

## STOLZ & EIGENSINN

### Pride & Attitude

Director Gerd Kroske

Germany | 2025

115 min. | German with English subtitles

**Screenplay** Gerd Kroske. **Cinematography** Anne Misselwitz, Jakobine Motz. **Editing** Andreas Zitzmann. **Music** Klaus Janek, Michael Thieke. **Sound Design** Pierre Kirchoff, Michael Kaczmarek, Oliver Prasnikar. **Producer** Gerd Kroske. **Production company** realistfilm (Berlin, Germany). **With** Silke Butzlaff, Steffi Gänkler, Ingrid Kreßner, Bärbel Grätz, Ulla Nitzsche, Brigitte Jahn, Christel Bradler, Cornelia Patzwald, Monika Schumann, Isabell Radecke-Aurin, Norbert Meissner.

### Synopsis

The views of female employees of large factories in a country that no longer exists. **PRIDE & ATTITUDE**. A title appropriately settled at the intersection of Kluge/Negt and Jane Austen. The protagonists in Gerd Kroske's latest survey of the past and the state of affairs in the context and afterlife of East Germany are concerned with both – labour power and questions of women, as in questions about possibilities as a woman to work, participate actively in social life and achieve self-realisation. Or the question of why men take these issues for granted, ultimately regardless of the political system. "The mantle of history blows in favour of those with enough breath to determine the direction of the wind," states Christa Wolf in a quote at the start of the film. Woman, East Germany, West Germany: Kroske creates an experimental set-up with split screens and asks, "What was once gained – what is lost?" The film presents U-matic footage of female industrial workers in the early 1990s shot by Leipzig's Kanal X to document real dismantling and layoffs. An archival find. Today, the same women speak again about the loss of their hard-won sovereignty. A multi-channel film. (Barbara Wurm)

**Gerd Kroske** was born in 1958 in Dessau. After training as a concrete craftsman, he delivered telegrams, and later moved into cultural work with young people. Kroske studied Cultural Sciences at the Humboldt University in Berlin, and Directing at the Academy for Film and Television Konrad Wolf in Potsdam-Babelsberg. From 1987 to 1991, he worked as a writer and dramaturge at the DEFA documentary studio. Gerd Kroske has been making his own films since the autumn of 1989, and founded the realistfilm production company in 1996. The Austrian Film Museum and the DHM dedicated retrospectives to him.

**Films:** 1989: Cassiber (30 min.), Leipzig im Herbst / Leipzig in the Fall (50 min.). 1990: La Vilette (52 min.), Kehraus / Sweeping (28 min.). 1991: Kurt – oder du sollst lachen / Kurt – You Shall Laugh (30 min.). 1994: Vokzal-Bahnhof Brest / Terminus Brest (91 min.). 1997: Kehrein, kehraus / Sweep it Up, Sweep it Down (70 min.), Galeria (101 min.). 2000: Der Boxprinz / The Boxing Prince (97

min.). 2004: Autobahn Ost / Highway East (90 min.). 2006: Die Stundeneiche / The Our Oak (60 min.), Kehraus, wieder / Sweep it Up, Again (100 min.). 2007: Wollis Paradies / Wolli in Paradise (60 min.). 2008: Schranken / Bounds (95 min.). 2012: Heino Jaeger – Look Before You Kuck (120 min.). 2014: Striche ziehen / Drawing a Line (96 min.). 2015: Grenzpunkt Beton / Circuit End Point (20 min.). 2018: SPK Komplex / SPK Complex. 2025: Stolz & Eigensinn / Pride & Attitude.

### Director's Statement

#### 'I Love Faces!'

#### The pleasure of watching people remember

The first time I heard Kae Tempest's song 'People's Faces', I rediscovered why I make documentaries. In the song, Kae sings: 'I love faces.' Yes, I am interested in people's actions, processes, moods and faces. The places they live, which are marked by upheavals, and how people break away from historical dislocations. Filmically, this seems to me particularly appealing: uncovering memory and recording this act with the joy of looking. That is also to be found in my film. I love faces!

