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Surf Theatres

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NORTHERN CALIFORNIA PREMIERE FRIDAY, DECEMBER 14 AT THE CLAY

Rainer Werner Fassbinder's

THE / MARRIAGE OF MARIA BRAUN

CAST

Maria Braun	HANNA SCHYGULLA
Hermann Braun	KLAUS LOWITSCH
Oswald	IVAN DESNY
Willi	GOTTFRIED JOHN
Mother	GISELA UHLEN
Hans	GUNTER LAMPRECHT
Senkenberg	HARK BOHM
Bill	GEORGE BYRD
Betti	ELISABETH TRISSENAAR
Peddler	RAINER WERNER FASSBINDER

CREDITS

Direction	RAINER WERNER FASSBINDER
Screenplay	PETER MARTHESHEIMER, PIA FROHLICH
Photography	MICHAEL BALLHAUS
Editing	JULIANE LORENZ
Music	PEER RABEN

Running Time: 120 Minutes

"THE MARRIAGE OF MARIA BRAUN"
("Die Ehe der Maria Braun")

Director: Rainer Werner Fassbinder

with: Hanna Schygulla as.....Maria Braun

CLAY THEATRE

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The 1979 Berlinale (Berlin Film Festival) opened with a stunning intimate epic from Germany's most prolific director - "The Marriage of Maria Braun" (which won its star Hanna Schygulla the Festival's Best Actress award and its entire crew a Special Prize for Best Overall Production Values), the story of a 10-year-old act of coitus interruptus.

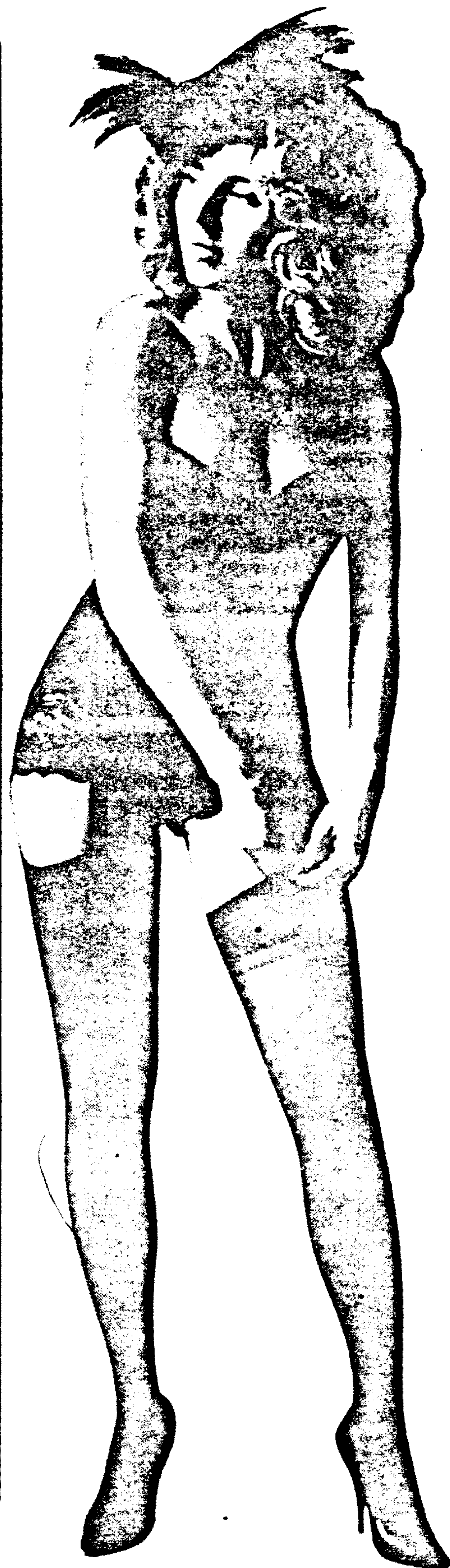
After a three-week acquaintance, Maria marries her Hermann Braun. In the film's opening sequence, as society explodes around them, a bomb hits the registry office and the notary public bleeds to death, Maria braves death and destruction to get the official stamp of respectability on the piece of paper which promises her a happier-ever-after future. However, after 'half-a-day and a single night,' her Hermann is dispatched to the Russian front, where at the war's end he is presumed dead. A faithful worshipper at the shrine of his memory, Maria sets about earning food and another kind of future for herself and her mother. She gets a job as a B-girl in a GI bar, and enjoys a gentle liaison with a black soldier until a resurrected Hermann catches them in the act. To save her husband further humiliation, Maria impulsively murders her lover; to spare his wife the humiliation of prison, Hermann confesses to her crime. To make amends to her husband, the wife sets about amassing a fortune toward the day of his release. To be worthy of the wife who has sacrificed her finer feelings for his future, Hermann rushes to Australia on his release from prison to amass a fortune of his own. When the couple are eventually reunited on terms morally and materially satisfactory to both, Maria is a hardened businesswoman, Hermann a primitive boor. On her way to their long-postponed consummation, Maria accidentally sets off a gas explosion which destroys the marriage, the past, the future...and the last illusion of romantic bliss.

The following article by Jan Dawson is from the "berlinale tip", the official bulletin of the Berlin Film Festival:

It's a rare dialectic indeed which can combine a rampant misogyny with an all-encompassing compassion for women as society's - and sexism's - victims; yet it's a balancing act which Fassbinder has sustained with a truly acrobatic skill from his feature film debut in 1968, when he first observed that love was colder than death and proved the point by having Hanna Schygulla - beaten, used and abused by himself in the role of her pimp and dubious protector - seize the opportunity for a brief moment of power by betraying to the police, and to death itself, the elegant, cool killer (Ulli Lommel) for whom Franz/Fassbinder had displayed an impulsive sympathy and affection.

