

AUDRE LORDE – THE BERLIN YEARS 1984 to 1992

A FILM BY DAGMAR SCHULTZ

2012 | 84'

WORLD PREMIERE at the Berlinale, International Film Festival Berlin, Panorama
15 February, 2012, CineStar 7, 8:00 p.m.

FURTHER SCREENINGS: 16 February, 2012, CineStar 7, 2:30 p.m., 17 February, 2012, Cubix
7, 5:30 p.m., 18 February, 2012, CineStar 7, 12:00 p.m.

CREDITS: Producer and Director: Dr. Dagmar Schultz, Editor: Aletta von Vietinghoff, Author: Dr. Dagmar Schultz, Co-Authors: Ika Hügel-Marshall, Ria Cheatom, Aletta von Vietinghoff, Dramaturgical Consultant: Regina Bärtschi, Cinematography: Dagmar Schultz, Michael Seidel, Ika Hügel-Marshall



SHORT SYNOPSIS

Audre Lorde, the highly influential, award winning African-American lesbian poet came to live in West-Berlin in the 1980s. During her stay as a visiting professor, she was the mentor and catalyst who ignited the Afro-German movement. Lorde also had a decisive impact on white women, challenging them to acknowledge the significance of their white privilege and learning to deal with difference in constructive ways.

LONG SYNOPSIS

Audre Lorde's incisive, often-angry, but always brilliant writings and speeches defined and inspired the US-American feminist, lesbian, African-American, and women of color movements of the 1970s and 1980s. *Audre Lorde - the Berlin Years 1984 to 1992* documents an untold chapter of Lorde's life: her influence on the German political and cultural scene during a decade of profound social

change. The film explores the importance of Lorde's legacy, as she encouraged Afro-Germans - who at that time had no name or space for themselves - to make themselves visible within a culture that until then had kept them isolated and silent. It chronicles Lorde's empowerment of Afro-German women to write and to publish, as she challenged white women to acknowledge the significance of their white privilege and to deal with difference in constructive ways. Previously unreleased archive material as well as present-day interviews explore the lasting influence of Lorde's ideas on Germany and the impact of her work and personality. For the first time, Dagmar Schultz's personal archival video- and audio-recordings reveal a significant part of the private Audre Lorde as well as her agenda – to rouse Afro-Germans to recognize each other. 2012 marks the 20-year anniversary of Audre Lorde's passing.



DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Dagmar Schultz was born in Berlin and from 1963 to 1972 studied at the Free University of Berlin, as well as in the United States of America and Puerto Rico, where she also made her first work experience. From 1973 to 1986 she taught “*Women’s studies and cultural and immigration issues*” at the John F. Kennedy Institute of North American Studies at the Free University of Berlin. From 1991 to 2004, she was a professor of Social Work at the Alice-Salomon University of Applied Sciences in Berlin. Her teaching and research have focused on feminist studies and women’s movements, on anti-racist social work, on women’s health care and on cultural competence in the psychiatric care of migrants and minorities. In 1974, after her return from the United States, Dagmar Schultz was a co-founder of the Feminist Women’s Health Center in Berlin – the first of its kind in Germany – and worked for the center until 1981. Also in 1974 she co-founded Orlanda Women’s Press and was its (co-) publisher until 2001.

Dagmar Schultz first met Lorde at the Women’s World Conference in Copenhagen in 1980. She arranged for Lorde to be invited as a Guest Professor at the John F. Kennedy Institute of North

American Studies at the Free University of Berlin in 1984. As director of publishing house Orlanda Frauenverlag Schultz edited *“Macht und Sinnlichkeit” Selected texts by Audre Lorde and Adrienne Rich*, and introduced these authors to German readers. Orlanda published further works by Audre Lorde including a bilingual edition of 42 poems Lorde selected during her last summer in Berlin (*“Die Quelle unserer Macht”*). Recently she was awarded the Margherita-von-Brentano-Price 2011 for work which furthers the equal rights of women in academia. The funds of the award contribute to the production of the film *Audre Lorde – The Berlin Years 1984 to 1992* and to the establishment of an Audre Lorde Archive at the Free University of Berlin.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I myself lived in the United States and in Puerto Rico from 1963 to 1973 and was active in the civil rights movement, in the anti-Vietnam movement and in the women's and lesbian movement. Thus I had plenty of opportunity to confront myself with my role as a German and as a white European. After my return to Berlin it became more and more clear to me to what extent the absence of Black and Jewish women in the women's movement determined the identity and the politics of that movement. In 1980, I met Audre Lorde for the first time at the UN World Women's Conference in Copenhagen in a discussion following her reading. I was spellbound and very much impressed with the openness with which Audre Lorde addressed us white women. She told us about the importance of her work as a poet, about racism and differences among women, about women in Europe, the USA and South Africa, and stressed the need for a vision of the future to guide our political practice. On that evening it became clear to me: Audre Lorde must come to Germany for German women to hear her, her voice speaking to white women in an era when the movement had begun to show reactionary tendencies. In the spring of 1984 she agreed to come to Berlin for a semester to teach literature and creative writing. One of her first questions on arriving in Berlin was, "Where are the Black Germans?" Thus began a political movement- and awareness-building journey that lasted until the end of her life. During that process she initiated work on the book *“Showing Our Colors. Afro-german Women Speak Out”*, which Orlanda Frauenverlag published in 1986.

For me this process meant learning, discovering and forming friendships and alliances with Black Germans.

Audre returned to Berlin in 1986 and until 1992, the year of her death, spent annually weeks and months in this city. During the last two years she stayed with me and my partner Ika Hügel-Marshall, and we visited her and her partner Gloria Joseph in St. Croix. A friendship developed: we worked on the publication of her books, I translated for her on reading tours, and Orlanda published four more books with Lorde's work including a bilingual volume of 42 poems she herself selected from her work during her last summer. (Her novel "ZAMI. A new spelling of my name" is being republished by Unrast Verlag in March 2012.) Audre Lorde had a profound influence on the development of Orlanda Frauenverlag. We accomplished our goal to become a working team composed of Black and white women and in Audre's sense enlarged our vision and made possible our constructive dealing with differences in daily life.



Another aspect of our friendship had to do with her cancer illness: I introduced her to alternative medicine and naturopaths. For me this meant a very special confrontation with illness and death – an experience which certainly helped me in dealing with my own cancer illness years later. As Audre said: "We meet cancer like we meet every other crisis – out of a composite of who we are." One sign of her friendship was her challenging me, both as a person and a friend. Being with her taught me that, as a white woman, I could not just assume the existence of trust on the part of a Black woman, but that I had to build it up and be ready to reaffirm it.

Fortunately, during much of the decade this film covers, I photographed, audio- and video-recorded Audre with her consent, but without any plan whatsoever about what to do with this trove of

material. In the ten plus years it has taken me to bring this film to fruition, it was clear to me that I definitely wanted to make this material available to as many people as possible. Together with Ika Hügel-Marshall and Ria Cheatom I developed a script which was skillfully edited by Aletta von Vietinghoff. "Audre Lorde – The Berlin Years" brings to light a little known chapter of Audre Lorde's life which was and is extremely important to her and to Black and feminist white communities in Germany and in Europe.

DIRECTOR'S FILMOGRAPHY

2007, *Hope in my Heart – The May Ayim Story* by Maria Binder, co-producer.

2012, *Audre Lorde – The Berlin Years 1984 to 1992*, director and producer.

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FURTHER INFORMATION

<http://audrelorde-theberlinyears.com/>

<http://dagmarschultz.com/index.html>