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Harry & Helen Gray  
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MOVING IMAGES OF  
EAST GERMANY:  
PAST AND FUTURE OF  
DEFA FILM

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Edited by  
Barton Byg  
and Betheny Moore  
University of Massachusetts

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## FOREWORD

The cinema of East Germany, for many years discarded as one of the liabilities of a strictly controlled state culture, is being rediscovered on both sides of the Atlantic. While much of the West German Autorenfilm of Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Werner Herzog, and Wim Wenders generated particular interest in the United States as a critical response to Hollywood in the 1970s and 1980s, the interest in the movies of DEFA, the East German film production company, stems less from their anti-Hollywood bent than a new appreciation of their surprising aesthetic vigor and differentiated portrayal of life in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The fact that it took almost a decade after the fall of the Berlin Wall to establish an institutional setup for their ownership and scholarly study, the DEFA-Stiftung of 1999 can be taken as evidence of the dramatic twists and turns which the vast legacy of movies, documentaries, scripts, unfinished projects, and filmic know-how underwent before and after the official dissolution of DEFA in 1992. This volume helps understand these twists and turns but focuses on the legacy itself, trying to illuminate both the historical developments under party rule and the aesthetic achievements in an international context. Both approaches, the antiquarian and the discursive, still feed on each other, especially in light of the need on this side of the Atlantic to document the visual material before larger claims about the politics and aesthetics of East German film can be made.

The volume is based on papers presented at the AICGS workshop, "Moving Images of East Germany: Past and Future of DEFA Film," which was held in Washington on December 8, 2000. As part of the workshop, the Goethe-Institut Washington organized public screenings of the movie, *Der Rat der Götter* (Council of the Gods) of 1950, directed by Kurt Maetzig, as well as the documentary, *Der schwarze Kasten: Versuch eines Psychogramms* (Black Box) of 1992, created and directed by Tamara Trampe, who also spoke at the workshop. Both screenings, on December 7 and 8, led to lively discussions that reflected the lack of familiarity with East German developments on the part of the American audience. At the same time, the workshop, with speakers from the United States, Great Britain, and the former GDR, confirmed that the specialists on this continent are no less advanced in their critical analysis than those in Europe

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who were more exposed to the political presence and cultural politics of the GDR.

This growing familiarity among scholars is in no small measure the result of the work of Barton Byg, the workshop organizer, who not only has been on the forefront of research on GDR film for many years but is also the initiator and director of the DEFA Film Library at the University of Massachusetts. In partnership with PROGRESS Film-Verleih, the closely related ICESTORM International received the rights for all video and DVD distribution, thus giving Americans direct access to much of DEFA's enormous film stock. Thanks to Barton Byg's expertise in academic research and marketing, a whole array of East German films is already available, and it seems as if this easy accessibility will soon result in important shifts in teaching the history and culture of the GDR.

The AICGS workshop widened the discussion about DEFA's position within the rise and fall of the GDR towards a more comprehensive understanding of East German cinema that includes its interface with Russian, American, French, and West German models. There is little doubt that its academic study and teaching as a mirror of East German cultural policies will enliven the interest in a rather drab subject. What is asked for, however, is a better understanding of both the specific German traits of this enterprise and its participation in the international currents that shaped film history in the second half of the twentieth century. Both Barton Byg's introduction and Katie Trumpener's concluding essay lay out the parameters of this timely reorientation between the fields of film studies, historiography of the GDR, anthropological and cultural studies, and the interdisciplinary ventures of German studies. The rediscovery of East German cinema, both agree, is driven by the realization that the aesthetic accomplishments far outweigh their status as political documents and markers of nostalgic retrospectives. In order to do justice to these accomplishments, the discourse needs a more interdisciplinary and international outlook, more cross-overs to the literary production of the period and more comparative studies with developments in central and eastern Europe as well as West Germany and western Europe.

As the inquiry into the existence of a public sphere in East Germany gave a previous workshop on GDR literature—published in the Humanities Series volume, *What remains? East German Culture and the*

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*Postwar Republic* (1997)—its special dynamics, so does the debate about canonization and contextualization to this workshop on film. Leading experts present insights into the history and legacy of DEFA film that will help Americans understand the centrality of film culture in this system for which the tense censorship represented only a confirmation of its significance. The volume points to the need for more research of DEFA's precarious artistic balancing act between textual (literary) grounding of many productions and the ever-growing influence of a TV culture that seemed more malleable to the wishes of the political leaders.

The American Institute for Contemporary German Studies wishes to express its gratitude to Christiane Mückenberger and Tamara Trampe for sharing their critical insights as active participants in the work and legacy of DEFA. It also thanks Seán Allan, Stefan Soldovieri, and Katie Trumpener for their original and stimulating contributions to the workshop and the volume. Special thanks goes to Barton Byg as the organizer of the gathering and to Betheny Moore, who edited the papers and created a most useful bibliography.

Equally appreciated is the collaboration with Werner Ott and Silvia Blume of the Goethe-Institut Washington, who organized the screening of films, and with Wolfgang Klaue of the DEFA-Stiftung, Berlin, who encouraged and generously supported the workshop. ICESTORM International and the Museum of Modern Art (New York) gave valuable support with the films.

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## **INTRODUCTION: REASSESSING DEFA TODAY<sup>1</sup>**

Barton Byg

Twelve years after the euphoric opening of the Berlin Wall, it is not surprising that the view of the cinema of East Germany is as contradictory and incomplete as German reunification itself. A fundamental inadequacy of film criticism since 1989 has been the fact that the films of DEFA (Deutsche Film AG) are primarily valued as evidence for the history of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Sometimes this is done in a benign or even sympathetic way, which has produced much valuable research. At other times it is done merely to confirm that the GDR was a dictatorship producing only political art meant to prop up the regime. But both approaches fail to take advantage of the new historical perspective that German reunification demands in regard to both the present and the past. Comparative viewing and study of films from the GDR and the Federal Republic (FRG) before 1989 (and since) can provide new information on both German states, as well as the cultural limitations and opportunities of the now unified Germany. Beyond this, virtually no one has taken the opportunity to study the cinema of the GDR as a way to understand differently the culture of West Germany, with which it was in constant struggle.

Two problems will thus be the center of attention in this introduction. First I will discuss the dilemmas presented by the “canon” of major achievements of the DEFA film studios between 1946 and the 1990s, as this legacy has been invoked in the past twelve years. Then I will highlight the more limited recent attempts to place DEFA in a context beyond the limitations of either East German or simply German “national cinemas”—a category of declining interest for contemporary film studies in any case.

### **GENERATIONS AND FILM MEMORIES**

German reunification was a major event in German and European history, and one could argue that its ramifications are only gradually becoming known after the first twelve years of this ongoing process. Perhaps the German film industry can only now begin to treat the division and reunification of Germany from new perspectives. After all, it was

ten years after the Vietnam War that the major narrative works in United States film successfully treated the subject, and certainly the cold war requires at least as much subtlety and consideration for artists to treat it on behalf of a mass audience. Irmgard Wilharm uses the admittedly cumbersome but helpful term of “asymmetrical imbrication” (asymmetrische Verflechtung)<sup>2</sup> to describe how the cold war cultures of both East and West Germany functioned in constant reference to each other. She summarizes the conclusions of many film scholars and historians by describing the west as the superior supplier of entertainment while the East was both the earliest and most consistent in its cultural confrontation of the Nazi past (90-91). Later, GDR literature and film would expand the implications of this legacy to wider questions of philosophy, militarism, the environment and technical progress as such.

An example for how German reunification might now be seen from an East-West historical perspective is Volker Schlöndorff’s new film *Die Stille nach dem Schuss* (The Legends of Rita, 1999),<sup>3</sup> written by the leading GDR scriptwriter Wolfgang Kohlhaase. The film brings together two memories of political violence and repression from the past of both the FRG and the GDR: the phenomenon of the Red Army Faction and the fact that some of its members were hidden in the GDR by the *Stasi*—in some cases until quite recently. Although the plot of this film hints at the continued “presence of the past” in Germany, and suggests a connection to the metaphors of psychotherapy and psychology that are often used in discussions of German cultural treatments of the past, it remains an exception in connecting explicitly an emotionally charged narrative of recent history from the west with events and conditions in the East. Both this film’s uniqueness and its failure to gain wide critical or audience acclaim attest, I would argue, to the lack of a public discourse addressing the ramifications of reunification and the cold war histories of both German states.

### **GDR FILM HISTORY AS HISTORICAL NARRATIVE**

Far more common is the psychological narration of history and film history from a clearly West German point of view, even when it is the history in and of the GDR that is under consideration. The postwar West

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German cultural context of the New German Cinema was often referred to as the “fatherless society.”<sup>4</sup> For instance, the Mitscherlich thesis on the inability to mourn was used to analyze political rigidity, economic fervor, as well as cultural constraints and schisms.<sup>5</sup> Psychology and questions of fantasy, mourning, and memory now play a role in reexamining GDR culture—since in part it offered an alternative to the “fatherless society.” (As Eric Santner wrote in *Stranded Objects*, one way out of historical guilt was to imagine a communist grandfather who stood for the “other” Germany.<sup>6</sup> Of course he wrote that before that grandfather’s historical complicity was a concern.)

Since reunification, one could understand the need on the part of many to constitute the GDR and its culture, now that they have vanished, as the “good object,” a reference point for positive memories capable of providing meaning and constructing an identity in the present. Leonie Naughton has argued this in reference to western-made films about reunification produced since 1990. On the one hand, the events bringing down the GDR regime and subsequent reunification provide German history with a new narrative of progress that was lacking in the 1980s. On the other, depictions of “quaint” practices and archaic land- and cityscapes in the east provide a renewed image of *Heimat*, a quality of film Naughton argues is an exclusively western phenomenon.<sup>7</sup>

In the years immediately after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the international cultural representatives of Germany (especially the Goethe-Institut and Inter Nationes) made unabashed use of the legacy of the GDR on film to promote “German” culture as the culture of democracy and freedom. All too easily was it forgotten that the breakthrough of the Berlin Wall came from the other side. This is in part a convenient continuation of one tendency in West German criticism for decades: to ignore or condemn any GDR film as long as it is GDR-identified, but to adopt the positive achievements of GDR cinema for German (meaning West German) culture in a general sense.

The dismissal or exclusively “GDR-based” analysis of GDR culture thus precludes any new or adequate understanding of what has not already been considered “known.” After all, as Hartmut Kaelble has written, one should make a distinction between GDR ideology and GDR society and institutions. And perhaps neither the west nor the east provides an

adequate perspective to judge this historically. For social history, Kaelble proposes an international comparative approach:

[...A]n international comparison, including especially with the west, can play an important role for the historical evaluation of the GDR by all Germans. In the shadow of the collapse of the GDR system of domination there is today a broad consensus among West Germans as well in judging negatively not only GDR politics and economics but also GDR society. A considerable number of institutions and attitudes in the society of the former GDR are thus drawn into the wake of the negative image of GDR domination and thus take on the taint of condemnation.<sup>8</sup>

In film critical terms, there has been some of this, of course—dismissing all of DEFA film history because of its connection to the GDR: In a publication supported and distributed by Inter Nationes, a quasi-governmental agency, two leading West German film critics dismissed the entire history of DEFA. In forty-three years, they wrote, the only difference between the first and last DEFA film was the addition of color.<sup>9</sup> The irony is that even celebrations of the “DEFA chapter” of German film history seem predicated on the assumption that this chapter is closed, that it was a dead end. Several historical publications with a national cinema approach share this tendency. They include the two comprehensive volumes on the production of the DEFA Studios (*Das zweite Leben der Filmstadt Babelsberg* and *Schwarzweiß und Farbe*), the only English-language survey of DEFA, most of the articles contained in the two yearbooks of the DEFA-Stiftung produced so far, and the recent volumes accompanying a comprehensive DEFA retrospective in Vienna.<sup>10</sup>

An important recent publication based on a major east-west conference in Berlin in 1999 displays both sides of the current division in GDR film scholarship. Although the volume does contain several forward-looking, comparative approaches, the predominant view still merely looks to DEFA film as “explaining” the GDR. This is even evident in the

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somewhat ambiguous title: *DEFA-Film als nationales Kulturerbe?* The definition of “nation” treated here is not subjected to critical scrutiny regarding the united Federal Republic. Rather, the legacy of DEFA is primarily seen as the GDR’s national legacy, explaining what kind of nation it was. DEFA film is seldom proposed, and virtually never by historians of eastern Europe, as a component of a new definition of united Germany’s *Kulturerbe*.

The value of DEFA as a cultural legacy is thus measured in part by its being closed off from the present. This lively afterlife, observed by the editors of the inaugural yearbook of the DEFA-Stiftung that was recently published,<sup>11</sup> derives from the double attraction of the fact that DEFA itself no longer exists. On the one hand, the films offer to the nostalgic or the curious a view to a lost and distant world. On the other hand, historians benefit from both the completeness and the apparent coherence of the documentary record.

