

# 1968: A Global Perspective

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## **Casting Culture in the 60s: Alexander Kluge and Cultural Revolution in West Germany**

In reflecting on the legacies of 1968, attempts by filmmakers of that generation to foster increased intervention in the mechanisms of cultural production can hardly be ignored. Through the films of the European New Waves, auteur directors trained moviegoers in radical and politicized ways of viewing and engaging with film. By 1968 going to the movies was no longer necessarily a “safe” and entertaining outing. More significantly, Culture had become more than the stale inheritance of a society; it was permeable and indeed demanded active intervention on the part of all involved.

In West Germany, the signers of the 1962 *Oberhausen Manifesto*, who cast off the legacy of “grandpa’s cinema,” assumed a prominent position in debates over cultural engagement and the role of film in the growing campaigns for social and political change. The filmmaker and writer Alexander Kluge stood at the forefront of these debates. In his films and writings (prose fiction and theory) throughout the Sixties, he developed a model for cultural engagement through film that influenced the activists of 1968, and that continues to resonate in discussions of the degree to which film should involve the viewers in social and political discourses off screen. In this presentation I propose to analyze three of Kluge’s films from the late 1960s, (*Abschied von gestern*, *Die Artisten in der Zirkuskuppel: ratlos*, *Der große Verhaul*) with the aim of understanding how such involvement was promoted by and furthermore trained through the medium. Beyond this, my examination of Kluge’s work will offer insight into the continuously fluctuating meanings of cultural engagement since 1968.