Gerd Kroske

### Interview

#### Thinking with Your Hands

**Gerd Kroske talks to Annina Lehmann and Barbara Wurm about the making of the film, the excavation of memory and the value of manual labour**

*Barbara Wurm: This is your fifth time at the Berlinale and your third time at the Forum. We're happy to have you, Gerd! PRIDE & ATTITUDE. Is that Jane Austen?*

**Gerd Kroske:** That would make sense, but I was thinking more of Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt's book "History and Obstinacy" [1981, ed.]. It's thematically more relevant because it's about female industrial workers. This manual work is disappearing historically and that shows quite well in the film, condensed into a very short period of time.

*BW: What was the starting point?*

**GK:** I was doing research for something else in the archive of the GDR civil rights movement, Leipzig e.v. at the House of Democracy in Leipzig. The archivist came up to me and started beating around the bush. He said he had to ask me something, he had a bunch of material from this Channel X, a former pirate TV station in Leipzig. Anyway, it turned out that he was in the process of digitising this material and clarifying the rights issues. And there were several tapes that included my film KEHRAUS [1990, ed.], which was broadcast by this pirate station. I didn't know about that – and I was thrilled. He was relieved that I wasn't giving him trouble regarding the copyright.

Then he returned and said he had some material that might interest me. He showed me two hours of raw material from a film called FRÜHER WAREN WIR GUT GENUG [WE USED TO BE GOOD ENOUGH, ed.]. I think it features 25 women, it was made on behalf of the union back then. I watched it and thought it was absolutely great. Later on I also met Norbert Meissner, who made it together with the sociologist Bärbel Moser Minx. I thought that we should try to find these women again. The material was in a very rudimentary state, there were no records of who lived where. Names were misspelled, and so it took me a good six months to find the women, and three of them didn't want to participate. That was in the autumn of 2023.

*Annina Lehmann: What was your experience with the women you did find again? How many of them did you find and how did they react?*

GK: Very differently. The interviews were made in 1994, almost 30 years ago. I didn't make these old recordings myself, so they didn't know me and we had to do a lot of persuading, which was a bit difficult at the beginning. This is a generation that is apparently very pestered by advertising calls. When an unknown number calls, they don't answer the phone at first. The initial contact was relatively difficult. But then I already had the appropriate film clips with me to show them, and then, of course, the memories started to emerge.

What interests me about documentaries is participating through the medium of film in how people uncover their memories. What interests me about documentaries is participating through the medium of film in how people uncover their memories. How that happens and how you move through a conversation and notice where the fear is, where topics are avoided, or what has remained particularly vivid. Of course with the knowledge that there is something constitutive about such memories. Everyone remembers very personally and selects accordingly. With the material that shows what they talked about 30 years ago, I was very well prepared and was able to fill in the gaps and find out what happened afterwards or how they see it today. I've been doing this kind of work for a few years now with Lisa Böttcher, the assistant director. We'd probably be really good at selling bibles, too.

*BW: I would like to move on to the film's central split-screen constellation. The women are reflecting on their own experiences in 1994 already, having gone through the turning point of the re-unification. And 30 years later, the same women talk about both: about themselves at the time, reflecting, but also about the historical process itself. It seems to me that this is the central question of the film: a shift that is not so tangible at first glance. The differences between the two time periods are sometimes very slight. And that is the core of the film. How do perceptions of this loss shift?*

GK: As far as these two time levels are concerned, I tried not to show the women all the material during the shoot, to avoid a certain repertoire being repeated over and over again. So they only saw very short excerpts. Seeing themselves was often a surprise, the topic of age and youth played a role as well. What I noticed, and where the two levels meet, was that the bitterness had not increased at all. There is by now such a distance over the 30 years, during which they have retained their dignity. That was probably also their salvation in dealing with this situation. We were always prepared for hearing tales of bitterness. But that didn't happen at all. They perceived it as a period that was probably not the best in their lives, but that was also somehow over and done with. I always tried to strike a balance so that you also realise that, of course, a lot is still unresolved.

At least with the train driver, with Ms Schurmann, you can hear how it has affected her family. How she tried to protect her children from it and keep the outside out. It comes across that it was an influence that has been disrupting her throughout

her life. But that still doesn't make her pick up right-wing slogans. Of course, you also have to realise what significance it has for people, to do such work for decades. Since I trained in construction myself, although I only practised it for a year, I have an idea of what it must be like to do shift work for 30 or 40 years and then suddenly lose your job and have to leave. And I think they do a very good job of describing that.