The political decisions affecting the GDR’s film legacy since 1989 have clearly been consistent with this view, emphasizing historical relevance and not promoting institutional, geographical or even biographical continuity between pre- and post-1989 production.<sup>12</sup> Seán Allan’s essay published here discusses some of the co-productions funded through the GDR’s last investments, but after this brief transitional period the studios were sold in the early 1990s. The sale of most of the film theaters and distribution networks in the east to western or non-German owners also severed the transition films from their former cinema audiences, to say nothing of the West Germans’ lack of interest in narratives of the east in transition. Of course, this merely duplicates the long-standing situation in the west, where the Hollywood films are most desirable and domestic production has a relatively small niche market.

First in feature film, then in documentary, all trace of the DEFA name and most of its institutional structures disappeared; the name and logo were themselves removed from the register of German trademarks. Tamara Trampe’s contribution to this volume, along with a small number of other publications,<sup>13</sup> describes some of the ramifications of this for film production and exhibition in Germany. I would argue in general that the shutting down of production of DEFA represents a cultural break

with the past much greater than any intervention made into the film industry at the end of World War II, particularly in the East.

Despite the disappearance of DEFA as a producer, the historical legacy of DEFA still fills an important national function in cultural policy. This role has in part been supported by public investment and subsidy aimed at providing a basis for the successful privatization of the East German economy. In 1997, the state film distributor of the GDR, PROGRESS Film-Verleih, was privatized with the mandate to continue to work with the films and licenses previously under its control. After years of administration by the Treuhand, then the BvS (*Bundesanstalt für vereinigungsbedingte Sonderaufgaben*), the actual intellectual property represented by these hundreds of feature films and thousands of documentaries and shorts produced over forty-six years was transferred to the stewardship of the DEFA-Stiftung. In 1998 ICESTORM Entertainment, GmbH was founded in Berlin, successfully marketing DEFA films on video and DVD, primarily but not exclusively to the German-speaking regions of Europe. Their greatest success story has been the distribution of DEFA fairy tales, which in 2000 exceeded the one million mark in total copies sold. In 1999, ICESTORM International, Inc., in association with the University of Massachusetts, began the marketing of DEFA films on video and DVD to both the educational and the commercial markets in North America and elsewhere in the world.

### **THE “CANON” OF DEFA FILM IN THE MARCH OF CINEMATIC PROGRESS**

As lively scholarly and historical interest in DEFA films seems to increase as the GDR recedes into the past, it is fair to ask why DEFA deserves this interest. What are its principal cultural achievements to be adopted as milestones of German film history? On the one-hundredth anniversary of the cinema in 1995, German film critics and producers were surveyed to construct a list of the one hundred most important German films of all time. Fourteen DEFA films were on that list, and a brief survey of them will provide us with some constants of the “canon” of GDR cinema as it has emerged. Among the fourteen films, one could argue that only two themes emerge as significant, along with a short list of directors who deserve international recognition. The two themes

one could distill from these select films are “antifascism” and the “socialist realist film.”<sup>14</sup> In the fourteen top films, these stylistic elements are largely subordinate either to antifascism or socialist realism.

The antifascist film is the most consistent and internationally recognized reference point in the DEFA film, beginning with the very first film made in Germany after World War II, Wolfgang Staudte’s *Die Mörder sind unter uns* (The Murderers Are Among Us, 1946). Antifascism coincided with the GDR’s ideology as an ally of the Soviets against the Nazis, its founding myth, so to speak. But it also became a reference point for artists exploring the themes of liberty and confinement, complicity and “civil courage,” ongoing German-Jewish life within socialism, or even bleak hopelessness, which had contemporary meaning to audiences far beyond their historical and ideological settings.

The other category, the “socialist realist” category, is partly specific to the GDR, since it reflects everyday life in that particular society, but partly a connection to realist cinema internationally. After all, the GDR was not alone in its attempt to create a cinema culture—using realist narratives—that would both be accessible to, and popular with, a wide audience while dealing with social realities in an innovative and artistic way.

Six of the fourteen “top” DEFA films can be related directly or indirectly to the antifascist tradition: Wolfgang Staudte’s *Die Mörder sind unter uns*, *Rotation* (1949) and *Der Untertan* (The Kaiser’s Lackey, 1951) based on Heinrich Mann’s treatment of the love of submission in a Wilhelminian setting; Kurt Maetzig’s *Ehe im Schatten* (Marriage in the Shadows, 1947); Konrad Wolf’s *Sterne* (Stars, 1959) and *Ich war neunzehn* (I Was Nineteen, 1967); and Frank Beyer’s *Jakob der Lügner* (Jacob the Liar, 1974).

The same leading directors are represented in the (loosely defined) socialist realist category: Beyer’s *Spur der Steine* (Trace of Stones, 1966/1989); Wolf’s *Der geteilte Himmel* (Divided Heaven, 1964) based on the Christa Wolf novel, and *SOLO SUNNY*, (1978/80); and Maetzig’s *Das Kaninchen bin ich* (The Rabbit is Me, 1965/1989). The list is completed by two of the most widely popular and artistically respected films of the GDR, Gerhard Klein’s *Berlin-Ecke Schönhauser* (Berlin-Schönhauser Corner, 1957) written by Wolfgang Kohlhaase, and Heiner Carow’s *Die Legende von Paul und*

*Paula* (The Legend of Paul and Paula, 1974), written by the noted author and playwright Ulrich Plenzdorf.

One DEFA film on the top 100 list also represents an internationally recognized achievement of the GDR: the documentary cinema. Standing in for countless noteworthy films is one installment in the longest-running long-term documentary in film history: *Die Kinder von Golzow* (The Children of Golzow) by Winfried and Barbara Junge.<sup>15</sup> Beyond this example, DEFA documentarists employed a variety of styles over the decades, with their most famous examples reflecting the influence of *cinéma vérité* and its poetic application by artists such as Volker Koepp, Helke Misselwitz, and Jürgen Böttcher. Böttcher's international acclaim is presently even increasing, as he has been rediscovered as both a painter and filmmaker.

Naturally, it is more than fitting that filmmaker Tamara Trampe is published here to represent both the importance of documentary to an understanding of the GDR and to innovations its artists have contributed to filmmaking itself. Her film, *Der schwarze Kasten: Versuch eines Psychogramms* (Black Box, 1994, co-directed with Johann Feindt), a portrait of a *Stasi* psychologist, was screened parallel to the AICGS workshop. In her two-year study of the *Stasi* officer's career and personal life, Trampe artfully introduces a contemplation of time, the film medium, and the role of the author in uncovering and constructing her material—made up of past documents, face-to-face interviews and even the experience of the audience itself.

### THE “GREAT DIRECTORS”

Returning to the list of films one last time, we come to the most conventional means of constructing a canon of films, and that is the bio-filmographies of major directors. Two of those on the list recently passed major birthday milestones: Konrad Wolf, who died in 1982, would have been seventy-five in October 2000; Kurt Maetzig celebrated his ninetieth birthday in January 2001. There are international stars among the others as well. Wolfgang Staudte, since he lived in the west, has long been recognized as a major German filmmaker—even though his films have been hard to get in the United States and were initially censored in West

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Germany. Frank Beyer, as author of the only DEFA film nominated for an Oscar, also has international recognition. This is perhaps enhanced by the fact that he was banned from the studios after his monumental film *Spur der Steine* was released and then shelved as “antisocialist”—along with a dozen works of 1965-1966. Furthermore, Beyer’s training at the Prague film school, his collaborations with Jurek Becker (even after the latter was allowed to move to the west), and his own east-west co-productions gave him international stature.

Two exemplary figures from the list, in terms of their artistic accomplishments and historical significance, are Kurt Maetzig and Konrad Wolf. With Maetzig’s 1950 film *Der Rat der Götter* (Council of the Gods) screened in conjunction with the workshop, we have a work that touches the issue of a national film canon in multiple ways. Its director, Kurt Maetzig, is the only living member of the *Filmaktiv* that founded DEFA in 1946. Maetzig was central to GDR film at all stages of its development: he was responsible for the *Augenzeuge* (Eyewitness), the newsreels made by DEFA immediately after the war. The only German-made newsreels permitted by any occupying power in the 1940s, the motto of the *Augenzeuge* was, “Sie sehen selbst, Sie hören selbst, urteilen Sie selbst” (You see for yourself, you hear for yourself, judge for yourself).<sup>16</sup>

Maetzig’s film *Ehe im Schatten* reached over 10 million spectators across occupied Germany in 1947-1948 by employing the conventions of melodrama familiar from Weimar and Nazi cinema to depict the fate of a “mixed marriage” between a Jew and a non-Jew. *Ehe im Schatten* actually anticipates the breakthrough NBC television film *Holocaust*, which stimulated public discussion of the Nazi persecution of the Jews after its broadcast in West Germany in 1979, in a number of ways. As Christiane Mückenberger points out in her essay, Maetzig’s film allows the audience to identify emotionally with its characters as it traces step by step the increasing persecution of Jews and the eventual horrors brought by the war. But it does so by emphasizing their commitment to classical German culture rather than their Jewish identity and, like *Holocaust*, derives much of its power from the seeming inevitability of its tragic narrative. Yet it would be unfair to accuse Maetzig of cynicism, since his own mother, who was a Jew, had committed suicide during the war. He

was also certainly aware of the fears of German or Soviet anti-Semitism at the time, felt by any Jew in Germany including the Red Army cultural officers who supported the film.

All the more reason to consider the shift in Maetzig's work as the cold war split took effect in Germany. Based on the 1947 documentation by Richard Sasuly and Nuremberg Trial transcripts, *Der Rat der Götter*, released in 1950, won National Prizes for Maetzig as well as for its author Friedrich Wolf and cinematographer Friedl Behn-Grund—the same year National Prizes were awarded to Johannes R. Becher and Hanns Eisler for the GDR national anthem. On the one hand, it is shocking to see the Holocaust instrumentalized in the manner the film displays. By dramatizing the complicity of IG Farben (which had contracts with Standard Oil) in the production of poisonous gas used in the extermination camps, the film risks reducing the entire Holocaust to an international capitalist conspiracy. Here, as in other early films of the cold war, propaganda devices of the Nazi era (not far from Stalinist anti-Semitism) are exploited rather than put into question.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, the film joins with the other antifascist classics of the early DEFA in asserting the need to ask who was responsible for Auschwitz, to depict its horrifying effects not only on its victims but also on Germany itself and on the psyches of those ordinary—even working class—families who did nothing to stop it. Given its aesthetic power and quality, along with the striking ideological and emotional range of its impact, the film can do much to help us understand today the cultural dynamics of the time and the aspirations of the East German film enterprise.

In film historical terms, the ambition of the film is striking considering the times: from the architectural grandeur of the chemical plant to the design of the crowd scenes and the ultimate catastrophe, the film evokes no less an ambitious precedent than Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1926). The central character, the chemist Dr. Scholz, even physically resembles Lang's Freder character, as he, too, is led to face the destructive effects of his willed complacency. A number of important figures in film history were involved in this film as well: Hungarian film theorist Béla Balázs served as dramaturge, and the film featured music by Hanns Eisler and experimental electronic sound by Oscar Sala, who later became known in the West for his work on Hitchcock's *The Birds* (1963).

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This wish to equal or exceed the achievements of the UFA studio system of the Weimar Republic and the Nazi era, typical of the East and West German will to rebuild after the war, is also indicative of an unwillingness to try new cultural avenues in dealing with the past. With very few exceptions, the consequences of these institutional priorities—business in the west, centralized production in the east—have yet to be examined for their lasting impact on the culture of cinema in Germany. Katie Trumpener’s look at the more radical experiments in other eastern European countries takes an important step in this direction, while Christiane Mückenberger provides the historical and institutional context. But investigation of why the early “neorealist” films had so little impact in Germany after the 1940s, although suggested by such authors as Thomas Brandlmeier and Theodor Kotulla, is still an unmet challenge to historians of German film. Despite the astonishing accomplishments of the postwar DEFA (as well as early West German films), their limitations need to be investigated as well. Contemporary criticism has yet to flesh out the challenge to German cinema voiced by Kotulla in his 1960 commentary on *Die Mörder sind unter uns*: “Compared to what became of the German cinema later on, one can say that this was not a bad beginning. But compared to the eruptions in film aesthetics that took place elsewhere at the same time (in Italy especially, but even in Hollywood), one will have to concede the limitations of this debut.”<sup>18</sup>

Maetzig went on to create other classic films central to the GDR’s historical understanding of itself, as Seán Allan’s essay helps illustrate. In Kurt Maetzig the German cinema has one of the few remaining links to the studio system, the aesthetic sophistication with popular appeal, the ideological flexibility, and the technical polish for which the UFA studios had been known since the 1920s. But Maetzig was not only a master filmmaker in service of the cold war or even Stalinism. He also attempted to introduce more liberal flexibility into the film academy of the GDR in the late 1950s, and even saw a film of his own banned by the Party in 1965. Indeed, his film, *Das Kaninchen bin ich*, which exposes official cynicism and hypocrisy in the character of a GDR judge, lent its name to all the banned films of that cultural debacle: they became known as the *Kaninchenfilme*—“Rabbit Films.”

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**THE LEGACY OF KONRAD WOLF AS  
UNITED GERMAN *ERBE***

The name of the scriptwriter for *Der Rat der Götter*, Friedrich Wolf, brings me to the second exemplary bio-filmography from our list of fourteen greatest film hits: After film school in Moscow, Friedrich Wolf's son, Konrad, "immigrated" to the GDR and began his DEFA career, in part as a directorial assistant to Kurt Maetzig. Recent critical assessments on the occasion of Konrad Wolf's seventy-fifth birthday anniversary stress the "German" artist above the GDR political functionary. But the tension between the two roles always was productive in Wolf's work.



