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Picking at a Scabbed Wound

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“PICKING AT A SCABBED WOUND.” *JADUP AND BOEL*, DIR. RAINER SIMON. DVD. NTSC WITH BONUS FEATURES. DEFA FILM LIBRARY AND ICESTORM, 2008, 100 MIN., ORIGINALLY *JADUP UND BOEL*, EAST GERMANY, 1981.

At a meeting of the Young Historians’ Club, Edith, who is being reprimanded for writing an article critical of the mayor, picks at a large scab on her elbow. This scene provides a framework for viewing the rest of Rainer Simon’s GDR film *Jadup und Boel*, filmed in 1981 and banned until 1988.¹ The film is based on Paul Kanut Schäfer’s 1975 novel *Jadup* and narrates the story of Jadup, the mayor of the small town of Wickenhausen. Jadup simultaneously remembers Boel from the period directly after the Second World War, as a copy of Friedrich Engels’s *Die Entwicklung des Sozialismus: Von der Utopie zur Wissenschaft*, which Jadup had given Boel, is unearthed in a collapsed house. Boel has been raped and has fled town. Now rumors are spreading that it was Jadup who raped Boel. As Wickenhausen is on the eve of its 800th anniversary, a chronicle of the town is to be written.

The years since the Second World War are particularly problematic. Should the town’s chronicle be another exercise in official discourse, or should it be a more bottom-up and subversive affair? “Das Subversive liegt zwischen den Bildern,” says director and screenplay writer Rainer Simon, speaking specifically about *Jadup and Boel*, in an interview on the DVD. Simon points out that the GDR censors focused primarily on the dialogues and explains that he consciously displaced the subversive into the pictures. For example, as Jadup is giving a speech about progress in Wickenhausen in honor of the opening of a department store [Kaufhalle], an old house collapses in the background. Another example is a sentence painted on the side of an old house that reads: “Der Sozialismus ist so gut, wie wir ihn selber machen.” The implication of this ambiguous sentence being: We have not made it very good. Still the image most indicative of the film is that of Edith, a girl who goes to school with Jadup’s son, Max, picking at her scab as she is being reprimanded by the Young Historians’ Club, for writing her own parodistic chronicle of the city.

But what is the metaphorical scab and how is it being picked at? The scab is an image of what Thomas Fox calls “stated memory,” that is, memory that is not only stated in the sense that it is indicated, but also in the sense that it is

¹ For more on the censorship of the film, see: *Das zweite Leben der Filmstadt Babelsberg: DEFA-Spielfilme 1946-1992*. Filmmuseum Potsdam, Ed. Berlin: Henschel, 1994.

formed by the State.² It is the official history that has smoothed over the problematic experiences of the past. Several elements in the film pick away at the scabbed memory to reveal historical wounds. Edith questions the foundational myth in Wickenhausen. The chronicler, Edith's father, who is always sharpening his pencil as though it will help him better prick through the scab, wants to dig up dirt on Wickenhausen and makes it clear that he will focus on the period after 1945. And with the collapse of Boel's mother's old house, and the finding of the Engels volume that Jadup had given to Boel, well worn and with the cover now missing, the story of Boel now bubbles up through the scab, both in the town gossip and in Jadup's memory.

Jadup and Boel is influenced by the Documentary Style of fiction film, which was prevalent in Eastern Europe in the 1960s, and which used realistic scenes from everyday life and repetition in order to subversively illustrate political paradoxes.³ As Larson Powell points out in a bonus feature, *The Case of Jadup and Boel* (2008), on the DVD, Simon studied Documentary Style film in the 1960s. *Jadup and Boel*, however, was made after the end of that style's epoch and, aesthetically, goes beyond the style (a point also made by Powell) in that it is narratologically more complex, including frequent use of analepsis. Jadup, furthermore, is a politician. The film meshes his everyday life with his troubling past. Again, the scab metaphor is relevant: whereas Documentary Style illustrates how disgusting the scab is, *Jadup and Boel* explores the relationship between the scab and the underlying wound.

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² Thomas C. Fox. *Stated Memory: East Germany and the Holocaust*. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 1999.

³ For more on Documentary Style, see Peter Wuss. "The Documentary Style of Fiction Film in Eastern Europe: Narration and Visual Style." Trans. Stephen Lowry. *Film Style and Story: A Tribute to Torben Grodal*. Eds. Lennard Hojbjerg and Peter Schepelern. Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum, 2003.