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Eight Hours Are Not a Day (1972)

Part 1. *Jochen and Marion.* Grandma Kruger (Luise Ullrich) lives in Cologne with her daughter Kathe, her son-in-law, and their son Jochen (Gottfried John). Among those who attend her 60th birthday party are her younger daughter, the spinsterish Klara, as well as Monika, Jochen's sister, who is unhappily married to Harald (Kurt Raab). When Jochen goes to fetch champagne from an automatic vending machine, he becomes acquainted by chance with Marion (Hanna Schygulla), and spontaneously invites her to accompany him to the party. Jochen is a tool maker in a large factory, where his work group has been promised an efficiency bonus. Marion works in the advertising department of the

Cologne City Advertiser with Irmgard Erlkonig, who has very conservative ideas, and is prejudiced against Marion's boyfriend because he's only a worker. Marion breaks with her former friend because of Jochen. In the park, Grandma strikes up a conversation with Gregor Mack (Werner Finck), a widowed pensioner, and the two become friends. Grandma makes up her mind to find an apartment of her own. Jochen's work group's bonus is cancelled, because in the opinion of the management, Jochen's proposal for reform made the pay increase excessive. The workers deliberately sabotage production. The company has to hold up its delivery schedule, and so submits to them and pays the increase. Kretschmer, the foreman, who came into conflict with the workers because of the sabotage, dies unexpectedly.

Part 2. *Grandma and Gregor.* Grandma and Gregor are looking for a place to live. Because of the excessive rents, Grandma wants to establish a housing agency for elderly people, but then puts another plan into action: she organizes a kindergarten in the vacant rooms of a former city library. Jochen's colleagues help with the equipment. The police close the kindergarten, but the neighborhood mothers succeed, with the help of the press and especially, with a children's demonstration, in getting the school reopened, now under the direction of a kindergarten teacher who, as is only fair, will be Grandma. Franz Miltenberger, a somewhat older work colleague of Jochen's, gets up the courage to apply for the job of foreman. The supervisor tells him, however, that the company doesn't want to hire the new foreman from its own staff.

Part 3. *Franz and Ernst.* The workers notify the supervisor that they want Franz as their foreman. Franz makes a miscalculation which seems, finally, to have deprived him of any chance of getting the job. The worker Rudiger, who has a strong prejudice against any kind of solidarity, informs on an innocent immigrant worker, Giuseppe. A new foreman arrives, but he is ignored at first, though he tries to gain the confidence of the workers. Soon it becomes apparent that he would actually rather have another position in the company, so that he doesn't stand in the way of Franz's application. He willingly helps Franz in his preparations for the test he must take for the foreman's job. Franz passes the test, and the supervisor kindly promises to recommend him to management.

Part 4. *Harald and Monika.* Marion's mother finds Jochen in bed with her daughter and throws him out. She is not at all pleased that he's only a worker. Harald forbids Monika to take a job outside the home. He wants to raise their daughter in an authoritarian way. Monika decides to get a divorce. Jochen and Marion get married. Manfred, Jochen's co-worker and best friend, begins to fall in love with Monika. At the wedding reception, Harald agrees to a divorce and Miss Erlkonig finally kisses a worker.

Part 5. *Irmgard and Rolf.* The company plans to transfer the toolmaking division to another part of Cologne, which causes many problems for the dismayed workers. Because of the transfer, Jochen wants to exchange his new apartment with that of his parents, but his father is initially vehemently against it. The workers suggest to the supervisor that they organize the pace of the work themselves. The supervisor refuses, but the director of the company agrees, and informs the workers that he's only doing it because it suits his own interests. Miss Erlkonig has fallen in love with a worker she met at the wedding. Monika has moved in with her parents. She had given over her savings to a questionable businessman who had advertised incredible profits from investments; Grandma intervenes to clear the matter up. Miss Erlkonig and her new lover move in with Marion and Jochen. In the apartment which Grandma shares with Gregor, Monika and Manfred declare their love.