*Ich war neunzehn*

Exemplary is *Ich war neunzehn*: the West German director Volker Schlöndorff, who only a few years ago had little good to say about DEFA, called this film "the best of all German films of the postwar period."<sup>19</sup> In addition to his sensitive exploration of the antifascist theme in such films as *Mama, ich lebe!* (Mama, I'm Alive!, 1977), *Sterne*, and the film version of

his father's play *Professor Mamlock* (1961), Wolf was concerned both with the conflicts imposed on artists in a politicized world (*Sterne*, and *Der nackte Mann auf dem Sportplatz*, [The Naked Man on the Playing Field], 1974) and with the frustrated aspirations of ordinary people living in socialism. In the latter regard, *SOLO SUNNY* was also Wolf's breakthrough film as far as popularity with the audience was concerned.

Publications honoring the memory of Konrad Wolf on the occasion of what would have been his seventy-fifth birthday reveal the ambivalence of contemporary critics toward film art that is tied both to cultural resistance and political domination in the GDR—and to the legacy of antifascism as the context for the tension between the two. On the one hand, the “counterculture” significance even of works by such an official figure as Konrad Wolf can be clearly seen in the example of *SOLO SUNNY*. As Kerstin Decker recently wrote in *Der Tagesspiegel* (former West Berlin):

*SOLO SUNNY* is a declaration of love for what the Party liked to call ‘our people’ (*unsere Menschen*) and who today are sometimes such an embarrassment to the West. [...] Late socialism, as seen through the eyes of a pop singer. And seen in this way it is nothing more than incidental (*eine Beiläufigkeit*). [...] That Konrad Wolf, President of the Academy of Arts of the GDR, could depict socialism in this way, reveals him as the artist he was. For he did not himself consider socialism to be incidental, only the artist in him. [...] Art is—if it is art—per se non-ideological.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, in order to praise the artist in Konrad Wolf, even a well-meaning contemporary critic needs to downplay Wolf's own political beliefs, including his position about art. After all, even in the years just before his death, Wolf was still heard to quote his father, Friedrich Wolf's, slogan, “*Kunst ist Waffe!*” (Art is a weapon!). A publication less sympathetic to Wolf either politically or artistically—*Die Welt*—similarly praises Wolf's art by distancing it from the GDR: “It goes without saying that Konrad Wolf's work is political, put as such it was still not primarily produced to prop up the state” (*staatstragend*).<sup>21</sup>

## **THE BIOGRAPHICAL BASIS FOR A CANON OF GDR CINEMA**

If the canon of GDR cinema is primarily based on its leading directors and the work some of them continue to produce since German unification, what is the problem with that? After all, this is the logical result of seeking an artistic and cultural continuity with the DEFA studios' production before that time. One problem is that the choice of great directors and great films one would make now is little different from what might have been chosen before 1989. This makes me uncomfortable for two reasons: First, it means that the GDR's assessment of itself—choosing which films to produce, promote, subtitle, send to festivals—thus extends into the present. This discourages a reinterpretation of the canon and an examination of neglected or excluded artists and their work. Second, the positive perpetuation of this canon, even incorporating criticism of the GDR, is still consistent with a pan-German narrative of progress that incorporates the gradual “overcoming” of the GDR as a step toward even greater achievements.

I hope the present volume and future work will help us question the narratives of West and East German film histories, asking how the film industry functioned and remains open to new interpretations of its present dynamics. This includes placing narratives of national achievement into question, along with the narratives of victimization (both of citizens by the GDR government, and of former GDR institutions and citizens in the post-unification context). Such narratives all too often lend a ready interpretation to a reality that may well be in flux and subject to influences (international, biographical, industrial, cultural) that are excluded in the very framing of the subject matter.

Film criticism, including my own, has been suspect in regard to constructing a canon. These figures were great artists “in spite of the GDR”—as the privileging of the banned films of 1965 suggests. The GDR was separate from the artistic achievements it produced; they were in service to a greater, still-intact cultural narrative. The exceptions stand for the cultural heritage of their time, just as the few classics of thousands of mediocre Weimar films represent the “Golden Age,” and a few exceptionally

evil or artistic works of the Nazi era prove this or that thesis about totalitarianism—while the “typical,” to the extent it exists, receives little attention.

On the other hand, the selection of a canon of exceptional and outstanding works and figures can allow one to generally dismiss the GDR as well. Here the banned films provide the best example—although most of the leading figures had films banned or were exceptional in other ways (such as Konrad Wolf due to his exile biography). To the extent they are exceptional, i.e., not of the GDR, they are seen as great art that fits into a transcendent category. To the extent they are seen as GDR-specific, they are seen as inferior. Hence the need for the critics cited above to divorce the artist Konrad Wolf from the state in which he held an influential public position. Regarding the wider aesthetic and cultural context of the banned vs. popular films, the essays by Katie Trumpener and Stefan Soldovieri both touch on subjects here that move the view of the banned films beyond the persecution of art.

The “canonization” of either leading artists or persecuted artists thus narrows our understanding of film history and the functioning of films in past or present cultural contexts. The problem of using artistic greatness to explain the successes of DEFA treats them as a cultural anomaly: “If it is great art, it is not GDR-specific, and if it is GDR-specific, it cannot be great art.” This gambit of film history is quite close to the temptation Kaelble warns against: to equate the GDR’s failure as a state with failure of all its social institutions.

### **GDR CINEMA OR “GERMAN” CINEMA?**

The main problem with a “canon” of GDR cinema, as seen from a western perspective today, is that it sustains a narrative of progress that has a predetermined teleology. The progress of film history, the progress of the legacy of Weimar cinema in Germany, the progress of democracy mapped onto the progress of art from repression to freedom—GDR and DEFA history easily fall into this line. These narratives allow us as outsiders to perpetuate the cold war ignorance about the people in the east and the details of the lives they led.

But the wider effect is the perpetuation of the cold war attitude of West Germans speaking for “Germany.” The “Federal Republic of Germany” of today can again, still, or retroactively stand for all of postwar Germany. The most recent and egregious example was the 2002 Film Society of Lincoln

Center (New York) retrospective entitled “After the War, Before the Wall: German Cinema, 1945-1960.” Neither the title nor the publicity materials explain how some thirty West German films (with the exception of *Die Mörder sind unter uns*) can stand for German Cinema 1945-1960. Just as a multi-zone treatment of the “license period” up to 1949 could fit into the Frankfurt Film Museum’s book on “West German postwar film,” here *Die Mörder sind unter uns* is celebrated as the first of the “rubble films” as well as the first postwar German film, but is not identified as belonging to a tradition of East German film.<sup>22</sup> The motivation of the Lincoln Center retrospective of 1950s films from the west was explicitly to explain the New German Cinema of the Federal Republic of the 1970s, by examining “Papas Kino” of the 1950s from which they so strenuously distanced themselves. But the distancing of both “Papas Kino” and the New German Cinema from the vibrant and productive studio cinema of the early postwar period in the east, and especially the commonalities and differences between the “new waves” of both eastern and western Europe has yet to be investigated in a thoroughly comparative manner.

But if the narratives of national film progress were true, not only would there have been a much greater burst of artistic creativity in German cinema since 1989, but the state of European film culture would be much more solid and self confident than it is now. Perhaps the opposite of the narrative of progress in German film is actually the case: Perhaps what the GDR has to offer us now is much more than a few figures to add to the illustrious legacy we had already constructed for German cinema. Perhaps its “determined mediocrity” and the GDR’s self-destruction are also contributions to our understanding both of modernity in general as well as of contemporary German culture—east or west.

Here I am inspired by Detlef Kannapin’s conclusion that there is no “specific DEFA aesthetic.” Of course, there couldn’t be such a thing with such a long history and such a diversity of contexts and personnel. But in concluding there is none, Kannapin raises an issue that is relevant beyond DEFA and the GDR:

That DEFA followed no monolithic aesthetic formula is doubtless the case. It is also beyond question that the contents of DEFA films set new standards in the German cinema landscape both with their tradition of antifascist

films and with the tendency to observe attentively the lives of the lower and middle strata of society. DEFA productions were also of great substance as logistical and technical undertakings. But in terms of film aesthetics I can see no specific studio style in evidence. That is, unless one tries to paste together a makeshift DEFA aesthetic out of such traits as the use in conventional films of dream sequences in the style of poetic realism, or the wordiness of rather many DEFA works, or pathos in film—which surely is inadvisable. On the other hand, it should be objectively stated that the aesthetic innovations of the 1960s were hardly able to carry over in the feature films of the 70s and 80s.<sup>23</sup>

Kannapin does not end with this rather gray synopsis of GDR film, but instead draws the conclusion that—given such a history—there is now more at stake than ever in regard to cinema aesthetics in unified Germany and Europe:

Let's take a look in this context at the film world at the outset of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a good ten years after the disappearance of the GDR. It should then be noted that the present aesthetic helplessness of most international film productions was in a way anticipated on a smaller scale by DEFA, even when in other ways it was always behind. The loss of emancipatory ideas and utopias, then and in our own time, is apparently always expressed with the means of aesthetic conventionality.<sup>24</sup>

This parallels in the world of film what the social historian Hartmut Kaelble concludes about the instructiveness of GDR social institutions in general. The problems of the GDR are not completely foreign and the issues DEFA faced have not been abolished by the end of the cold war. What is at stake is not merely the historical record regarding the GDR, but the foreclosing of the discussion of cultural and historical dilemmas that face contemporary Germany and Europe:

Precisely in their current state of crisis the Western European societies need a special richness of ideas and an especially great flexibility in the development of new institutions. The taboos levied against institutions and attitudes—which the communist systems of domination did indeed attempt to impose but which were also to be found in Western Europe—comes at a most inopportune time. A comparison of GDR society with western European society can contribute to the breaking down of unnecessary taboos.<sup>25</sup>

### CONCLUSION

Comparative approaches that break down taboos do exist, such as that by Peter Zimmermann on the newsreels and “*Kulturfilme*” of both German states in the postwar period, or Dieter Wiedemann’s treatment of the eastern and western versions of the “youth film.” (His essay reflects a more comprehensive consideration of the international phenomenon in the volume *Bluejeans und Blauhemden*.) Historians, particularly, have attempted to adapt their methodologies in order to do justice to both the changed reality of the reunited Germany and the need to study the historical record in both east and west without a cold war teleology in mind. The projects of the Zentrum für zeithistorische Forschung Potsdam (Center for Contemporary Historical Research) are an excellent example, as is the essay cited earlier by Irmgard Wilharm, on the “Quellenwert von Filmen für die doppelte deutsche Nachkriegsgeschichte.” The presence of West German film (and film artists) in the GDR, and the influence of film figures who left the east have all too seldom been included in the discussion of the two supposedly distinct film cultures. Wolfgang Gersch’s essay in the Frankfurt volume of 1989 is a refreshing exception,<sup>26</sup> as is the east/west exhibit of films and posters presented in Vienna in 2001 and parallel to the 2002 Berlin Film Festival. The yearbook of the DEFA-Stiftung has also recently had an increasingly international approach, perhaps because it must now fill the film-critical function of the now-defunct GDR film journal *Film und Fernsehen*. Examples include Thomas Heimann’s essay on the GDR film experience of the Belgian filmmaker Frans Buyens and an increased attention to genre rather than nation as a

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category for film studies (such as Michael Hanisch's essay on the crime film in the GDR).<sup>27</sup> Also taking a decidedly more international and comparative approach are recent works by Sabine Hake, Thomas Meurer, Robert Shandley and Katie Trumpener.<sup>28</sup>

The essays that follow thus place the history of the cinema of the GDR in a wider context. I am grateful to Frank Trommler and AICGS for making this a truly international project, with presentations reflecting many years of first-hand experience with DEFA by Tamara Trampe and Christiane Mückenberger. Mückenberger has, for many years, been one of the leading film scholars and educators of the former GDR.<sup>29</sup> Her essay presents the situation before the emergence of the two German states and at the beginning of the cold war, when film artists searched for models in German and international film traditions on which to quickly rebuild a functioning cinema in the vacuum left by the devastation of Nazism and war. Seán Allan connects this early history to the GDR's varying attempts to narrate its own history on film, both in the phases of *Aufbau* and collapse. The context of both these essays, then, is to connect the history of the GDR and its cinema to "German history" in a more balanced and integrated sense.

Stefan Soldovieri's essay connects to the works mentioned above that, like many trends in contemporary film studies, move away from treating film as primarily a national product. Such approaches allow us to see the nationally specific as well as industrially determined functions of genres, stars, and other aspects of the modern cinema as an entertainment medium to construct and reach an audience. A complement to Soldovieri's work would be an analysis of Manfred Krug's successful career in the west, and the extent to which his DEFA past (and that of numerous other figures) remains legible in his West German and now "German" personas. The contemporary careers of DEFA artists is also the subject of Tamara Trampe's contribution, emphasizing both the difficulties confronted by those whose careers were founded in the GDR and the consistency of their character and concerns—particularly their attentiveness to those societies even farther to the east than the former GDR.