Already in this first film not only the dialectic but the remorseless chain of cause-and-effect lying behind it was plainly demonstrated - the mechanism laid bare for all to see. Power, and the frustration born of a non-selfdetermining impotence; the transitory nature of feelings and relationships, and the desperate desire for permanence and possession: within the amorphous territory of the characters's shady lives, these four active and reactive states stood out as landmarks signposting otherwise their inexplicable behaviour.

From the film's opening sequences - in which Franz beats up a lesser gangster, is beaten by the syndicate and returns home to demonstrate his authority by giving his girl Johanna (Hanna Schygulla) an authoritative slap and snarl - the connections between power, powerlessness and violence are spelled out with all the simplicity of a kindergarten lesson in social dynamics. We are also shown the pecking order ('big fleas have lesser fleas', etc.): big gangsters (already failures in terms of



the truly powerful society which remains inaccessible to them and invisible to the audience) take out their pent-up frustration by brutalizing lesser gangsters, who in turn work out their aggressions on the still lowlier race of women. For again, from his very first film, Faßbinder makes it perfectly clear just whom he sees as lying at the bottom of society's totem pole. Women (joined in his later films by Gastarbeiter, blacks and gays) have no power which is not vicarious, therefore no freedom, no satisfaction to be found in the absolute present tense which is all the male characters (like the cinema itself) can actually offer or enjoy.

The women's reaction to an unsatisfactory condition is, in effect, a double betrayal of the present moment, and of the reality of their situation: they retreat into fantasies of future security (nearly all the whores in Faßbinder's films are saving up for a home and family); and they resort to devious schemes in a vain attempt to turn these wishful fantasies into substance. And Faßbinder as auteur has tended to denounce this deviousness with almost as much vigour as he denounces the social injustices which occasion it. Unlike the book of Genesis, he does not assume that deviousness is an inherent characteristic of the female, but he does reveal it as one which is rapidly acquired. Many of his heroines (PIONEERS IN INGOLSTADT, EFFI BRIEST, NORA HELMER) start out as open and innocent: but even though the degree of his sympathy for them varies, none of them is allowed to stay that way. Women's unfounded faith in the possibility of a future destroys, in film after film, the few possible moments of present happiness; and those few women (foremost among them Petra von Kant) who seek to escape this vicious circle of cause-and-effect invariably do so by acquiring 'male' characteristics just as lamentable as the deviousness of their weaker sisters.

Since Mutter Küsters' journey

to heaven, women have played a minor role in Faßbinder's most recent films, taking second place, not only to the male characters but also to the flamboyant on-screen expression of the director's homosexuality. MARIA BRAUN therefore marks, in more senses than one, a return of the Faßbinder heroine. And, most specifically, of Hanna Schygulla who - before splitting from the Faßbinder group after EFFI BRIEST - had previously, and from the first film on, been used by Faßbinder to incarnate the dominant aspects of the female personality as he sees and defines it: a radiant but slightly dumb sensuality swiftly distorted by it's owner's determination to employ it in the service of long-term material goals; a somewhat transparent cunning: a rapidly tarnished innocence (preserved intact only in the fairytale soap-opera world of EIGHT HOURS DON'T MAKE A DAY). Schygulla has, in Faßbinder's films, played both the whore and the shining innocent - but invariably, these two extremes have converged before the final reel.

Against this generalised background, the title role in MARIA BRAUN, even though not scripted by the director, represents both an elaborate synthesis of Schygulla's previous work with Faßbinder, and another textbook demonstration of the processes and institutions which determine that innocence must be corrupted and that women must eternally be denied a moment of present-tense fulfillment, - or at any rate two such moments. For - and very much in defiance of the outside world (war as a social determinant and further future-killer) - the lovely, loyal, young and innocent Maria Braun, enjoys some 18 hours of perfect, present-tense pleasure with her Hermann; and both of them for in this film, men subscribe no less fervently than women to the myth of a happy-ever-after future - sacrifice everything to the possibility of institutionalising this moment in some eternal amber. They share a dream of perfection which, in

fact, determines that, minute-by-minute, they lead increasingly imperfect lives, justifying their compromises, concessions, miseries and sacrifices - in what is almost a classic illustration of the Sartrian concept of *mauvaise foi* - by seeing them as the 'unreal' means to a perfect end. And since, as Faßbinder has proved in film after film, perfection is the most dangerous myth of all, the perfect end is repeatedly postponed, and then blown to bits at the very moment when the long-delayed consummation is about to be revealed as the hollow myth that it is.

For during the film, Maria Braun has only been able to remain true to her shared dream by being untrue to herself. We watch her harden, lose her innocence, turn before our eyes from Effi Briest into Petra von Kant: the birth of the businesswoman spells the death of the lover. The process is accelerated here, first because Maria - apparently left a penniless widow at the end of the war - is forced to temporise with the material realities of the outside world by selling her only marketable commodity, her sensuality; second, by the Brauns' inability to conceive of a reunion in less than perfect circumstances; third, by their shared inability to acknowledge the corrosive effect of time. The dream stays, but the characters who share it change. In his most sardonic ending yet, Faßbinder reaffirms the message of his contribution to GERMANY IN AUTUMN: that people must be judged by their behaviour, not by their motives. He also reaffirms that love is still colder than death, and that nothing corrupts like faith in the future - unless it be the love of a good woman in an unjust world.

Maria Braun is a product of her sex, but also of Germany and its history: the innocence is crushed out of her in her attempt to sustain a grand passion in a greedy, capitalist society, to believe that 'real life' will only start when you - and the world - are ready for it.