

## THE GERMAN SOCIETY'S

### *Friday Film Fest Series*



#### *Nach dem Fall*

*Production:* Umbrella Films with Sender Freies Berlin and  
Saarländischer Rundfunk – produced in 1999.

*Producer:* Frauke Sandig

*Director:* Eric Black, Frauke Sandig

*Writer:* Eric Black, Frauke Sandig

*Music:* Terry Riley; Janusz Stoklosa; Yale Strom & Zmiros

*Cast :* Brian Ladd, Winfried Prem, Annette Simon,  
Hagen Koch, Gertrud Kielberg, Manfred Fischer

*Length:* 88 min.

*Language:* German and English with German subtitles

#### Précis – Allen Krumm

In June of 1961 Walter Ulbricht announced that “...nobody intends to put up a wall.” Thus the citizens of Berlin were alerted that a wall was almost certainly in their future. Berliners so eagerly anticipated their new wall that between Ulbricht’s June pronouncement and August 1961, tens of thousands fled West, apparently believing the view of this impending architectural marvel would be better from that direction.

And good walls make good neighbors, *nicht Wahr?*

Herr Ulbricht certainly thought so. After his unintended wall was intentionally built, he fondly referred to it as a “protective womb” and as a “convalescent girdle” behind which the belief of the citizens of the GDR in socialism could be nurtured and strengthened. Hence the socialist syllogism: walls equal wombs equal good socialist neighbors.

*Nach Dem Fall* employs a nicely balanced ensemble of Berliners who never partook of Mr. Ulbricht’s touching belief. Co-directors Eric Black and Frauke Sandig intertwine visual and verbal vignettes to weave a discourse on the life, death and ghostly afterlife of the Berlin Wall with an unsettling mixture of humor and pathos.

The Wall was an oppressive physical and psychic presence featuring not merely the infinitely ugly concrete *Ding an sich*, but a clean well-lit “death strip.” In addition, Stalin lawns, dogs, guns, barb wire and sharpshooters adorned the structure.

The words of these residents illustrate how richly the Wall deserves forgetting and how earnestly each of them needed to find the right way to remember it. *Nach dem Fall* deftly probes the dynamics of both impulses.

Black and Sandig use American historian Brian Ladd as a sort of anchor narrator who interjects thematic and historical aperçus amid lonely lingering shots (seemingly always at sunrise or sunset) of construction cranes and circling, cawing birds.

Interspersing the voices of the other individuals, the directors allow each speaker to keep adding detailed aspects to the mental map of the Wall Experience: a pastor, a former Stasi captain, a construction contractor, a retiree and a psychotherapist.

The Wall was an “inescapable presence” for everyone living in Berlin between 1961 and 1989 (even though in the east the word wall was not allowed). Each interlocutor has his or her own cache of anecdotes and dreams for the necessary remembering; each has analogies and interpretations intended to arm those memories with meaning.

A former Stasi captain (Hagen Koch) describes with clinical precision the technical aspects of the Wall in its heyday (the death strip was so well lit that astronauts and cosmonauts could identify it from space).

A bubbly Bavarian construction contractor (Winfried Prem) extemporizes on his ultimately realized dream of pulverizing the Wall with his Beton-Fresser. West Berlin Rentnerin Gertrude Kielberg expresses her conviction that the Wall is still there, having merely migrated inside everyone’s head. A pastor (Manfred Fischer) reminisces about taking over a parish by the Wall that no one else wanted. A pensive psychotherapist (Annette Simon) elaborates on the grand metaphor of “twin brothers, east and west” which serves as her ultimate coping mechanism.

So how does a city, politically and economically reunited but still culturally and emotionally divided, preserve the memory of the Wall in a way that is meaningful. And why? Pastor Fischer is perhaps the most blunt: when he states, “...it [the Wall] is evidence; in criminology the securing of evidence is important.”

One could also elaborate on Ms. Simon’s metaphor, that twins, no matter how far their paths diverge, can never escape their shared heritage. East and West had their own ways of remembering the past, notes Mr. Ladd, and each was, to a degree, somewhat evasive. “The desire to forget the past...can manifest itself in an effort to destroy its traces.”

Herr Prem feels he has done his part to preserve the memory of the Wall. After all, most of it is spread beneath the roads and buildings of the new Berlin, thanks in large part to the pulverizing efficiency of his machine. He recalls, “the good concrete; well, it was used sensibly.”

We need a memory of the Wall, even a physical piece of it, warns Pastor Fischer, because “the dynamite is still there.” Hence markings and memorials (physical as well

as written) are needed to guide those who have to contend with defusing the historical dynamite which the Wall symbolized.

Mr Prem is not a fan of memorials or museums (“all that crap means nothing”) but he confesses to harboring a desire to take at least one slab of the Wall (properly decorated by a famous artist) back home to Bavaria.

In one sense it is good, even fitting and proper, that Potsdamer Platz, where the Wall had its most menacing presence, should now be essentially a shopping mall. So many new buildings have gone up that for old timers and newcomers alike, it is sometimes hard to remember or imagine what was once there.

And hopefully the period of the Wall will eventually only be “a peculiar episode in a much longer history.” But since the future will always abound in “opportunities for misunderstanding” it is understandable why these Berliners want to keep the memory and just a small portion of the Wall around.

Perhaps if First Secretary Ulbricht had indulged in more poetry and less dialectics, things might have been different: “something there is that doesn’t love a wall.”

### **Biography:**

ERIC BLACK was born in Ohio. He attended high school in West Berlin and has returned many times, camera in hand. He studied photography, anthropology and political economy at the University of California and film in the cinema department at San Francisco State University. His first film, TWO EGGS ANY STYLE, won the Western States Student Academy Award. He has shot many documentaries since and has worked twice with the American director Jon Jost in Rome.

FRAUKE SANDIG was born in West Germany six months before the Wall was constructed in 1961, and she moved to Berlin one year before the fall of the Wall. She holds a master of arts degree from the University of Erlangen, Germany, where she studied drama, German literature and philosophy. She has worked as a television producer (RIAS, Deutsche Welle) and director of more than 20 documentaries in the city of Berlin.