*BW: Between the changes in the 90s and the present, there is a gap in the biographies. We don't get a story of transformation, as might have been expected, but a second commentary, delayed. The gap remains. Was that a conscious decision?*

GK: The gap was partly inherent in the material. While shooting and later while editing, it became apparent that while I tried to bring the family into the questions, or the husbands, the women themselves didn't really address these topics. Instead, they always described their work situation with a very clear sense of pragmatism. And how they developed a sense of pride in their work, which they were completely entitled to feel for what they had achieved. To an extent it was because the husbands are mostly deceased and the children were independent by now. Family was no longer such a central topic.

But then there was also Frau Grätz, the plant operator from the coal mining industry. She had a daughter and I tried to broach that topic with her. But she said it would take it too far. They once participated in a radio podcast and they talked about it for a few hours. You can't sum that up like that. There are also critical topics that she discusses with her daughter, but not with me. And I had to deal with that, also respecting how far people are willing to reveal their innermost thoughts or not.

*BW: I really enjoyed experiencing you as a dialogue partner. What were the women like for you as film dialogue partners? Different from your previous films?*

GK: The approach was different because I was very focused on the material that was already available, because the basic idea of working with the split-screen format was there from the start. But while shooting, I didn't perceive it as a fundamentally different situation. It has to do with how you come across at first and how you establish a situation of trust. In this case, it was really important that I'm from eastern Germany myself. That was really checked a few times. Then I had to explain my background and that of the team. That has been changing since a few years, it never used to matter. But for a few years now, it has become an issue when you shoot with people, the question of where you come from. And that's how the opening up happens.

*AL: I would like to ask a question about the present, because while it is, of course, a film that looks back, it is also made now and is being shown in the present. Can you say a little bit more about that, i.e. why this film is important now? Or also, what would the film's message be today?*

GK: Well, I've always tried to get away from this reflexive aspect. The most striking examples are, of course, the two women who are still working. Ms Butzlaff, who has been operating various large machines in the open-cast mine since her apprenticeship and will continue for another ten years before she retires. Or Steffi Gänkler from the shoe factory, who has been standing at the counter at Ikea with a pre-warmed plate for 28 years now. You can see how manual work is changed and absorbed into the service industry. In Weißenfels, the entire shoe industry has completely disappeared. Now there is a pretty old town centre and otherwise a lot of vacancies and industrial wastelands, in places where a few thousand people used to work. That creates a different mood than in Berlin.

We started shooting the day after the European elections. And the first landlord in Spremberg insulted us for being from Berlin and equated us with the government. We thought if it

continues like this, we might as well pack our bags. Everyone who is filming knows that this has changed in the last few years. Before, people used to politely ask what you were doing. Then you explained it and they stood on the side and watched. Today you are insulted on the street, called "lying press" [a term used by right-wing groups to describe the media as a whole, ed.], and subjected to reproaches. You have to find a way of dealing with that. Nothing bad happened, but you notice how people react to the media in general, that they can no longer differentiate.

*AL: Do you have any hopes for the impact of the film?*

GK: I can't judge that. One of the impulses for the film was that very generalised stories are circulating about the 'Treuhand' [the agency responsible for the privatisation of East German state-owned enterprises, ed.] and the liquidations at the time. You also find stories about how confident and great the East German women were. But if you just pick out bite-sized pieces that fill this image, how great it was, that's not enough for me. I have an incredible respect for the work these women did. I myself come from a family where both parents worked. My mother raised four children, more or less on her own, although the father part of the household, and still worked full-time without me being aware of any complaints. It was everyday life. And of course I recognise that in this generation of women. How they subjected themselves to the greatest drudgery as a matter of course. If I talk to my daughter, she would not lead such a life today, that's for sure.