Finally, Katie Trumpener examines the extensive interactions of DEFA and the cinemas in eastern Europe as but one of several aspects in which our work needs to end its habit of seeing the GDR in isolation. Trumpener identifies numerous ways in which our understanding of German, European, and

international culture—and not only in regard to film—can benefit from international, comparative approaches. But in regard to the contested definition of “German” history and culture, these must be measured in regard to what Peter Zimmermann calls the *Gretchenfrage* of German historiography and film since 1989: “Wie hältst Du’s mit der Geschichte der DDR?” (Where do you stand on the history of the GDR?)<sup>30</sup> The importance of this goes beyond the goal of setting the record straight, since history is, even in the best of circumstances, a construction. The gain however, is to widen the accessibility of the past for a present so much in need of cultural imagination. As Eric Santner put it, “The ‘oppressed past’ that Benjamin speaks of is, in other words, one that never in fact took place but that nevertheless might become available to future generations.”<sup>31</sup>

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>. I would like to thank Frank Trommler and the Harry and Helen Gray Humanities Program at AICGS for sponsoring the workshop on which this volume is based. Additional support for the event was generously provided by the DEFA-Stiftung, ICESTORM International, Inc., the Museum of Modern Art and the Goethe-Institut Washington. For event coordination and editorial contributions, thanks also to Silvia Blume at Goethe-Institut / Inter Naciones Washington, to Ilonka Oszwald and Masha Tsytkina at AICGS, to Ralf Schenk, and to Betheny Moore, Hiltrud Schulz, Sky Arndt-Briggs, and Axel Hildebrandt at the DEFA Film Library at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

<sup>2</sup>. Irmgard Wilharm, “Der Quellenwert von Filmen für die doppelte deutsche Nachkriegsgeschichte,” *DEFA-Film als nationales Kulturerbe? Beiträge zur Film- und Fernsehwissenschaft* 42.58, ed. Klaus Finke (Berlin: Vistas, 2001), 81-92 (here 82).

<sup>3</sup>. Distributed in the United States by KINO International.

<sup>4</sup>. See Michael Schneider, “Fathers and Sons, Retrospectively: The Damaged Relationship Between the Generations,” *New German Critique* 31 (Winter 1984): 3-51.

<sup>5</sup>. Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich, *The Inability to Mourn: Principles of Collective Behavior*, trans. Beverley R. Placzek (New York: Grove, 1975).

<sup>6</sup>. See Eric L. Santner, *Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory, and Film in Postwar Germany* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990), 42.

<sup>7</sup>. Leonie Naughton, “Wiedervereinigung als Siegesgeschichte: Beobachtungen einer Australierin,” in Ralf Schenk and Erika Richter, eds., *apropos: Film 2000: Das Jahrbuch der DEFA-Stiftung* (Berlin: Das Neue Berlin, 2000), 248.

<sup>8</sup>. Hartmut Kaelble, “Die Gesellschaft der DDR im internationalen Vergleich,” *Sozialgeschichte der DDR*, eds. Hartmut Kaelble, Jürgen Kocka, and Hartmut Zwahr

(Stuttgart: Klett Cotta, 1994), 561. “Viertens schließlich kann der internationale Vergleich der DDR-Gesellschaft gerade auch mit dem Westen für die historische Bewertung der DDR durch alle Deutschen eine wichtige Rolle spielen. Im Schatten des Zusammenbruchs des DDR-Herrschaftssystems gibt es heute auch unter den Westdeutschen einen breiten Konsens der negativen Beurteilung nicht nur der DDR-Politik und der DDR-Wirtschaft, sondern auch der DDR-Gesellschaft. Eine Vielzahl von Institutionen und Einstellungen in der alten DDR-Gesellschaft gerät dabei in den Sog des Negativbildes der DDR-Herrschaft und erhält den Beigeschmack des Untergangs. [. . .]”

<sup>9</sup>. Hans Günther Pflaum and Hans Helmut Prinzler, eds., *Cinema in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Bonn: Inter Nationes, 1993), 167.

<sup>10</sup>. Ralf Schenk, ed., *Das zweite Leben der Filmstadt Babelsberg 1946-1992* (Berlin and Potsdam: Henschel and Filmmuseum Potsdam, 1994); Günter Jordan and Ralf Schenk, eds., *Schwarzweiß und Farbe: DEFA-Dokumentarfilme 1946-1992*, 2nd ed. (Berlin and Potsdam: Jovis and Filmmuseum Potsdam, 2000); Seán Allan and John Sandford, eds., *DEFA: East German Cinema 1946-1992* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 1999); Schenk and Richter, eds., *apropos: Film 2000: Das Jahrbuch der DEFA-Stiftung*; Schenk and Richter, eds., *apropos: Film 2001: Das Jahrbuch der DEFA-Stiftung*; Filmarchiv Austria, *Der geteilte Himmel: Höhepunkt des DEFA-Kinos 1946-1992*, vol. 1: *Die Filme der Retrospektive*, ed. Helmut Pflügl, vol. 2: *Essays zur Geschichte der DEFA; Filmografien zu 61 Regisseuren*, ed. Raimund Fritz (Vienna: Filmarchiv Austria, 2001).

<sup>11</sup>. Schenk and Richter, eds., *apropos: Film 2000: Das Jahrbuch der DEFA*, 7-8.

<sup>12</sup>. See my “Parameters for Institutional and Thematic Integration of Filmmakers from the former GDR,” *What Remains? East German Culture and the Postwar Public*, ed. Marc Silberman, Harry and Helen Gray Humanities Series 2 (Washington, DC: American Institute for Contemporary German Studies, 1997), 64-74.

<sup>13</sup>. Numerous articles and a few published memoirs document the general difficulty of former DEFA directors to make feature films since 1989. Typical for the established generation might be Roland Gräf, who even dismisses his 1991 Federal Film Prize (Bundesfilmpreis) for *Der Tangospieler* (The Tango Player, 1990/91) as a post-unification political gesture: “. . . naturally also from a political, tactical calculation; it looked good, to have someone from the East among the prizewinners.” Roland Gräf and Erika Richter, “Leben und Arbeiten in Übergangszeiten: Erfahrungen eines DEFA-Regisseurs vor und nach der Wende,” Schenk and Richter, *apropos: Film 2001*, 138. The most successful—yet ambivalently so—young directors from the former GDR, Andreas Kleinert and Andreas Dresen, are profiled by Kerstin Decker in her article “Neben der Zeit,” Schenk and Richter, *apropos Film 2001*, 328-43. The majority of this age cohort has had a much more difficult time, as discussed in Dietmar Hochmuth’s *DEFA NOVA - Nach wie vor? Kinemathek* 30.82 (1993), and in research by US film scholar Laura McGee.

<sup>14</sup>. These categories are a condensation of a somewhat longer list of strong traits of DEFA films Detlef Kannapin cited in exploring the existence of a “specific DEFA aesthetic.” In his list these included expressionism, melodrama, socialist realism, socially critical

realism, poetic realism and pathos in film. Detlef Kannapin, "Gibt es eine spezifische DEFA-Ästhetik?" Schenk and Richter, *apropos: Film 2000*, 147.

<sup>15</sup>. Typical of the pro-Western narrative of film history I am criticizing here, Michael Apted's British film series *7-Up* to *42-Up* is still generally regarded as the longest-running documentary project, not the DEFA production which preceded it. See my article "GDR-Up: The Ideology of Universality in Long Term Documentary," *New German Critique* 82 (Winter 2001): 126-44.

<sup>16</sup>. See Peter Zimmermann, "Im Winde klirren die Fahnen: Dokumentarfilme und Reportagen der DDR und der BRD im Kalten Krieg und zur Zeit der Wiedervereinigung," Finke, 15.

<sup>17</sup>. See Ralf Schenk, "Mitten im Kalten Krieg," Schenk, *Das zweite Leben*, 104. "Überhaupt hat *Der Schwur*, der sowjetische Geschichte von Lenins Tod bis zum Ende des Großen Vaterländischen Krieges ganz im Zeichen des Personenkults illustriert und 1946 von Kurt Maetzig und Erich Freund deutsch synchronisiert worden war, immensen Einfluss auf die Ikonografie des DEFA-Spielfilms um 1950. [Unser täglich Brot, Das kleine und das große Glück, Roman einer jungen Ehe] Und die satirisch überspitzte Darstellung eines französischen Ministers, der lieber mit einer schönen Frau eine Pariser Nachbar besucht als mit sowjetischen Diplomaten eine Anti-Hitler-Koalition zu schmieden, korrespondiert durchaus mit der abfälligen Präsentation amerikanischer Politiker in Maetzig's *Der Rat der Götter*—allerdings mit einem grundsätzlichen Unterschied: Tschiaureli versteigt sich zu einem widerlichen Antisemitismus (der verlotterte und verlogene Minister hat eine 'typisch jüdische' Hakennase); solche Töne sind Maetzig wie überhaupt der DEFA völlig fremd."

<sup>18</sup>. Theodor Kutulla, "Die Mörder sind unter uns," *Filmkritik 1* (1960); cited in Thomas Brandlmeier, "Von Hitler zu Adenauer: Deutsche Trümmerfilme," Hans-Peter Reichmann and Rudolph Worschech, *Zwischen gestern und morgen: Westdeutscher Nachkriegsfilm 1946-1962* (Frankfurt: Deutsches Filmmuseum, 1989), 41. My translation.

<sup>19</sup>. Kerstin Decker, "Konrad Wolf: Und über uns die Sterne. Zum 75. Geburtstag: Das Babylon zeigt alle seine Filme," *Der Tagesspiegel*, 20 October 2000.

<sup>20</sup>. Decker.

<sup>21</sup>. *Die Welt*, 22 November 2000.

<sup>22</sup>. See Ralph Blumenthal, "A Golden Age of German Film / A Festival on the Golden Age of German Film After World War II," *The New York Times*, 11 April 2002.

<sup>23</sup>. Kannapin, 164. My translation.

<sup>24</sup>. Kannapin, 164. My translation.

<sup>25</sup>. Kaelble, 7.

<sup>26</sup>. Wolfgang Gersch, "Die Verdoppelung der Ferne: Notizen von der anderen Seite," Reichmann and Worschech, 100-9.

<sup>27</sup>. See Thomas Heimann, "Wie ein Ausländer die DDR mit eigenen Augen sehen wollte: Der belgische Regisseur Frans Buyens bei der DEFA," and Michael Hanisch, "Nachrichten aus einem Land ohne Schurken," Schenk and Richter, *apropos: Film 2001*, 105-33 and 194-222.

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<sup>28</sup>. Sabine Hake, *German National Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Thomas Meurer, *The Split Screen: Cinema and National Identity in a Divided Germany 1979-1989*, *Studies in History and Criticism of Film* 2 (Lewiston, Queenston, and Lampeter: Mellen, 2000); Robert R. Shandley, *Rubble Films: German Cinema in the Shadow of the Third Reich* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001); and Katie Trumpener, *The Divided Screen: The Cinemas of Postwar Germany* (Princeton University Press, forthcoming).

<sup>29</sup>. Christiane Mückenberger has taught for many years at the “Hochschule für Film und Fernsehen ‘Konrad Wolf’” in Babelsberg and directed from 1990 to 1994 the Leipzig International Festival of Documentary and Animated Film. In addition to co-authoring documentary films, she is a contributor to virtually all of the major anthologies on GDR cinema, and is co-author with Günter Jordan of “*Sie sehen selbst, Sie hören selbst ...*” *Eine Geschichte der DEFA von ihren Anfängen bis 1949*. Aufblende. Schriften zum Film 7 (Marburg: Hitzeroth, 1994).

<sup>30</sup>. Zimmermann 24. The full passage reads: “Ein Wechsel der Sichtweise ist angesichts der Dominanz einer einseitigen westdeutschen Perspektivisierung und Konstruktion deutscher Geschichtsbilder überfällig. [. . .] Die ‘Gretchenfrage’, an der sich die Qualität zeitgeschichtlicher Fernseh-Dokumentationen und Dokumentarfilme ebenso wie historischer Forschungen ein Jahrzehnt nach der Wiedervereinigung messen lassen muss, kristallisiert sich immer deutlicher heraus: Sie lautet: ‘Wie hältst Du’s mit der Geschichte der DDR?’”

<sup>31</sup>. Santner, 152.

**DEFA'S FIRST POSTWAR FILMS IN THE SOVIET ZONE  
AND THE GDR**

Christiane Mückenberger

**INTRODUCTION:  
SEEKING MODELS IN A NEW BEGINNING**

After the defeat of National Socialism in 1945, the main task for a new political order was to eradicate any manifestations of Nazi ideology. The phenomenon of National Socialism could not simply be reduced to the despicable person of Adolf Hitler. There had to be a rigorous break with traditions, a change of attitude, and something new and never before practiced in Germany had to be introduced. The causes of what went wrong in German history, the predisposition of the German people for intolerance and violence, and the militarization of daily life had to be examined by looking back to earlier centuries. One initiative to demolish the Nazi system was to expropriate industry and banking; the task the German bourgeois revolution of 1848 had been to accomplish the transfer of property from large landholders to the peasants, a transfer that had been unsuccessful.

