mentioned, what is important is the way in which the controversy surrounding Fassbinder's play indicates the manner in which anti-Semitism and the relationship of Germany to its past have or have not been dealt with. In order to be able to approach this question, I will briefly give some background information about the nature of the Jewish community in Frankfurt, the Left scene or subculture in that city, the so-called *Häuserkampf* [housing struggle] in Frankfurt in the early 1970s, as well as the character of the movement towards normalization in the 1980s in the Federal Republic.

The abnormal character of normality in post-war Germany is very evident in the nature of its Jewish communities. There are about 30,000 Jews in the Federal Republic today. The two largest communities are in Frankfurt and Berlin, each of which has about 5,000 members. The overwhelming majority of these Jews are not originally from Germany: that is, they are people who, for personal, political, or cultural reasons, decided not to return to their homes after 1945. Most of them are originally from Poland and decided to stay in Germany after 1945, after the concentration camps were dissolved. Why did they stay or in some cases, actually return to Germany? Some, after 1948, went to Israel and lived there for five to ten years, and then returned to West Germany during the 1950s. One can point to the fact that, living more or less under the wing of the American Military Occupation Forces immediately after the war they not only felt relatively secure, but were the recipients of benefits and favors from American Jewish organizations and the American authorities. Later, of course, the West German government began to distribute reparation payments.

Factors on this level hardly constitute a fully adequate explanation. What did or does it mean psychologically and emotionally for Jews, most of whom were concentration camp survivors, to choose to stay in Germany after 1945 when only a tiny minority of them had had any direct cultural or political relationship to Germany or Germans prior to 1939? Whatever the explanations, and one could speculate a great deal, it is clear that these people remained caught in the grips of their

experience as survivors of the Holocaust. In fact, in terms of their self-understanding, as Andy pointed out, these Jews never *chose* to live in Germany. They always considered their residence there to be temporary, a temporary sojourn that has now lasted 40 years.

This duality of living in Germany and not living there shaped their lives. They felt non-identical, defensive, perhaps even guilty living in Germany. They had business contacts with Germans but no social contacts. They sought to avoid the public, political sphere — I think that’s very important — and were strongly oriented toward Israel. In terms of their occupations, most are engaged in small scale businesses, particularly in the garment industry. Others set up business which originally catered to the needs of American soldiers, like the bars in the *Bahnhofsviertel*. One group became very involved in real estate at a time of structural transformation in Frankfurt, a theme to which I’ll return.

It’s really only in the past five or ten years that the realization has slowly begun to dawn on most of these people and their children that their stay in Germany is no longer temporary, that they live there. This, of course, has immediately raised the question of how a normal life is possible. In other words, the question of normalization that has affected most segments of West German society has become a double issue for the Jews: On the one hand, what does normalization mean for them and on the other hand, what does the process of normalization mean for the Germans, and what are its implications for the Jews?

I will shift focus here and describe briefly the character and history of the Left in Frankfurt in the late 1960s and 70s, as well as the social struggle of the early 1970s which centered on the issues of housing and real estate speculation, the *Häuserkampf*. That struggle, as Andy pointed out, constituted the immediate background of Fassbinder’s play, which he wrote shortly after arriving in Frankfurt as director of the Theater am Turm.

As most of you know, during the 1970s in Germany — and particularly in Frankfurt — the New Left did not disappear as in France and the United States, for example, but remained significant as a social and cultural force, although it was in a constant process of change and transformation. One of the things that characterized the New Left in Frankfurt was that neither orthodox communism nor Maoism ever gained a significant foothold. The “hegemonic tendency” — for lack of a better term — in Frankfurt was referred to as “sponti” for Spontaneous Left. Its history can be traced to a series of loosely structured struggles and campaigns beginning with organizing attempts in the factories and among foreign workers in the early 1970s, the formation of various solidarity committees through the anti-nuclear power plant movement of the late 1970s, to the peace movement of the 1980s, and

the rise of the Green Party. An important turning point was the political debate conducted between 1974 and 1977 concerning the tactics and political world view of the RAF, better known in America as the Bader-Meinhof Gang, which was coupled with an increasing emphasis, influenced by feminism, on what was referred to as the subjective dimension. The core of the so-called realist faction of the Greens, that faction, which successfully argued for a SPD-Green Coalition in the province of Hesse, come out of the old Frankfurt Sponti movement. The first Green minister on the state level, Joschka Fischer, is perhaps its most prominent figure.

