

On the Death of Rainer Werner Fassbinder
Robert S. Griffin
www.robertsgriffin.com

Rainer Werner Fassbinder (May 31, 1945 – June 10, 1982) was a major filmmaker, writer, and actor in post-World War II Germany. In a career of less than fifteen years, Fassbinder directed and, in many cases, wrote the screenplay for three short films, forty feature films, and two television film series, authored and directed twenty-four stage plays and four radio plays, and acted in thirty-six of his own and others' films. In addition, he was a film producer, camera operator, music composer, set designer, film editor, and stage manager. His work reflected deep sensitivity to social outsiders and personal and institutional cruelty and violence.

At the end of his life, Fassbinder was working constantly, averaging three hours sleep a night, overeating, drinking two bottles of bourbon a day, smoking cigarettes, marihuana, and hashish and consuming cocaine non-stop, and taking powerful sleeping pills. A friend recalls one occasion when Fassbinder, with the intention of going to sleep for the night, sniffed cocaine, took three ten-milligram tablets of valium, and drank three glasses of bourbon and said, "If I'm not asleep in fifteen minutes, I'm going to do the same thing again." Fifteen minutes later and still awake, he did just that. "If you did this," Fassbinder told his friend, "you'd be dead."

On June 10th, 1982, Juliane Lorenz, with whom Fassbinder was living, arrived home at 3:30 a.m. She heard the television in Fassbinder's room but could not hear him snoring as he usually did. She was not allowed into his room uninvited, but this time she went in and found him in bed, a cigarette between his lips, dead. It was ten days after his 37th birthday.

Source: Ronald Hayman, *Fassbinder: Film Maker* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984).