From the very beginning, the Soviet Military Administration invested great hope in the mass media, particularly film. While the American occupying forces insisted on taking the re-education of the Germans into their own hands and were, for economic reasons, not altogether interested in the renaissance of the German film industry, the Soviet forces relied heavily on their German partners who had survived in prison or had been in exile. In some cases, German artists had even joined the soldiers of the Red Army.

Thus, the first German film company after the war came into being in the Soviet occupation zone. On May 17, 1946 there were five founding members—all film experts and antifascists, who received from the Soviets the founding deed for the new film company, *Deutsche Film Aktiengesellschaft*—DEFA (German Film Shareholders Company). It soon became the center-point for filmmakers throughout Germany.

Scripts that had been hidden in drawers for decades by filmmakers in exile or in concentration camps were now reemerging. What themes were these new films to explore, and what artistic means would be employed? Should an unusual subject correspond with an unusual form? Can there be a

disruption of artistic means in the make-up of a film that is just as severe as the disruption of social relations?

Since this task was so significant and the people's involvement with the past so painful, the question of artistic form played a secondary role. This, of course, did not mean the filmmakers had not considered and reconsidered what appropriate aesthetic form film was to adopt.

The idea to emulate Italian neorealism was rejected, as this style was considered not to be sufficiently appealing to the public. A number of artists recommended concentrating on the great tradition of German expressionism. This was proven totally impossible in the years to come—particularly in the 1950s—because in the Soviet Union, expressionism was seen as something hostile to socialist realism—and with good reason.

Soviet disdain for German expressionism had no repercussions for DEFA in the late 1940s. The Communist Party played an insignificant role; the real censors working on behalf of the Soviet Military Administration were highly educated Russian intellectuals usually of Jewish descent who were under the illusion that they were advocating the cultural concepts of the 1920s that had been betrayed by Stalin. Not until the 1950s did the unfortunate discussion of formalism begin, a discussion that ended up drastically restricting artistic opportunities.

Where could a suitable model for the new German film be found? It was assumed that artists in the Soviet zone would look to the famous films by Eisenstein, Pudovkin, and Dovshenko for their inspiration. *Bronenosets Potyomkin* (Battleship Potemkin, Sergei Eisenstein, 1925), for example, was an interesting answer to the general question of whether a new and unfamiliar subject matter must be mirrored by a new and unfamiliar form. Eisenstein's film was a revolutionary work in both content and form, as well as a sensational success abroad. In their own country, the Russian audiences for whom the film had been made received Eisenstein's work less enthusiastically.

Lev Kuleshov, another revolutionary Russian filmmaker, followed a different path. He watched the audiences in the suburban cinemas to find out what kind of movies were popular. It was the American Western that was the unequalled favorite. Thus, the young Kuleshov depicted contemporary life in the country of socialist attainment, inventing the story of frightened Mr. West who, accompanied by his bodyguard, ventures into the unknown hunting grounds

of the Bolsheviks. Thus, young Kuleshov told the story in the style of a classic Western with all the paraphernalia, including cowboys, complete with the Colt still smoking from its last shot. The film was one of the most successful movies of the 1920s in the Soviet Union. But the imagery used in the early Russian films was overwhelmingly dramatic—Russian visual aesthetics did not concur with most DEFA directors' state of mind.

There were also the then contemporary Soviet films, but the German artists working in the Soviet zone actually dared to shun this model; these films were seen as having plummeted into hitherto unknown (un)aesthetic depths—a result of the Stalinist art policy. German filmmakers declared this type of film unsuitable for a German audience.

“We all agreed what German film should not be,” one of the film directors of the first hour confessed. They were also unanimous in their refusal to resurrect the detrimental modes of expression characteristic of the UFA films under Nazi dictatorship. 1,094 films premiered in Germany between 1933-1945. By 1942, movie ticket sales (in a nation of 80 million) had exceeded one billion. This Nazi film heritage was a heavy burden on the new postwar film. The filmmakers who had stayed in Germany during those twelve years could not have remained uninfluenced.

### **STAUDTE'S *DIE MÖRDER SIND UNTER UNS* AND THE ANTIWAR THEME**

What was the alternative? Most filmmakers sought answers, whether consciously or subconsciously, in their own artistic careers and impressions of the pre-1933 era.

The first film produced by DEFA, *Die Mörder sind unter uns* (The Murderers are Among Us, 1946), is typical of the new beginning. Wolfgang Staudte, the director, was one of the millions of Germans who had been living in Nazi Germany and had not committed any crimes, yet felt responsible for what had happened. He later said, “I really had to make this film. It was an attempt at understanding ourselves, at confronting the past.” Films such as these were of equal concern to the artists and their audience.

*Die Mörder sind unter uns* is a story of an army doctor who was unable to prevent the execution of Polish hostages, many of whom were

women and children. After the war, the protagonist meets his commanding officer who was responsible for the shooting and who is living a pleasant life, undisturbed by the authorities. The doctor aims his pistol at the captain, in accordance with the eternal theme of crime and punishment.

In many aspects, Staudte's first work after the war is similar to the antiwar films that were produced and shown at the end of the Weimar Republic era. Staudte's most significant experience as a young artist was the viewing of the best known antiwar film of those years, *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930), by the American film director Lewis Milestone. It was based on the novel of the same name written by Erich Maria Remarque, a German émigré.

Staudte was deeply touched by the loss of those who had so senselessly sacrificed their lives. He himself had experienced a similar tragedy. In the last days of the war, a shell seriously injured the leg of his friend and cameraman, Friedl Behn Grund, who later became the director of photography for *Die Mörder sind unter uns*.

Friedl Behn Grund bore the stamp of the classic German filmmaker. He amazed spectators with shots taken from unusual angles, shots that had not been practiced for a long time. In his creative, symbolic use of objects—from ruins of the city to looming shadows—he appropriated an expressionist style familiar to the cinema-going public since the release of the German film *Das Kabinett des Doktor Caligari* (*The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, Robert Wiene, 1919). In an effort to have audiences recognize the familiar, Staudte made conspicuous use of original film locations than might have been expected in the case of the first German postwar film that attempts to confront the nearness of the horrific past.

Behn Grund and Staudte did not resort to the documentary style. Rather, they worked with the psychological state of the characters. In doing so they were following a German tradition. In the days of Goebbels, extreme camera angles were seen as degenerate. Friedl Behn Grund said, "Now we can make up for all that was forbidden." Following his stylistic principles, namely to point out the absurd, Staudte put his trust in cross-cutting and parallel editing, thereby achieving a sarcastic counterpoint, as in the execution scene on Christmas Eve, which ends with the rifles carelessly hanging from a crucifix. In creating the character of the captain, Staudte gave a new dimension to the figure of the petty bourgeois in German film.

Staudte's earlier film heroes were committed to the pacifist attitudes of the antiwar movies of the 1930s. It was not until quite some time later that Staudte abandoned this idea. He had pursued "only one objective during the Nazi era," he said, "to survive and not to be sent to the front. I was very proud, then, of not having fired a single shot in my life. Today, I would say I would be proud had I fired a few shots in the right direction."

### **MAETZIG'S *EHE IM SCHATTEN* AND EMOTIONAL APPEAL**

A year later, in 1947, the film *Ehe im Schatten* (Marriage in the Shadows) had its premiere. It was the first German movie that addressed the persecution of the German Jews, touching on the suppressed memory of millions of Germans. The narrative was influenced by events in the life of the popular theater and film actor Joachim Gottschalk who, along with his twelve year old son and his Jewish wife, could no longer be saved from being deported. He committed suicide on November 6, 1941. This story is related to the life of the film director Kurt Maetzig, whose mother committed suicide to avoid arrest by the Gestapo. As Kurt Maetzig was not permitted to produce any films during the Nazi years, *Ehe im Schatten* was his debut.

As contemporary critics noted, it is a film that focuses on the everyday manifestations of fascism. The viewer cannot transfer his guilt to explicitly portrayed murderers and executioners; rather, he must face himself and his blind obedience, lack of courage, and opportunism. Maetzig used an artist couple in *Ehe im Schatten* to teach the necessity of taking an interest in politics, thereby divulging his view that the German intelligentsia had failed. Hans Schweikart's novella on which the film script was based was titled, *Es wird schon nicht so schlimm* (It won't be all that bad). The story also addressed the fatal belief many Jews had had in the humanity and decency of Germans and the tragic self-deception of the victims. The dramatic tension and subject matter of the tragedy was contained in this entanglement.

Maetzig did not embed his great theme in any analytical historical drama, but instead chose an intimate play set in the world of artists—something with which German audiences were quite familiar after watching numerous UFA-produced soap operas. To witness an artist's

fate in such a different manner must have affected a salutary shock in the spectator.

*Ehe im Schatten* is a successful film, which by way of the classic melodrama affords insight into a historic situation. The film premiered on October 10, 1947 and was the only German postwar film that was shown simultaneously in all four sectors of Berlin. People remained numb for several minutes at the end of the performance before they began to applaud. The film was DEFA's greatest success in those years and was awarded the rank of best German postwar film. Within a short time, it was seen by ten million people.

Bertolt Brecht, who had returned from exile in the United States a year later, asked Maetzig to show him his oeuvre. Flattered, the beginner, as Maetzig called himself, later said that he was flabbergasted by Brecht's response, "I would never have thought that this could be told so awfully sentimentally."

Years later Maetzig said he would have liked to direct the movie again, but in a modern fashion. Shortly after the war he had been too strongly affected by what had happened, but thought he had struck the right chord. His audience proved him right. Staudte uttered words to a similar effect—that his first postwar movie was "somewhat of an overreaction." His explanation was that the whole problem had appeared to be insoluble to him at the time. Indeed, it was the highly emotional narrative mode of these first postwar movies that largely corresponded with what the audience expected—an appeal to emotion. It might have been the conventional formal principles in sync with the familiar viewing habits that contributed to the success of these films.

### **BRECHTIAN INFLUENCE ON THE "NEW" CINEMATIC EXPERIMENT WITH CONTENT AND FORM**

At the end of the 1940s, Staudte produced *Rotation*, a film about a working man in the printing press business who found himself in great need during the depression. Having found work again after 1933, he reluctantly comes to terms with the new political system, hoping for an apolitical life in a political space. He realizes too late where his opportunism leads him. In this film, Staudte tried for a more objectified narrative perspective, for more documentary-style

camera work, unsentimental acting, and total absence of music. He later said he had wanted to create a document.

In 1948, director Erich Engel, a Brecht disciple, made the film *Affaire Blum* (The Blum Affair). Like his master, he tried to activate not only sentiments but also the intellect. Brecht described him as “an artist of the scientific century.” In 1928, Engel had become internationally recognized after directing Brecht and Weill’s stage premiere of *Die Dreigroschenoper* (The Three-Penny Opera). In 1949, while working on *Affaire Blum*, Engel simultaneously staged the Berlin performance of Brecht’s *Mutter Courage* (Mother Courage).

*Affaire Blum* was the first attempt to show anti-Semitism as the result of an escalating development—one that had actually begun prior to 1933. The director made use of a sensational legal scandal dating back to 1926. As a former member of the *Reichswehr* (the German army after World War I), we might today refer to the film’s antagonist as a right wing extremist who commits robbery and murder. The judicial officers’ unconcealed support for their former fellow comrade makes it easy for him to impute his guilt to a Jewish entrepreneur, Blum. Radical arrogance and hatred of the Jews almost resulted in a classic judicial murder. Engel depicts with great precision the social and psychological background of the time, presenting satirical images with the utmost excellence when characterizing the conceited judicial officers, and achieves a comedic effect by introducing a Colombo-like detective.

Most of all, however, Engel makes use of a sort of dramaturgy that was largely unknown at the time. The spectator is fully informed of what is going on by having witnessed the murder. Thus, the audience is not to concentrate its attention on finding the murderer, but on the social background and the ideological situation of the judicial authority. The onlooker is asked to comprehend how things interact. Like Brecht, Engel insisted that thinking gives pleasure and turned his subject matter into one of the most thrilling German postwar detective movies. *Affaire Blum* was an extraordinary success with critics and audiences alike.

In his film *Die Buntkarierten* (The Girls in Gingham, 1949)—the title evoking the colorful gingham bed linens a maid received from her ladyship as a wedding present—Maetzig traces the unfortunate development in German history back to the years of the emperor. The UFA Company

made frequent use of the showy effects of the historical film. But UFA's heroes were emperors, kings, generals and politicians. Kurt Maetzig looked at history "from below," through the perspective of a working-class woman. The film presents a family saga with the dramatic structure of an *Entwicklungsroman* (a novel showing the development of a character). Critics admirably dubbed it "the proletarian cavalcade"—a reference to Lloyd Frank's film and Noel Coward's play. At the end of the film, the now elderly former servant girl sews the gingham into a dress for her granddaughter to wear to the university in East Berlin.

*Freies Land* (Free Land, 1946) is another one of the early films that depict the radical social change in Germany's Soviet zone shortly after the war. It is about agricultural reform—the expropriation of land from large landowners and its redistribution among small holders. Even formally, the film aims at something entirely new—a documentary feature film. Director Milo Harbich shot the scenes on the original location, made use of amateurs, and some of the dialogue was made up as the scenes were shot. The most notable things about the film are the camerawork and editing, both of which remind us of the Russian traditions of the 1920s.