*AL: That makes me think of the beginning of the film, of this identification of the woman with the miner: she doesn't want to be called "Bergfrau", a female miner, because it's the tradition of the male miner, the "Bergmann". That's interesting, especially in relation to modern feminism. You could say that yes, they were feminist in their way, just by doing what they wanted. But at the same time, there also seems to be an identification with the patriarchy, or with this male world: I'm just a woman, so I have to work harder. That was not really questioned.*

GK: Yes, of course. They have a different approach. Much more matter-of-fact, pragmatic. Of course it was also about making money. But this also meant being able to move around confidently and independently despite this insane burden. They also worked very hard physically. I have a great deal of respect for people who do such honest work, who, let's say, think with their hands. When you do manual labour, it's a completely different process than when you write texts or make films. I have the greatest respect for people who can do that day in, day out and also take joy in what they do. And they express this self-esteem again and again. I think that's perhaps a signal for the here and now.

*BW: The openness of the conversation means that in most of the stories, the women's fates and biographies are almost stronger than the original question of East/West, GDR/FRG. The film gives the women's biographies a lot of space and also does away with clichés. That is one of the film's strengths, that it reflects on these fundamental questions about women's opportunities for self-realisation, about the organisation of working women, about women's active participation in social life – maybe a little Jane Austen after all... These are questions that men don't have, regardless of the system.*

For me, the Christa Wolf quote that precedes the film – 'The cloak of history blows in favour of those who have enough breath to determine the wind direction.' – is in a sense true on both levels of the film, it refers to the historical 'victors', but also to the world of men. Some women comment on this connection very eloquently. Did you know from the beginning that the conversations would go in that direction?

GK: Of course I pushed in that direction by asking questions, I was interested in that. The general background is, of course, that regardless of whether it's women's or men's work, everyone has had a foundational experience and can draw comparisons

with the present from that experience. And sometimes these comparisons are very positive, sometimes very negative, because they are compared with this personal experience. And that is a topic that, strangely enough, always falls by the wayside, that is not so often perceived in public. That there is still this other temporal level of experience. When I walk through Berlin Mitte, I still know where the Koffer-Kratky was and where the pub was, etc. That's completely changed now. And at the same time, you have like an internal film that runs alongside what you see, so to speak. And of course, everyone who comes from the East feels that way.

And if, as described in the film, their professional lives are also cut short – they were at an age when you don't expect to be sent into retirement – it naturally leaves its mark on people. There is almost an acceptance of this outcome, I can't really interpret it, I'm a bit surprised myself. Because a lot more anger would be acceptable. But I put that down to their age, that you are somehow coming to terms with it. These flashbacks to what they were capable of and what they achieved are probably what keeps them grounded. It was that strong. Everything else was not as relevant. I don't know if that's true. But it is also clear how much the loss of jobs affected families. As for the transformation in the Lusatia region today, Silke Butzlaff says clearly that it recalls memories of the 1990s and the situation when jobs were at stake. That is something the region will still have to face. There are still a few thousand people employed there.

*BW: A case for Channel X.*

GK: Yes, and to wrap things up: it's great that this material exists. Norbert Meisner from Channel X gave me a hard drive yesterday at the Michendorf rest stop because he found more material that we can use to exchange a picture. He's very cooperative. It's great to meet such a supportive person who has given this entire archive to the citizens' movement without any vanity and without any financial benefit. They shot an incredible amount of material over almost two years. Especially in the whole of Saxony, it is a huge treasure trove of material that no television archive has. They moved through the city with a completely free choice of topics and did everything that came to their minds.

*BW: Are you the first to revive this?*

GK: It is becoming a bit more well-known because there is a series of events organised by the Leipzig City Museum, and I was there in autumn with one of the KEHRAUS films. The event that followed was about Channel X, which a couple of university professors were looking into and trying to study. But it is an untapped treasure. That has to be made very clear. I think it will still become relevant.

*BW: A final question, very nice and concise. You formulated it yourself. 'What was gained? What was lost?'*

GK: Yes, that's what the film is supposed to tell and for everyone to find out for themselves. Of course, there is this point that work is more than just that if it simultaneously contributes to a sense of self-worth. That it is more than money and that it is a constituting of one's self. Mrs Nitzsche says it, that this was the second part of life. First the family and the husband. And then this work, on an equal footing on one level, that was a very important area of life for women. That can be felt by everyone. And that is also, I think, what is so injured when you are pushed out of your job. In such a brutal way as it is described here in part. Then you know what has been gained and what has been lost.

*BW: A wonderful answer. It still hasn't solved the big question of Marxism: is the women's question just a secondary contradiction? Maybe we will solve it together, after your film.*

GK: I'm glad you're showing it.