What was this *Häuserkampf* all about? In the late 1960s the city of Frankfurt, together with a business consortium, led by the large banks, developed a plan to transform Westend, a neighborhood that had once been bourgeois — even patrician — and which was then the home of many students, foreign workers, and members of the German lower-middle class, from a residential to a commercial neighborhood. Real estate speculators were, to put it mildly, strongly encouraged by the city to participate in this process of transformation. Many residential buildings were bought, and if the tenants could not be evicted, were allowed to decay until they were uninhabitable at which point a demolition permit would be obtained in the hope of then building a new highrise. There was a disproportionately high number of Jews among the real estate speculators, and this fact was widely known among the population.

This development converged with the fact that at the time the Left in Frankfurt was strongly influenced by the attempts of *lotta continua* and other left-wing groups in Italy to develop forms of agitation which would tie together workplace issues with those of working-class neighborhoods, or in the language of the times, to tie together the spheres of production and reproduction. There had been many left-wing factory groups in the Frankfurt area. Now, a highly politicized squatters movement began to occupy and renovate buildings which were empty. After several years and pitched battles with the police, most of the occupied houses were cleared and torn down. In most cases, the land was to remain unused for years. (Incidentally, Bubis just started building on his property last year.)

The whole experience left a very strong residue of anger and bitterness. In Frankfurt, however, that form of struggle took on a very different significance than it had in Italy. No real tie was created between workplace issues and issues of housing. Instead, the latter superseded the former with negative consequences that were not clearly understood at the time and which I'll try to talk about briefly towards the end.

Before getting into the issue of normalization and the way in which various groups, tendencies, and parties in Germany define normalization for themselves, I should briefly touch upon the question of anti-Semitism in terms of the self-understanding and the actions of various German groups. Central to the self-definition of the Left in Germany, whether old or new, is that it's anti-fascist. This was particularly strong among the members of the first generation of the New Left, whose revolt was also directed against what they considered to be the great degree of continuity between the institutions and values of National Socialist Germany and those of the Federal Republic. Many of that generation had earlier in the 1960s been members of German-Israeli study groups, and had been strongly affected by Hochuth's plays such as *The Deputy*, by Anne Frank's diary, by the Eichmann trial, and by the Auschwitz trials, which were held in Frankfurt in 1964. This leads to a very complicated issue that I cannot discuss now, the relationship of the Left to Israel after 1967.

The general point I would like to make is that, in spite of this background, most people on the Left never really understood the sort of anti-Semitism the Nazis embodied, and the ways in which the Holocaust was different from other murderous actions of the Nazis. Instead, anti-Semitism was treated simply as a form of prejudice, and was criticized from a universalistic point of view, an enlightenment point of view, which saw the Holocaust as an extreme example of racial and political persecution. Not having really dealt with anti-Semitism, I don't think they could really recognize it and its dangers. This began to change, at least in Frankfurt, in the late 1970s and early 1980s in part as a reaction to the showing of the American Holocaust film on German television and the subsequent discussion surrounding that media event, in part as a reaction to the constitution in Frankfurt of the group of left-wing Jews, who began to address these issues more strongly and publicly, and partly due to changes in the political atmosphere. Those changes have not, however, been universal, not even among the Left, as one could see in Frankfurt this fall.

With regard to the conservatives, in my opinion, there has been a tendency to reduce National Socialism to anti-Semitism in such a way that the latter has been interpreted simply in terms of prejudice and persecution. The tendency has been to speak of Nazi domination as if it were something imposed on the German people. The frequent statements against Nazi anti-Semitism on public occasions have served as a very convenient way, in my opinion, to distance Germans from the Nazi past without looking at it too closely, or at any elements of continuity between that past and the present. The issue of anti-Semitism in Germany is of course inseparable from that of normalcy. As

Andy mentioned, in the past few years the desire, expressed in different ways across a political spectrum, for a return to normalcy has become increasingly stronger. This desire is, in part, an expression of the changed constellation of power in the world. For the Social Democrats, for example, it has expressed itself in the increasing desire that West Germany act politically and economically in a fully sovereign fashion, vis-à-vis Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

Under the Kohl Government, the desire that the postwar period finally be ended is expressed in a different manner, as a desire for reconciliation with the past. An example of this change is the new law passed by the Bundestag making it a criminal offense to deny or speak lightly of the Holocaust or of the expulsion of Germans from the East in 1944-45, a law, in other words, that equates the sufferings of the Germans with that of the Jews, and thereby seeks to wipe the historical ledger clean.