However, the original concept did not follow through. In a framed narrative, the figure of a mayor is introduced. He reports on the difficult past while he distributes the deeds to the new owners of the land. People serve as ornaments to an idea, so there is nothing to grip an audience. Viewers did not like the film. It was a flop for DEFA, but formally it belongs to the few experiments of the early years.

Not until 1956 did a film again attempt to address this theme. In his two-part movie *Schlösser und Katen* (Palaces and Cottages), Kurt Maetzig begins part one of the story with a count's poor coachman in *Der krumme Anton* (Crooked Anton) and follows his development to the days of the agricultural reform in part two, *Annegrets Heimkehr* (Annegret's Return). This movie, which portrays an exciting life, still attracts large audiences and is one of the DEFA classics.

There are very few films that deal with a subject matter totally unknown in the world of German film and are virtually incomparable with the DEFA oeuvre: *Der Rat der Götter* and *Unser täglich Brot*. Kurt Maetzig points out a new aspect behind the reasons for the rise of fascism in Germany. In his film *Der*

*Rat der Götter* (Council of Gods, 1950) Maetzig investigates the interests of big industry in Hitler's expansionary politics and its part in his crimes. The film is based on authentic material found in documents of the Nuremberg trials, as well as on the remarkable book by the American writer Richard Sasuly, head of the Finance Department of the American Military Administration and chairman of the committee that investigated the activities of the chemical industry. The documents provide proof that the German company IG Farben helped Hitler seize power and that the company made huge profits from the war, particularly in the East. Maetzig construes some action around proven facts, but subtle psychological characterization had to remain in the background. The subject matter and the mode of staging the scenes were new.

To characterize *Der Rat der Götter* as a documentary feature film, as we so often read, is misleading. The only things characteristic of the documentary are the historical events depicted—and a few top brass personages embodying the Council of the Gods, such as the leading IG Farben bosses called by their actual names—most certainly not the mode of making the film. What was new was the critical view of the neighboring Federal Republic, which the film articulates by tracing the development of company traditions as an uninterrupted continuation of the Nazi period up to the present, in contrast to the situation in the East, where IG Farben had lost its power.



*Der Rat der Götter*

The film was banned in West Germany. Now, fifty years later, the facts revealed by the film need to be discussed even in the Federal Republic of Germany. However, we must admit that the film's method of disclosing information has certainly heaped too much of the burden on the feature film to present all the factual evidence. Conveying information to the audience in this film was achieved at the expense of exploiting human fates.

The second feature film that embarked on the path to unknown lands, as it were, was *Unser täglich Brot* (Our Daily Bread), made in 1949 by Slatan Dudow. This film's theme deals with the construction of an industrial plant owned by the people. Dudow emerged from the traditions of German proletarian film. In 1932, together with Bertolt Brecht, he produced *Kuhle Wampe*, the most significant representative of the German proletarian film tradition.

In *Unser täglich Brot*, Dudow employed the same trick used in *Kuhle Wampe*—ideological disagreements take place at the kitchen table where the family meets for their meals. The family argues about the manager of the factory and the father allies himself with the expropriated factory owner, for whom he had worked as one of the executives. The dramatic method employed in the film seems to be influenced by the theater and is reminiscent of Brecht's play *Furcht und Elend des dritten Reiches* (Fear and Misery in the Third Reich), written in exile in 1938.

Two workers in *Unser täglich Brot* also evoke Brecht's theatrical theory and practice. They are not involved in any action, but fulfill the function of commenting on turning points in the course of events. The film's attempt to depart from conventional artistic fashion is mirrored especially in the soundtrack. The music was composed by Hanns Eisler, who also composed the soundtrack for *Kuhle Wampe*; Eisler was Brecht's long-time partner, even while in exile in the United States.

For almost all the other films, long serving, well-experienced composers were employed by DEFA, whose works often included rather ill-chosen titles in Nazi cinema. The film directors had quite underrated the importance of the soundtrack when trying to make their way into a new era. This is why music appears to be the most conservative component of most early DEFA films.

In the later years the DEFA documentary film specialized in investigative dramaturgy. Films by Andrew and Annelie Thorndike, for instance, became a

hallmark of DEFA. The montage was especially interesting. They used pictures from archives, creating films that were successful at home and abroad.

### CONCLUSION

DEFA often dealt with a variety of genres and thus conveyed a most vivid and colorful picture. Yet, there were rather few successful comedies, a genre not exactly typical of DEFA (the absence of comedy in German film history is a phenomenon). Moreover, the controversial treatment of everyday problems in the GDR led to serious conflicts with the censors. However, there is most definitely a recognizable continuity of content, namely the antifascist subject matter. For good reason, one film of this theme was the only DEFA film nominated for an Oscar for Best Foreign Film, *Jakob der Lügner* (Jacob the Liar, Frank Beyer, 1974) in 1976.

We would not say that DEFA is known for a style all its own. Experiments with content and form, as I have mentioned here, were rarely taken up by DEFA. Later, some of these ideas were revisited, albeit rarely, and only in television productions. All these early films' stories attempted to approach the ideological and psychological roots of German fascism. Yet, in relying on themes such as war and violence, crime and punishment, love that must prove itself, and the struggle of justice, DEFA used conventional narratives.

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**RUPTURES AND CONTINUITIES:  
DEFA, HISTORY AND THE RISE AND FALL OF THE GDR**

Seán Allan

*Geld ist die Quelle allen Wohlstands  
und regelt die Ordnung der Welt*

**THE BREAK**

“What’s the point of having got through it all, Bruno, the war and our time in prison, if we don’t carry on now?” asks the gangster, Lubowitz, in a last-ditch attempt to persuade the elderly safe-cracker, Bruno Markward, to come out of retirement and help him pull off a daring bank raid. At one level, this is the break-in—or “*Ein-Bruch*”—that is referred to in the title of Frank Beyer’s whimsical gangster comedy *Der Bruch* (The Break), which was first released in January 1989. But the resonance of the film’s title extends far beyond this, alluding to a break of a very different kind, namely the caesura—or “*Ab-Bruch*”—in German politics that coincided with the immediate aftermath of World War II, a time when, in the words of the scriptwriter Wolfgang Kohlhaase, “the political map was being re-drawn.”<sup>1</sup> In this twilight world, where no one wishes to dwell on the past and where the future is still anything but certain, each does his or her best to pick up the pieces of their prewar lives. For the bank robber, Lubowitz, it is simply a question of carrying on from where he left off; for the two boys, Julian and Bubi—for whom the war years mark a transition from adolescence to adulthood and who live at a time “at which history and puberty happened to coincide”<sup>2</sup>—what matters most is getting enough money to make an impression on the attractive hairdresser, Tina. And as for Tina, her most important task is to find a man of means—a man like Lubowitz’s accomplice, Graf. She hoped that he might offer her a way out of the dreary routine of her daily life, a life that consists of practicing the tango against a backdrop of bombed-out dwellings with her youthful, indeed all too youthful, male admirers. It is a world in which the experience and streetwise approach of the older gangsters Lubowitz, Graf, and Markward is pitted against the naïveté and inexperience of the new generation represented by the likes of Bubi, Julian, and the members of the recently established police force. At times, however, it seems as though we are not in postwar Berlin, but have

been transported back to a “MacHeathian-Threepenny-Opera-World” in which any of the characters might ask—and perhaps with some justification—“What’s breaking into a bank compared to founding one?” It is striking that of all the characters in the film, the bank manager is the only one whose prewar and postwar activities appear to have continued almost without interruption.



*Der Bruch*

Much of the film’s strength derives from the way in which Beyer and Kohlhaase avoid the black-and-white characterization that is so typical of many of the early DEFA films and also the way in which they consciously refrain from passing judgment.<sup>3</sup> Far from offering a straightforward analysis of the politics of the postwar years, *Der Bruch* merely hints at the interplay between the personal and the political by focusing on the everyday concerns of the protagonists.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the real fascination of *Der Bruch* lies in the film’s complex montage of disparate formal elements—with its multiple allusions to 1930s cabaret, Berlin satire shows, slap-stick comedy, and gangster movies, to name just some of the genres on which the film draws—with the result that,

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at times, it hovers so close to the point of self-parody that viewing it becomes a curiously disorienting experience, and we find ourselves repeatedly asking just where exactly we are in historical terms. This is already evident in the opening sequences of the film, where we see Tina sitting between her two young admirers in the cinema, watching herself at work in (a pastiche of) an early postwar newsreel. Here the contrast between “the past” (the black-and-white footage of the newsreel) and “the present” (the color filmstock used in the main body of the film) hints, albeit subtly, at the important role played by cinema in the way in which individuals come to understand themselves and their personal histories. While the film reflects on the events of 1946 from the perspective of 1989, the film-within-a-film structure that Beyer deploys reminds us that any attempt to capture the past on film is unlikely to be the last word.

At the same time, in the manner in which it both ironizes and romanticizes its subject matter, *Der Bruch* anticipates a new mode of cinematic narrative in post-DEFA cinema in which the past is viewed not through the lens of competing political ideologies but, rather, in terms of personal histories. In stark contrast to the early DEFA productions where the past is treated primarily as a stage to be overcome in the dialectical progress of history, Beyer’s film looks back at the founding years of the GDR with a subtle blend of comic detachment and wistful nostalgia that is itself characteristic of those caught up in a state of transition. Moreover, by showing how ideology is increasingly consigned to the back seat as the individual characters struggle to assert themselves in the face of an uncertain and rapidly changing future, Beyer and Kohlhaase succeed in extending the film’s scope of reference well beyond the events of 1949. In hindsight, it is clear that the “*Bruch*” of the film’s title has already acquired a new significance (albeit one which the filmmakers could hardly have intended) with the collapse—or “*Zusammen-Bruch*”—of the GDR that occurred only a few months after the film’s release.

### FACING GERMAN HISTORY THROUGH FAMILY HISTORY

The example of *Der Bruch* reminds us that any attempt to approach German history via its representation in the cinema of the former GDR must come to

terms with the way in which our view of these films—and indeed of DEFA generally—has been profoundly affected by the facts that have come to light since German reunification and by our knowledge of the eventual fate of the GDR. But this is not the only difficulty. As Barton Byg has already pointed out elsewhere, one of the paradoxes of East German culture is that while outsiders are apt to view the former GDR as “the more historically conscious part of Germany,” this view is not always endorsed by GDR writers and filmmakers themselves.<sup>5</sup> Thus in a speech held in the 1970s, the filmmaker Konrad Wolf posed the question “Do we really have a distinctive historical understanding?” only to dismiss it with a frank remark to the contrary, “I don’t think so.”<sup>6</sup> Wolf’s response, however, does not tell the whole story. The GDR’s desire to present itself as the next phase in a tradition of socialism and antifascist resistance is reflected in the large number of DEFA productions dealing with German history before 1945. At the same time, problems of censorship and the pressure—whether from without or within—to conform to an aesthetic of socialist realism both contributed to the fact that there are relatively few DEFA films that address the history of the GDR directly.<sup>7</sup> As a result, often our only means of investigating how the GDR’s historical consciousness is reflected in its cinema is to examine the films that were considered contemporary feature films (*Gegenwartsfilme*) from a historical perspective. This brings with it the danger that when we re-visit such films today, it is too easy to interpret into them meanings of which contemporary audiences could scarcely have been aware. Nonetheless, as we shall see, an analysis of the different ways in which such films set out to contextualize the GDR within a complex web of historical continuities and ruptures can tell us much about the way in which the historical consciousness of DEFA both changed and developed between the years 1949 and 1989.

The earliest DEFA productions of the late 1940s clearly set out to portray the GDR as the legitimate heir to a tradition of antifascist resistance extending back far beyond the Third Reich to the working-class movements of the nineteenth century. Kurt Maetzig’s film, *Die Buntkarierten* (The Girls in Gingham), released in July 1949, traces the history of a proletarian family through three generations, and it is one of a number of films that makes use of the family as a vehicle to display developments in German history. The story begins with Guste’s birth in 1883, and ends with

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her looking after her granddaughter, Christel, who is about to matriculate at the Humboldt University in East Berlin. In the almost Brechtian opening credits, Christel is referred to as “a young student of our time,” a rhetorical turn of phrase that not only invites the film’s intended audience to identify with the young protagonist but also, at the same time, underlines the way in which the founding of the GDR constitutes an altogether new phase in the development of German history. En route to this happy conclusion, we are taken on an odyssey through the key moments in German history, an odyssey that includes World War I, the Weimar Republic, the Nazi seizure of power, and World War II.

At times, Maetzig’s film, a film that stylistically draws on the tradition of the proletarian cinema of the Weimar Republic, suffers from a rather unsophisticated representation of the members of the ruling elite, whose appearance is often reminiscent of a set of George Grosz caricatures. As one might expect in this historical account of the fortunes of the German proletariat, the connection between *Krieg* (war) and *Kapital* (capital)—or more precisely *Krieg* and *Krupp*—is repeatedly underlined. However, the real target of the film’s criticism is the way in which the petty bourgeoisie (represented here by the barkeeper Tante Emma) and even some representatives of the working classes (as represented by Guste’s son, Hans) are complicit in their own downfall. “I’m for nationalism,” says Tante Emma during the final phases of the Weimar Republic, “it makes people drink more.” In a similar vein, Guste’s son, Hans, tries to justify his employment in an armaments factory during World War II on the grounds that that way he will avoid being sent to the front. However, his political naïveté is cruelly exposed when he is killed during an air raid that destroys his home.