This television series is directed to the widest possible audience, and for this reason, it greatly resembles conventional family series and shows typical identification figures who are based on models from popular theatre: the young lovers in secret alliance with crafty old folks; family events (birthdays, weddings, funerals) as rallying points for the action; surprises, mixups and humorously depicted misunderstandings. Nevertheless, Fassbinder's series diverges dramatically from this schema, in that, contrary to popular theatre (and classic comedy), what is lacking is a certain malicious glee about negative characters.

Additional tension is given to the series by an effectively handled elliptical narrative style, which again and again startles the spectator with facts which were foreshadowed in a preceding installment, but which he could not witness (as he had might have wanted to). These frequent moments of surprise and hindsight enliven the series, which was a great success with the television audience.

Fassbinder has smuggled more socio-political insights into *Eight Hours Are Not a Day* than have ever before been attempted in an entertainment film. Numerous problems which are important to most viewers in their everyday lives are touched upon and are, through the evasion of any didactic tones, clarified in all their psychological, social and political interconnections. For example, some of the problems dealt with are public transportation fares, high rents and the influence of real estate brokers, participation in management activities, antiauthoritarian education, prejudice against members of a lower social class (workers) and minorities (immigrant workers), possible self-initiatives for the politically least active groups in society (pensioners, housewives). The plot also illustrates certain ideas without calling them by abstract names. We learn, for instance, what a psychosomatic illness is (the death of the foreman); that misplaced gratification is rooted in frustration (Monika eats one sausage after another and declares, "Unsatisfied wives just eat more.") When Franz Miltenberger thinks he has lost any chance of becoming foreman, he gets drunk at the local pub and keeps mumbling "I'm dumb and I wanna stay dumb," we witness an outpouring of feeling. The basic concepts of alienation and surplus value are elucidated in everyday speech. Alienated work: "It's just work that has nothing to do with us..." (Marion, Part 2). Surplus value: "I see now that when we work, we only work part-time for ourselves..." (Marion, Part 5). Fassbinder made painstaking preparations for the series: "For *Eight Hours Are Not a Day* we researched the stories to see whether they were possible, because we always worked the stories out for ourselves first, and also many stories that were not in the film, and talked with trade unionists...we worked a whole year before the script was ready." (Interview, Feb. 20, 1974) The series received an unusually mixed reception from the critics. Rejection by conservative critics was unanimous, and many left and liberal critics were also vehement. Almost all the critics stated as their main argument that the series did not convey a realistic image of workers. As it was stated, for example, in the *Television and Network Mirror of the German Industrial Institute* (No. 17, Jan. 25, 1973), "As large a view of society as that of the workers is entitled to a realistic and representative depiction of their various problems." In the *Frankfurter Rundschau* (Dec. 16, 1972), Heiko R. Blum called the second part "a story full of naivete, departures from reality and irrelevant subplots." Here it is obvious that Fassbinder's intentions had not been understood: the film was not intended to be a documentary on factual conditions, but sought to demonstrate protypical possibilities for people to be able to triumph over existing circumstances through knowledge, courage and solidarity. Only a few critics understood this intention: "All the necessary and useful documentary efforts of Erika Runge, Gunthar Walraff, and (Rolf) Schubel/(Theo) Gallehr to bring the world of the worker into focus have not brought about as great a change of consciousness as the concentrated learning processes packed into the seemingly broadly and naively painted family idyll of Fassbinder's series." (Klaus Rainer Rohl, *konkret*, No. 26, Nov. 9, 1972, p. 45)

Fassbinder had deliberately made use of the cliches of the culture industry in his series, which was in contradiction to the basic ideas of the neo-Marxist media theory of Theodor W. Adorno, whose work had influenced the new German film critics (and the selfawareness of the younger German filmmakers) more than that of any other theoretician. Therefore, it is understandable why the series was attacked so vigorously by liberal and left critics alike.