Another example is the decision by the Christian Democratic Mayor of Frankfurt to award the city's Goethe Prize to Ernst Jünger, which would have been unthinkable ten years previously. Lastly, and most seriously of course, was Kohl's equation of the First and Second World Wars, expressed in his insistence that Reagan should hold his hand in a gesture of reconciliation at Bitburg just as Mitterrand had done at Verdun. The equation of the two was meant to imply that with marginal exceptions, i.e., the Holocaust, the Second World War as fought by Nazi Germany was a war like any other. It implied that Germans had neither to confront and overcome their past nor continue hiding it. It meant that within limits, they now could affirm their own past. In setting the terms for reconciliation with the German past, the government adopted an attitude diametrically opposed to that expressed by Willy Brandt as he knelt before the memorial to the Warsaw Ghetto fifteen years ago, an attitude that sought reconciliation with the opponents and victims of the Nazi past on the basis of its repudiation. The visit to Bitburg also sought implicitly to relegate Brandt's gesture to the post-war era, that is, to a non-normal era.

It is illuminating to compare the reactions to Bitburg to those of the staging of Fassbinder's play. Of necessity, I am going to have to simplify. Kohl's form of reconciliation with the past at Bitburg was strongly supported by conservatives, weakly opposed by the Social Democrats, and strongly opposed in Parliament by the Greens, although neither they nor anyone else on the Left sought to organize large-scale protests against the Bitburg visit. As the protests in the U.S. and Israel grew louder and more insistent, a right-wing glossy magazine, *Quick*, published a long article on the power of the Jews in the U.S., and the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, the respectable conservative newspaper,

in a barely disguised threat, wrote that the Jews should be careful not to overstrain relations, because the consequences could only be negative for the Jews and for Israel. The Social Democrats took a lukewarm position having ascertained through opinion polls that the Reagan-Kohl visit to Bitburg was fairly popular, and not wanting to damage their chances of victory in the provincial elections in North Rhine-Westphalia, which were held the following week and which the Social Democrats won.

Why were there so few protests on the part of the Left? I'm not certain. I think that many leftists are also eager to be free of the ballast of the past. In the sense they are also expressing a desire for a return to normalcy, if not in the same form as the conservatives. I believe that other factors played a role as well, such as the refusal to understand that such a spectacle as Bitburg could have deep political significance. Instead of protesting directly against Bitburg, for example, the executive committee of the Greens sought to mark the fortieth anniversary of the end of the war in Europe by traveling to Auschwitz, a gesture, incidentally, that went completely unnoticed by the media worldwide.

When Fassbinder's play became an issue in Frankfurt this fall, the positions of the various political groupings seemed to have been changed. The conservatives and in particular the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* argued that the play is anti-Semitic and that the feelings of the Jews should be taken into account. The SPD, as far as I know, as well as many on the Left, particularly those grouped around the fundamentalist faction of the Greens, argued that the issue is one of censorship. In addition, many have maintained that the play is essentially about real estate speculation and the destruction of the city. The realist faction of the Greens has been less certain and has been more receptive to the arguments of the Jewish community, whose members occupied the stage to prevent the premiere from taking place, an act marking the first time, to the best of my knowledge, that the postwar Jewish community in Frankfurt has entered the political arena in such a direct and public fashion. The Jewish community said and did virtually nothing about Bitburg.

A few brief words about the play. I have not read it, but I saw the filmed version which was shown in Frankfurt in September 1984, after Schwab's unsuccessful attempt to stage the play. And I participated in the public discussion of the film that followed its screening.