In *Die Buntkarierten*, we are also presented with a particular take on gender relations that became increasingly commonplace in many of the early DEFA films of the 1940s and 1950s, whereby the progressive attitude of the female characters is unambiguously associated with the emancipatory potential of socialism and the new state.<sup>8</sup> At the start of *Die Buntkarierten*, Guste is portrayed as a head-strong individual who, while determined to go her own way, lacks the appropriate collective framework into which to channel her individual energies—a framework she later gets from her husband-to-be, the trade unionist Paul Schmiedecke. While Paul,

with his SDP leanings, is responsible for Guste's initial political education, it is Guste, rather than her husband, who emerges as the stronger figure as the film unfolds. For while her husband's determination to secure higher wages for the workers may appear to be a laudable goal, it is one that remains rooted in capitalist ideology, predicated on the belief that the relations between bourgeoisie and proletariat are capable of liberal reform. As such, it fails to embrace the bigger political picture and, in particular, the need for the left to put up a united front against the forces of not only National Socialism but also of capitalism in general. This is the lesson that Guste learned from the wounded World War II veteran on the tram, an individual who provides her with a new ideological framework within which to politicize her gut instincts, a learning process that culminates in her decision to stage a go-slow in the munitions factory where she works.<sup>9</sup> Significantly, it is Guste's granddaughter, Christel—and not her weak-willed son, Hans—who ends the film as the bearer of hope for future generations. This process of social and historical change is itself symbolized by *Die Buntkarierten*, the checkered piece of linen given to Guste as a wedding present by her former mistress. While her mistress explains the custom of giving such gifts to servants on the grounds that “it's always been



*Die Buntkarierten*

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that way,” Guste’s subsequent decision to turn the material into a dress (so that her granddaughter, Christel, can attend the matriculation celebrations at the Humboldt University) not only shows that she understands the need to break with tradition and embrace the future but also reminds us of the extent to which the present is inextricably linked to the past.

Kurt Maetzig was by no means the only director in the early years of DEFA to make use of the family as a means of tracing key developments in German history. But whereas Maetzig’s film *Die Buntkarierten* searches for a thread of historical continuity by focusing on the history of a working class family over a period of roughly sixty years, Slatan Dudow’s film *Unser täglich Brot* (Our Daily Bread), also released in 1949, argues for a radical break with what has gone before and, in particular, with capitalist ideology.<sup>10</sup> Set in the founding years of the GDR, the film offers an analysis of the prevailing social and economic conditions by tracing the fortunes of Karl Weber and his two sons in the immediate postwar period. While the elder son, Ernst, is a committed socialist determined to rebuild a bombed-out factory and turn it into a state-owned production plant (*Volkseigener Betrieb*), the younger son, Harry, is presented as a weak-willed individual who drifts into a life of crime and black marketeering (a thinly disguised metaphor for the pitfalls of capitalism) before finally committing suicide.

In stark contrast to the proletarian milieu of *Die Buntkarierten*, the setting of *Unser täglich Brot* is the world of the petty bourgeoisie. The shortages caused by rationing may have hit the Webers as hard as any family in postwar Germany, but the fact that this family is hardly on the brink of starvation is underlined by the plentiful supply of that well-known black market commodity: cigarettes. This is not a struggle for survival, but rather a fight for ideological supremacy. As the film’s richly resonant title suggests, man cannot live by bread alone, an inference that is underlined when one of the factory workers tells another, “You’ve got more than just a belly. You’ve got a mind as well.” This is the lesson that, at the beginning of the film, both Karl Weber and his younger son, Harry, have yet to learn. Karl Weber, who remains wedded to capitalist ideology and who confidently awaits the collapse of all socialist initiatives, believes that human progress is directly measurable in material terms. “Only money can ensure one’s well-being and bring about a sense of order in the world,” he declares at the breakfast table at which he holds court. But, of

course, his words contain a delicious double-entendre, insofar as the capitalist order to which he refers is the very antithesis of order as understood by his son, Ernst, and his communist associates. Indeed, the antithesis between these two modes of order is underscored visually in the film's opening and closing sequences. The film begins with the disorder of capitalism as hordes of Berliners flood through the S-Bahn in search of work and ends with the order of socialism as a disciplined crowd (including the recently reunited Weber family) applauds the delivery of the first tractors from the newly renovated production plant.

While the ideological underpinning of *Unser täglich Brot* is fairly conventional, what makes the film more than just a piece of straightforward propaganda is the way in which it explores the psychological tensions within this petty bourgeois family. In the film we are presented with a reversal of the conventional family model whereby the elder son is expected to live up to the expectations of his father. Here it is not Ernst, but the younger son, Harry, who is told by his father, "I always had great hopes of you." And in the course of the film, it becomes clear that the real reason Harry eventually resorts to a life of crime is his subservient mentality, and his desperate desire to please his father.<sup>11</sup> By contrast, it is the elder son, Ernst, who is prepared to risk conflict in the pursuit of his socialist ideals; and as the film shows, while Harry's desire to conform leads to disaster, Ernst's revolution sweeps all before it.

Through the triangular constellation of Karl Weber and his two sons, Dudow captures succinctly the options available at this particular historical juncture. For Karl Weber, things have come to such an impasse—"This ramshackle socialism will never survive," he exclaims—that the only way forward seems to lie in black marketeering and dog-eat-dog capitalism. But for Ernst and his socialist comrades, the sheer hopelessness of the situation is precisely the reason to break with the past and embark in a new direction, for, as he observes, "there is no alternative." However, despite Ernst's progressive thinking, the older Weber remains for much of the film a blinkered individual unable to relinquish his grasp on the old, discredited ideology. As the film unfolds, his intransigence drives each member of the family to leave the family home. His increasing sense of isolation—in both a literal and ideological sense—is reflected in the way that, having become estranged from his real family, he has no choice but to make friends with the

strangers who move in to fill their empty rooms. And of course when the Jewish lodger, Herr Bergstetter, shows him a photograph of his daughter, Ruth, who has perished in a concentration camp, Weber senior is left to reflect on the fact that he has failed to appreciate his good fortune and, above all, the fact that his family—unlike that of Bergstetter—has survived the war. At the end of the film, he does see the light—as his decision to take up a position in the now flourishing production plant shows—but his obstinacy led to the break-up of his family and the needless death of his younger son, Hans. Nonetheless, the successful integration of Weber senior into the socialist collective underlines that a radical break with capitalist economics is a prerequisite for future progress and that even the most obstinate members of the petty bourgeois world can be rehabilitated.

In the early DEFA films, the family is presented in an ambivalent light. In the proletarian milieu of *Die Buntkarierten*, it functions as a means of linking the founding of the GDR to the historical development of socialism in nineteenth-century Germany, thereby presenting the state as the legitimate heir to the antifascist movement. In contrast, the petty bourgeois family in *Unser täglich Brot*, dominated by a *pater familias* firmly committed to the old order of capitalism, is portrayed as an inherently reactionary structure that has to be overcome if progress is to be made. Despite this slight difference in emphasis, each of the films bears witness to the heady optimism of the early years of the GDR. In *Die Buntkarierten*, we witness the teleological progress of history culminating in the founding of the GDR. In *Unser täglich Brot*, the triumphalist set-piece with which the film ends and in which all contradictions are resolved, points forward unambiguously to a new and better world. At the same time, this sense of optimism extends to embrace not just the films' subject matter, but also their formal dimension as well. Neither film attempts to embrace a more critical neorealist aesthetic of the kind that would be deployed so successfully in the 1950s "Berlin Films" of Wolfgang Kohlhaase and Gerhard Klein. By the same token, there is no trace of the kind of irony deployed with such a good effect in a film like Frank Beyer's 1960s comedy *Karbid und Sauerampfer* (Carbide and Sorrel, 1963). Nonetheless, the fact that there is little in *Die Buntkarierten* or *Unser täglich Brot* that would prompt an alternative, more critical reading of this phase of the GDR's history should not prompt us to write these films off as dull, propagandistic works; rather, they

represent something of a yardstick with which to measure the subsequent developments in the history of DEFA itself.

### **HISTORICAL CONTINUITY AND RUPTURE IN MAETZIG'S *SCHLÖSSER UND KATEN***

Family trees and the relationship of the GDR's citizens to a non-socialist past also lie at the heart of Kurt Maetzig's two-part epic *Schlösser und Katen* (Castles and Cottages, 1957), a film that deals with the collectivization of land in the early years of the GDR and the bitter conflicts that ensued. Given the proletarian and petty bourgeois settings of *Die Buntkarierten* and *Unser täglich Brot* respectively, it is tempting to see *Schlösser und Katen*, with its exploration of the legacy of feudal relationships in a non-urban setting, as the completion of a programmatic analysis of class conflict in the early cinema of the GDR. Much of the film deals with the question of whether Annegret, the illegitimate daughter of the former landowning count, Graf Holzendorf, can be persuaded to exploit her birthright and fall back on the extravagant legacy bequeathed to her by her aristocratic birth father.

Maetzig's film opens with the impending arrival of the Soviet forces in 1945, an event that prompts Graf Holzendorf and his wife to abandon their estate and take refuge in the West. Of the peasants who remain, many are far from convinced that the old order has been swept away and they anticipate its imminent return. It is this attitude that lies at the heart of the difficulties experienced by the communists Kalle, Voss, and Christel Sikura when they try to persuade the other peasants to put their land at the service of the collective. For some, notably a group made up of a number of *Großbauern* (i.e., those peasants who have succeeded in amassing small-to-medium scale holdings of their own), their unwillingness to cooperate is a reflection of their belief that it is only a matter of time before socialism collapses and that, by clinging to their land, they will be best placed to exploit the situation when this happens.

For the others—the ordinary peasants such as Annegret's mother, Marthe, who have only just been given small parcels of land—their reluctance to join the collective reflects the mindset of the underclass. They have been deprived of property all their lives and cannot bring themselves to part with the small

landholdings that they received unexpectedly due to the count's abrupt departure. Nonetheless, the film goes out of its way to portray the kind of peasant obstinacy shown by the otherwise well-intentioned and decent Marthe as an understandable reaction, even if it is one that goes against her own interests, as she ultimately realizes. One of the great strengths of Maetzig's film is that it offers a starkly realistic picture of the difficulties faced in the course of setting up such farming collectives during the early phase of the GDR. Moreover, as the film makes clear, these difficulties are caused not only by political agitation



*Schlösser und Katen*

on the part of the Federal Republic, but also by the individual members of the collective acting in their own self-interest. This critical dimension to the film is further extended when, at one point, it is suggested quite unambiguously that the leaders of the collective, Kalle, and Christel Sikura, have become almost inhuman in their management of the collective. “Just squeeze a little harder,” says Kalle, “Then the pus will come out.” However, when they are forced to recognize that this hard-line approach drove an elderly peasant couple to

commit suicide, their reaction of shock is an invitation to us as spectators to reflect on the relationship between the means used to shore up the existence of the collective.

Much of the tension in *Schlösser und Katen* revolves around the question of whether the new state will succeed in making a radical break with the past, or whether the old order will re-establish itself in due course. To a great extent, this aspect of the film's plot centers on the document—the *Schein*—given to Marthe's husband, "crooked" Anton, by the fleeing Graf Holzendorf. Here, the illusory nature of this legacy is the pun on the German word *Schein*, with its connotations of deceptive appearance that are of crucial significance. In this document, the count promises to give his (illegitimate) daughter, Annegret, 5,000 marks and half a dozen sets of bed linen on her wedding day. For as it transpires, Annegret is not in fact Anton's daughter, but rather the result of the count's having forced himself upon Annegret's mother, Marthe, when she was a servant in his household. For the relatively simple-minded Anton, who married Marthe in order to give the child a father, the possession of the *Schein* holds out the promise of untold riches for Annegret in the future. But for the more Machiavellian individuals, such as the count's former estate manager, Herr Bröker, and the count's wife herself, the *Schein* has a deeper and more dangerous significance insofar as it legitimizes Annegret as the rightful heir to the Holzendorf estate. While Bröker, the countess, and Anton all struggle for possession of the document, for Annegret it represents a millstone around her neck. Despite her commitment to the socialist collective in the village (and to her communist boyfriend, the tractor driver, Klimm) the very existence of the document means that she remains—against her wishes—inextricably linked to the old order. The turning point comes when Bröker's scheming son, Ekkehart, threatens to reveal the legacy of her aristocratic heritage to Klimm and the other communists. Now fearful that, in the eyes of both the reactionary and the revolutionary factions in the village, she will not be seen as an individual in her own right, but merely as the potential recipient of a handsome legacy, she resolves to leave the village and carve out a new identity for herself as an agronomist. The final stage in her attempt to sever the line of patrilineal descent—the existence of which is predicated solely on the vagaries of male aristocratic sexual desire—occurs on her wedding day when Anton arrives at the celebrations and tears up the *Schein* on the grounds that no one is interested in it anymore.

