

WISE Germany

presents

DEMOCRACY TAUGHT TO MY GRANDCHILDREN A European Bildungsroman

W.I.S.E., like Europe, is a patchwork of many stories influenced by different mentalities, experiences and life views, bound by a mutual view of democratic structures. W.I.S.E. originated from a Europe-wide discussion on the topic of politics – on hopes, lessons learned and contradictory experiences in our European democracies. Over 60 witnesses, from the countries involved (Germany, Great Britain, Italy and Poland), born between 1915 and 1949, told us something of their political biographies; thus laying the foundation for the twelve chapters of this European “Bildungsroman”.

The chapters dedicated to Germany are:

Chapter III – ANYTHING GOES IN LOVE AND WAR by Sonia Antinori

In 1967, student Benno Ohnesorg died in West Berlin shot by a police officer during a demonstration. His death precipitated the radicalisation of the student movement and the terrorism of the Red Army Faction during the sixties and seventies in West Berlin. Three very distinct biographies reflect political awareness and political actions both before and after 2nd July 1967.

Chapter V – TRUST IS GOOD, CONTROL IS BETTER by Heidrun Kaletsch

A woman reports on two decades of family life in the GDR; from the moon landing in 1969, to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Her nonconformist family is under State Security surveillance in the GDR. The scrutiny is all-encompassing. Day to day life, privacy, intimacy, spy reports and rumours make their daily mark in Stasi files. After the opening of The Wall she fights for Stasi history to be processed and begins to work in the newly founded Stasi archives, where finally she is given access to her own Stasi file.

Chapter X – HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS by Heidrun Kaletsch

A man flees as a teenager over The Wall to West Berlin, from the repressive constriction of the GDR. He finds refuge there amongst the left wing milieu. As a dedicated human rights activist, he soon finds himself under the scrutiny of the intelligence service in West Berlin. When The Wall falls and he begins to investigate

the crimes the Stasi perpetrated against the citizens of the GDR, his comrades in West Berlin turn their backs on him.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Chapters III, V and X illustrate a contemporary history of Berlin; a history that was divided from 1961 until 1989 by the Berlin wall.

All the staging forgoes using the classic theatre forum. The audience is led from position to position, through an empty apartment block in Berlin and experience different perspectives of the walled city's political state.

The choice of a real, private location as a stage reflects the authenticity of the stories. Upon entering an anonymous apartment the audience is brought directly into the conflict between the public and private existence of citizens. In penetrating the privacy of a living space, filled with the traces of a life lived, they cross a border. This penetration mirrors the assault of the state's controlling body on the personal sphere of individuals.

On the ground floor the audience is received by a choir and chapter III. In strict rhythm the actors scan the language of violence in post war West Berlin; the chorus culminates with the tragedy of the shooting of Benno Ohnesorg. Three solos are embedded in the chorus and they herald the testimonies of those who were there, whose individual stories echo past, present and future violence, sometimes discreetly, sometimes clearly.

(Direction Chapter III: Pawel Schwejka)

Wandering further the audience is led through a labyrinth of stairs, corridors and rooms in which audio visual installations make tangible the traces of past times and past residents: diffuse noises from the fireplace, rustling and scratching from a corner, a polyphonic dripping, which accompanies visitors on their way up to the first floor. Deserted rooms in which old political placards, left by former residents, hang on the walls. Perhaps they left in a hurry. The bright light of a spotlight, which falls through the window from outside, could come from searchlights.

(Audio visual installation: Wiebke Hensle)

The audience ultimately reaches the insecurity of a vast, abandoned and decaying first floor. A man detaches himself from the small audience group and begins to tell of his search for a homeland. This reveals the temporary nature of this location, where the layers of the past can be found on walls, on which layers of wall paper are pasted over each other. It is a deserted location, but at the same time it invites occupation. It is a location which invites renewal. It is a location in transition, between an animated yesterday and an unknown future. Chapters V and X are interlaced into this dreamy transition. They express the real influence, exerted by state controlling bodies, on non-conformist lives in East and West Berlin. The fine line between conformation and differentiation in a dictatorship demands a constant inner dialogue. This dichotomy of the individual existence is expressed in the dual representation of the woman in Chapter V.

(Direction Chapter V and X Heidrun Kaletsch)