The play, as far as I'm concerned, is a play about a destroyed society and anti-Semitism. Anyone who is familiar with Fassbinder's work knows the extent to which he, probably more than any other post-war German artist, wrestled with the problems of Germany's immediate past and the interpenetration of past and present, normality and abnormality, in German society and in himself. Fassbinder took a

novel by Gerhard Zwerenz which dealt with the destruction of the Westend, and which, in my opinion, does have anti-Semitic overtones, and sought to transform the historical and literary material into a play about anti-Semitism. I don't think he completely succeeded. The play has traces of both: it's essentially about anti-Semitism, and it has anti-Semitic moments. With its expressionist crudeness, the play was to be a mirror within which Frankfurt recognized itself. It reflected the anti-Semitism that was strong among parts of the population in Frankfurt at the time of the *Häuserkampf*. Instead of serving as a mirror, however, the play has been regarded by most as a window, and I consider this to be the real problem. It has been regarded by the overwhelming majority of those engaged in the controversy — with some significant exceptions — as being either about a rich Jew and a couple of other unsavory characters, or about real estate speculation.

The positions taken in this controversy have been very revealing. It's unclear to me why Schwab wanted to stage it in 1984 and Rühle in 1985. What I do find interesting is that, once the Jewish community began objecting to staging the play, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* put itself at the forefront of the battle against Fassbinder's purported anti-Semitism. You'll recall that this was the same newspaper that more or less warned the Jewish community against opposing the Bitburg visit too vigorously. I believe that the difference in the attitude of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* to Bitburg and to Fassbinder indicates the way in which the issue of anti-Semitism has been instrumentalized by the conservatives.

I've mentioned that the conservative notion of normalization includes a reconciliation with the past. Of course, that past cannot be fully and wholly embraced. One solution to this problem has been to isolate anti-Semitism, understood simply as anti-Jewish prejudice, as *the* unacceptable element of National Socialism. The periodic critique of anti-Semitism, which is hardly politically problematic in the abstract, allows for the continued normalization of Germany. Indeed, it is one of its conditions. When, however, Jewish concern extends beyond what is accorded as its carefully circumscribed bounds, when it extends into areas of political significance such as was the case with Bitburg, then the Jews are quickly reminded of their place.

Whatever one may think of Fassbinder's piece, it in no way represents a reconciliation with the past as the Bitburg visit sought to do. Indeed, Fassbinder is a perfect target for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, being vulgar, homosexual, and calling into question the moral foundations of the Republic. To accuse him of anti-Semitism allows the conservatives to emphasize their distance from National Socialism in a manner that costs them nothing. On the other hand, those on the Left who claim that the issue is only one of censorship, thereby implicitly

agreeing with the judgement that the play is anti-Semitic, or who claim that it is about real estate speculation and maintain that it should be possible to criticize Jews as well, indicate that they have not recognized themselves in the mirror that Fassbinder held up.

If Fassbinder's play, as I've claimed, is not anti-Semitic, most of the reactions to the play have been, in one form or another. For those on the Left to see the play is about anti-Semitism rather than about real estate speculation, it would necessitate acknowledging the blindness many of them suffered from in the early 1970s concerning the degree to which their battle found support as a populist struggle, a form of struggle that frequently tends to be anti-Semitic. Instead, an abstractly universalistic attitude is frequently used to veil the issue of anti-Semitism. One frequently hears people say they are against speculation, and that they don't care about the identity of the speculator. Such an attitude suffers from an abstractness that is non-historical and non-social. It avoids raising the question of why it was that even though numerous non-Jews were involved in real estate speculation in Frankfurt in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the only speculators commonly known by name were Jews, with the exception of one, who was an Iranian.

What would have been required on the part of the Left, in other words, would have been reflection not only about the extent to which anti-Semitism is alive in Germany, but more fundamentally, what anti-Semitism is. Such a discussion would have raised some questions about the tricky nature of a social struggle in Germany fought in — pardon my terminology — the sphere of circulation, which is necessarily populist. This, in turn, would have required re-analyzing the form and content of various social struggles and working out those aspects of National Socialism not grasped by an orthodox, Marxist analysis of its relation to capital.

Actually, such discussions have been taking place in some circles for the past five years or so. In general, I find that there is, and this may sound paradoxical, *more* openness to discussing anti-Semitism today than ten years ago. The attempted staging of the Fassbinder play has shown how problematic the issue still is and has elicited a great deal of very necessary public discussion on the matter. Lastly, as I said before, members of the Jewish community in Frankfurt tried, for the first time, to employ tactics as political subjects, not objects. I'm sure, knowing the structure of the community, that at least temporarily this will be followed by a retreat away from the public sphere. But it could be indicative of a change. The success of such a change will depend on whether sufficient numbers of Germans will be able to deal with the issue of anti-Semitism when it is posed by Jews acting as political subjects.