

# GRACE SCHWINDT

## Only a Free Individual Can Create a Free Society

**PREVIEW** THU 10 MARCH 6–8pm

**EXHIBITION** 11 MARCH – 28 MAY

**GALLERY 1** · FREE ADMISSION

OPENING TIMES: MON-SAT 10AM-5PM

**THE EDGE**  
**UNIVERSITY OF BATH**  
**WWW.ICIA.ORG.UK**

**icia**



In this ambitious feature-length film, Grace examines the radical left-wing politics of Germany in the 1960s–70s, taking an interview with a former activist and taxi driver as the starting point.

The driver's words and memories of his politically-active student days form a dialogue that the artist weaves through a theatrical setting, drawing on costumes, props and performers to question political ideologies and to ask if we can truly be free. The film examines the notion of freedom: how it was, and is understood, and who, if anyone, can really access it.

The film is 80 minutes long, you can watch it from any point but to see it from the beginning these are the approximate showing times:

10:00 – 11:20	14:00 – 15:20
11:20 – 12:40	15:20 – 16:40
12:40 – 14:00	16:40 – close (17.00)

### HOLIDAY CLOSING

The Edge, including the galleries will be closed during Easter Fri 24 – Tue 29 March inclusive

## THE WEST GERMAN STUDENT MOVEMENT IN THE 1960S

In West Germany in the mid-1960s, a generation of young people came of age who had little or no direct experience of the Second World War and its aftermath. They had grown up in an increasingly affluent society, characterised by the post-war 'economic miracle' that had begun to take hold in the early 1950s. However, despite the collapse of the National Socialist regime, many authoritarian traditions and attitudes still prevailed in West German society, fostered by a general unwillingness to address German crimes in the recent past.

If anything, West Germans were inclined to see themselves as victims both of the Nazi regime and of division of their country as a consequence of the lost war. This expressed itself particularly in a strain of anti-communism that was a common denominator across the political mainstream, and which led to the banning of the German Communist Party in West Germany in 1956.

Arriving at West German universities in the 1960s, students rejected the authoritarian style of many older lecturers, few of whom had been removed for their earlier support of the National Socialist regime. Some sought to challenge the received wisdom of their teachers by re-discovering various forms of Marxism that had been expunged from the academy during the years of Hitler's dictatorship. They came together in the Union of Socialist German Students (SDS) in an attempt to reform the university system from within.

Originally an organisation close to the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the SDS became disillusioned with social democratic policy when the SPD joined with the conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU) in a 'grand coalition' (1966–1969). The SPD remained in government until 1982 (from 1969 in coalition with the Liberal Party). During this time, along with the other major political parties, the SPD supported US foreign policy, including the Vietnam war, and was also party to the introduction of a new 'emergency constitution' in 1968, which would suspend civil rights in case of a state of emergency.

From the point of view of the SDS, and particularly according to its West Berlin leader Rudi Dutschke, the SPD no longer represented an alternative to the capitalist status quo. He called for the founding of an 'extra-parliamentary opposition' (APO) to challenge what many students saw as the latent fascism and imperialism of the Western capitalist order.

The students criticised a society in which, in their view, the workers had been bought off with the modest materialism afforded by industrial progress, while real human needs remained unsatisfied to the extent that they could not be commodified within the capitalist system. They called for a socialist society that would create genuine freedom, but rejected the model represented by communist East Germany due to the authoritarian nature of its regime. Communist movements in the developing world, particularly China's Maoism, seemed to offer potential models, although the students tended to overlook the authoritarianism of these regimes.

Much of the student movement's activity focused on theoretical discussion. However, it also took to the

streets to protest against US and West German foreign policy in particular. Police tended to react violently, and this violence reached its high-point over the visit of the Shah of Iran to West Berlin on 2 June 1967. Following confrontations with security services and members of the Shah's own bodyguard, the student Benno Ohnesorg was shot by a West Berlin policeman and died.

The right-wing press increasingly demonised the student protests as they continued into 1968, which arguably led to an assassination attempt on Rudi Dutschke by a right-wing activist in April of that year. By this point, however, Dutschke was already arguing that the hoped-for revolution was unlikely to emerge under current circumstances. Instead, he proposed, student activists would have to undertake a 'long march through the institutions' (a pun on Mao's Long March), to become teachers, lawyers, politicians, and so on, who could change West German society from the inside. Dutschke died from complications related to his injuries in 1979, and many of those who had supported him sought new possibilities for political activism and self-actualisation away from violent conflict on the streets. >

A few famous communes were founded, attracting much press attention, and many later took part in new social movements (the women's movement, the environmental movement, the gay movement, etc.) that emerged in the 1970s. There were also those who believed that no compromise was possible with the existing system and its elites, which were dominated, according to later terrorist Gudrun Ensslin by 'the Auschwitz generation.'

By the early 1970s, splinter groups committed to violent confrontation with the state emerged, most famously the Red Army Faction (RAF, also known as the Baader-Meinhof Group), whose leaders committed suicide in jail in autumn of 1977. Intermittent terrorist attacks carried out in the name of the RAF continued until the early 1990s, but the group disbanded itself in 1998.

This coincided not only with the thirtieth anniversary of 1968, but also with the election of an SPD-Green government in which figures associated with the student protests and their aftermath were prominent. Otto Schily, for example, who became minister of the interior, had been one of the RAF's defence lawyers in the 1970s,

and foreign minister Joschka Fischer had at one time been close to those involved in left-wing terrorism, before himself renouncing violence. In this sense, Dutschke's 'march through the institutions' appeared to have come to fruition. However, by the time they gained power, the radical student generation appeared to be much more comfortable with capitalism, arguing for a 'third way' between capitalism and socialism rather than any revolutionary re-shaping of society.

Dr David Clarke, Department of Politics, Languages and International Studies University of Bath

## INTERVIEW WITH THE ARTIST

The artist was interviewed by Wiktoria Banda, University of Bath student and ICIA Arts Ambassador. Here is some of what Grace Schwindt had to say:

*"I don't see film as a projection, I see it as being very similar to my other works. I see it more as theatre or sculpture."*

*"A lot of the costumes are jumpsuits which in my mind are the most simple shape of clothing. I break every element down, I take out all the connotations in the speech because I want to look at speech in itself as a starting point, and I do the same with costumes, so I start with the most simple costume shape, and then it comes from a discussion about what the body is. This is the idea that gesture functions as sculpture, becoming an image. The costumes are often connected to the set, turning the body into sculpture."*

What is your definition of freedom?

*"I don't have one. For me it's more a series of questions, which is how my interview with the Taxi Driver started. I sent him nine questions and he answered with a single sentence for each*

*question, and then I unravelled these answers and it turned into two hundred questions. I looked at freedom, this abstract notion, from every angle I could possibly think of, whether it's from an emotion, or some really complex theory, or whether it's in relation to the Second World War, or in relation to a particular city. So I looked at it from all different angles and then formulated all these questions and the interview was then 8 hours long. For me freedom is a series of 200 questions."*

You can watch the full interview at [www.icia.org.uk/student/arts-ambassadors](http://www.icia.org.uk/student/arts-ambassadors)

Grace Schwindt (b. 1979, Germany) is an artist based in London working with film, live performance and sculpture. She completed an MA in Fine Art from Slade School of Fine Art, London in 2008. Represented by Zeno X Gallery in Antwerp, her work is distributed by Argos Centre for Media and Art. Recent solo presentations include; Tramway, Glasgow; Site Gallery, Sheffield; Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver; Eastside Projects, Birmingham and The Showroom, London.

[www.graceschwindt.net](http://www.graceschwindt.net)

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