Surprisingly, *Eight Hours Are Not a Day* was discontinued, despite earlier announcements. Dr. Gunther Rohrbach, head of television feature programming for the Westdeutscher Rundfunk, justified the cancellation of the series on "dramaturgical grounds": the projected episodes included so many long discussions about trade unions that the entertainment value would have suffered. "We should

not be satisfied with this explanation, because the basis (for the cancellation) is at heart exactly what the critics of the series found lacking—the entering of the hitherto-absent trade unions into the depicted labor struggles." (Gunther Pflaum, *Funk-Korrespondenz*, No. 22, May 30, 1973, p. 13)

Fassbinder: "I won't say anything about it. What are 'dramaturgical grounds'? You can blame it on dramaturgical grounds if you like. There are such things: Monika would have committed suicide, and the relationship between Marion and Jochen would have run into the kind of problems that Rohrbach didn't want—Rohrbach had an idea of them as 'that dream couple.' But this would have been a marriage with great difficulties. We would also have attempted to discover a utopian possibility, and how it *could* work, all right. Then, there would have been very concrete things: what the story has to say about these workers' organizations, what's happening to work councils and trade unions, here, we would have been somewhat more blatant than the Communist Party and somewhat more human than any system. For example, we wanted to say that the trade union is something that really doesn't have anything to do with the people any more, and that if the unions were to be able to do anything for people, they would have to return to fundamentals. That's an example of something that, from all accounts, you are not allowed to say so simply and straightforwardly. So it was all these things together, the dramatic complications, this analysis of things, on the one hand, and on the other, this political, but broader, perspective—but always very human, always seen very much from a human point of view—that undoubtedly made them decide to cancel it..." (Interview, Feb. 20, 1974)

In Fassbinder's series the conventional separation in art between private life and the workplace is overcome: here, the problems of the work world are carried over into the private, and not the reverse, which is generally the case in art when work problems are depicted. In political documentaries, the onesideness is often reversed, and only the workplace is shown, while private life is seen, falsely, as a largely unproblematic appendage of life at work. Only a few works in the history of political cinema have successfully made a consistent connection between the two domains.

Fassbinder's series, in which—contrary to most political documentaries—people appear not as victims, but as possible masters of their own history is, as far as I can see, the only recent German film which understands enlightenment not as the statement of an enlightened author to like-minded people, but as educational work which directs itself to the consciousness of the unenlightened.

Eight Hours Are Not a Day (1972)
(Acht Stunden sind kein Tag)

Screenplay	Rainer Werner Fassbinder
Camera Operator	Dietrich Lohmann
Editor	Marie Anne Gerhardt
Music	Jean Gepoint (= Jens Wilhelm Petersen)
Set Design	Kurt Raab
Assistant Director	Renate Leiffer, Eberhard Schubert
TV Adaptation	Peter Marthesheimer
Production	Westdeutscher Rundfunk

Cast: Gottfried John (Jochen), Hanna Schygulla (Marion), Luise Ulrich (Grandma), Werner Finck (Gregor), Anita Bucher (Kathe), Wolfried Lier (Wolf), Christine Oesterlein (Klara), Renate Roland (Monika), Kurt Raab (Harald), Andrea Schober (Sylvia), Thorsten Massinger (Manni), Irm Hermann (Irmgard Erlkonig), Wolfgang Zerlett (Manfred), Wolfgang Schenck (Franz), Herb Andress (Rudiger), Rudolf Waldemar Brem (Rolf), Hans Hirschmuller (Jurgen), Peter Gauhe (Ernst), Grigorios Karipidis (Giuseppe), Karl Scheydt (Peter), Victor Curland (Foreman Kretzschmer), Rainer Hauer (Floor Manager Gross), Margit Carstensen/Christiane Jannessen/Doris Mattes/Gusti Kreissl/Lilo Pempeit (housewives), Katrin Schaake/Rudolf Lenz/Jorg von Liebenfels (landlords), guests: Ulli Lommel, Ruth Drexel, Walter Sedlmayr, Helga Feddersen, Heinz Meier, Karl-Heinz Vosgerau, Peter Chatel, Valeska Gert, Eva Mattes, Marquard Bohm, Klaus Lowitsch, Hannes Gromball, Peter Marthesheimer.

Filmed in 105 days on location at the Monchen-Gladkach factory, Cologne, in April through August, 1972
Running time: Part I: 101 mins., 11 secs.; Part II: 99 mins., 31 secs.; Part III: 91 mins., 56 secs.; Part IV: 88 mins., 53 secs.; Part V: 88 mins., 53 secs.; 16mm, color.
Cost: 1,375,000 DM.