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While questions of historical continuity and rupture are dealt with metaphorically in the issues surrounding Annegret's paternity, the question of political restoration is tackled head-on in the film's treatment of *Der Tag X* (X Day) and the strikes of June 17, 1953 in the GDR. Indeed *Schlösser und Katen* is the only DEFA film to allude directly to the workers' uprisings of 1953. At one point in the film, we see Bröker's son listening to the radio station RIAS (Radio in the American Sector) and we even get to hear reports of strikes throughout the GDR. However, in keeping with the prevailing SED policy, the uprisings are presented as having been instigated by activists from the Federal Republic.<sup>12</sup> Thus the whole issue of *Tag X* is first broached by the scheming Countess of Holzendorf when she slips across the border for a clandestine meeting with Bröker and the other reactionary landowners. And when we see Bröker himself daubing the walls with the slogan "We cannot endure this system any longer," it is clearly suggested that this is not a spontaneous political protest by the citizens of the GDR, but rather the work of *agents provocateurs* from the west. Indeed even the brief sequences showing Soviet troops moving into place suggest that the presence of the soldiers is anything but threatening, a point that is further underscored when the roadblock set up to allow the tanks to pass prevents the unscrupulous Bröker from escaping to the west. It is, of course, hardly coincidental that Annegret's wedding to Klimm—an act that marks the final repudiation of her aristocratic heritage—should immediately follow on from the collapse of the uprising.

Although *Schlösser und Katen* stops well short of a critical analysis of the events of 1953, this should not be allowed to obscure the fact that Maetzig's film pulls few punches in its depiction of the collectivization of agriculture and the internal conflicts this provoked. In the years immediately following Stalin's death in the spring of 1953, there was a brief period of liberalization in film policy. The fact that the film could articulate the kind of critique that it does was at least partly a reflection of the era. But while *Schlösser und Katen* repeats many of the well-known clichés of the cold war era in its depiction of the west, the section of the plot that revolves around political agitation emanating from the Federal Republic is merely one aspect of the film. Far more telling is the way in which the film deals with the internal conflicts within the socialist collective itself, and it is this that marks it as a much later film than either *Die*

*Buntkarierten* and *Unser täglich Brot*. Nonetheless, what all three films have in common is that they are set at points in the history of Germany where the collapse of what has gone before is seen as a necessary precondition for the construction of the new. The biological family may not always survive the conflicts intact, but in each film a new “family”—the family of the state—emerges to take its place. In this respect, Annegret’s rejection of her aristocratic heritage in *Schlösser und Katen* calls to mind Paul Schmiedecke’s dying words to his wife in *Die Buntkarierten*, when he reminds her that “Your trade union is your father and mother.” Material standards of living may be low, but the emergence of a new and better world is at least in sight.

### **PROBLEMATIZING THE HISTORICAL PRESENT— THE WALL AND THE *WENDE***

The need to maintain a sense of continuity while at the same time breaking with capitalist economics lies at the heart of a great many of the early DEFA films dealing with the historical development of Germany and, in particular, the rise of the GDR. However, even in the films made some forty years later at the time of the *Wende*, questions of historical rupture and continuity are presented in an equally ambivalent light. What is at issue in those films produced after 1989 is, to a very large extent, the question of whether the collapse of socialism is to be celebrated as heralding a new beginning in human affairs, or whether the events of 1989 merely underline the truth of Karl Weber’s observation in *Die Buntkarierten*, namely that money does, indeed, rule the world.

The opening of the border between East and West Berlin is the subject of Jürgen Böttcher’s documentary, *Die Mauer* (The Wall), released in 1990. It is difficult to think of another moment in twentieth century history that captures the desire for a radical break with the past more poignantly than the night of November 9, 1989. But Böttcher’s film is anything but an upbeat documentary account of the night in question.<sup>13</sup> Instead, we are invited to reflect on both the transitory nature of human endeavor and the nature of historical representation in contemporary media. In the opening sequence of the film, the stark images of isolated sections of the Wall standing in an open field contrast markedly with those celebratory images of the Wall that have now become almost clichés as a result of their repeated

exposure in news bulletins and documentary retrospectives. Filmed from a distance and with birds circling overhead, the sections of concrete assume the character of a decaying cityscape made up of abandoned high-rise buildings. These images evoke the opening stanza of Andreas Gryphius's poem *Es ist alles eitel* (All Is Vanity), in which we are reminded that "what one man builds today, another tears down the next; a meadow grows up now, where once a city stood."<sup>14</sup> This is not the transitional world of the early DEFA films in which emblematic hammers and sickles are wielded in a spirit of optimistic reconstruction. On the contrary, the only hammers seen in Böttcher's film are those of the so-called *Mauerspechte*, the people relentlessly chipping away at the Wall in an attempt to secure a personal historical memento.

In *Die Mauer*, Böttcher hints that rather than this obsessive quest for souvenirs (or *Andenken*), what is required is a process of reflection (or *Denken*). The behavior of the Japanese tourists who want to be photographed in front of the graffiti, as well as the small boys who go around earning extra pocket money by selling lumps of concrete hewn from the Wall, draw attention to the ways in which history has been commercialized and packaged for rapid consumption. Moreover, the transformation of this historical moment into a tourist spectacle is underlined by the cosmopolitan composition of the assembled spectators—a group from which the East Germans are conspicuously absent. At those points in the film where they do appear, their worried, puzzled expressions betray a perhaps hidden anxiety that a vital part of their past history and collective memory is systematically being destroyed by souvenir-hunting intruders whose relationship to this historical moment is merely tangential.

Part of the fascination of Böttcher's film lies in the way in which the Berlin Wall is treated—not solely as a historical object, as a piece of *Geschichte*, but as something that tells stories (*Geschichten*) in its own right. This is underlined both



*Die Mauer*

in the collage of individual histories in the graffiti on the Wall, and in the sequence where we see the graves of those who died in the attempt to cross it, a sequence that forms a somber counterpoint to the carnivalesque atmosphere of the New Year's Eve celebrations of 1989/1990 that come immediately before it. Perhaps, however, the most memorable moments in the film are the three sequences where the Wall, quite literally, tells a story. In this scene, three sequences of documentary footage featuring key turning points in German history are projected against a segment of the Wall. The first sequence contains footage of the Wall's construction in 1961. The second features a series of triumphant military parades through the Brandenburg Gate—including the Nazis' triumphant torch-lit procession of January 1933. And the final section contains documentary footage of the night of November 9, 1989. These three sequences—which Böttcher has referred to as constituting “the film's core”—emphasize the way in which history is indelibly inscribed into the very buildings and architecture of the city, underscoring the peculiar significance of the Potsdamer Platz and the Brandenburg Gate in the historical and political development of Germany. At the same time, Böttcher's use of the film-within-a-film montage locates his own work in the historical context of DEFA as a whole. The first two sequences of documentary footage are, in effect “quoted” from Karl Gass's *Schaut auf diese Stadt* (Look at this City), a heavily propagandist work from 1962 that set out to justify the construction of the Berlin Wall as a defense against western aggression. By re-quoting these images (which even in Gass's own film are already “second-hand” newsreel footage), Böttcher succeeds in subjecting them to a further degree of alienation, thereby prompting the spectator to reflect on the role of moving images in the construction of historical narrative as well as on their peculiar power to shape our perception of the past.

*Die Mauer* ends on a somber note, underlining that the Berlin Wall is not simply a physical structure of bricks and concrete, but an ideological construct deeply ingrained in the minds of East and West Germans. Indeed, the difficulties that lie ahead for those who regard the *Wende* as heralding the promise of a new beginning are succinctly alluded to in the closing images of the film, where we see an overgrown field in which sections of the Wall have been strewn about like abandoned headstones. The cemetery-like setting with which the film ends has a profoundly elegiac quality to it and evokes a feeling of wistful mourning for the passing of a state. It may be that the removal of the Berlin Wall represents a radical break with the past; but Böttcher's film makes a plea for us not to lose sight altogether of the thread of continuity that connects the

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past with the present. For as we gaze at the pieces of graffiti which do not quite match up, we are left with a telling reminder that the integration of east and west will require more than just the removal of a physical barrier.

The elegiac tone of Böttcher's *Die Mauer* stands in marked contrast to the biting satire of Jörg Foth's *Letztes aus der DaDaeR* (Final Bulletin from the DaDaeR)—a stylistic difference that perhaps reflects the different generations to which the two filmmakers belong. What these two seemingly disparate approaches have in common is the underlying belief that, in the frenzied rush to embrace the future, the past has been lost sight of. Released in 1990, Foth's film eschews conventional film narrative in favor of a series of loosely connected episodes that serve as an odyssey through the *Wende*.<sup>15</sup> In the opening episode, "Breakfast in Sing Sing" that takes place in a decrepit jail, we are introduced to the two clowns, Meh and Weh, who cling to whatever meager comfort their cell can offer. As they converse while eating their simple breakfast amid such Spartan surroundings—an ironic homage, I would suggest, to those sequences that take place around the breakfast table in the early DEFA films—it is clear that we are poised on the threshold of another Year Zero, albeit one in the late 1980s rather than the 1940s. While the crumbling jail is hardly a flattering metaphor for the GDR in its final phase, Foth's film is sharply critical of the speed and manner in which this state is being steam-rolled out of existence. The trash collector, played by the well-known writer, Christoph Hein, comments, "I am swamped by the banality I see all around me. When I saw my country collapse, I realized that I loved it."<sup>16</sup> These sentiments are underlined in a subsequent episode entitled "The New Era," when the two clowns look on in horror as a TV report shows their former home—the jail—being plundered and looted.

As the film shows, this "new era" is anything but a new beginning. As we follow the two clowns on their travels, the film suggests that events are now moving at such a pace, that all memories of the past—even the recent past—are receding into the distance. This is perhaps most clearly brought out in the episode "Hell" in which the two clowns cast their minds "back" to the 1980s and to the fortieth anniversary of the GDR in 1989. Working their way through East German history they discover that they can remember nothing of note. Finally, they arrive at the 1980s. "What actually happened in the 1980s?" asks one, only for the other to reply, "I don't think anything much was going

on in the 1980s.” The temptation to bury the past may be understandable in the circumstances, but it is a dangerous tendency that stands in the way of any new start in human affairs, and one that is only thinly disguised by the upbeat waltz rhythms of the song “Let sleeping dogs lie” in which they sing, “Comrades, we know that unity is strength, so let’s go down to the park and burn all the files.” Indeed, in the mad rush to unification, it seems that criticism of any kind is intolerable. When the clowns stumble across a group of East Germans burning the Red Flag in a scene appropriately entitled, “A German Walpurgis Night,” they are invited to clear off in no uncertain terms.

In *Letztes aus der DaDaeR*, Foth—and the two writer/performers, Steffen Mensching and Hans Eckhart Wenzel—offer a biting critique of both western capitalism and the opportunism of the East Germans. Indeed, a large part of the appeal of Foth’s film lies in the way in which it offers the spectator the possibility of embracing a left-wing critique of the *Wende* without having to embrace at the same time the old discredited structures of East German Marxist-Leninism. As we see, far from being a genuine break with the past, this “new beginning” is merely a return to the old way of doing things. Back in the comfort of their cell, the two clowns discuss “the big issue” (*die Weltfrage*), which, as Meh points out, perhaps might be better described as “the money issue” (*die Geldfrage*). They arrive at an unpalatable conclusion that directly correlates capitalism and the wealth of the First World to the poverty of the Third World. This conclusion is echoed in the song they sing while scampering among the dinosaur skeletons in an antiquated museum, itself a telling metaphor for the ideals of socialism that now appear so outdated. Their description of the Third World as the “unwanted guest at the table of the rich” together with the refrain “the game goes on and on” underlines the annexation of the Eastern bloc—the Second World—to the First World, heralding not a new start in human affairs, but merely the intensification of an already long-standing process of economic polarization. It may seem that the *Wende* constitutes a revolutionary moment in history, but Foth’s film begs to differ. Indeed in the final sequence—the “Epilogue”—the failure of this revolution is addressed directly. As the two clowns make their way across a graveyard, they attempt to set a date for the revolution only to discover that their diaries are already full. So we are left with an image of a block of flats, each balcony occupied by a German shepherd dog whose upright posture is uncannily reminiscent of the postures of the former eastern bloc leaders waving from their tribunes. Meanwhile, the clowns,

down on their knees, bark in harmony with their new canine masters, a bitterly ironic commentary on the human capacity to conform and a bleak reminder that this *Wende* has merely led to one set of political masters being exchanged for another.

The optimism of such early films as *Die Buntkarierten*, *Unser täglich Brot* and even *Schlösser und Katen* stands in marked contrast to the pessimistic tone of the films of the *Wende*. In the early films, the GDR is presented as the culmination of a historical process extending back to the nineteenth century and beyond. At the same time, in arguing for the need to break with the past—and above all with the ideology of capitalism—the films bear witness to the spirit of optimistic idealism of the early GDR. By contrast, the films of the *Wende* are characterized by a desire to ensure that the historical thread connecting the past to the present—and above all, the recent past of the GDR—is not lost sight of altogether. While both *Die Mauer* or *Letztes aus der DaDaeR* may be sharply critical of the GDR and its political masters, they question the extent to which the events of the *Wende* constitute a genuinely new beginning in human affairs—and remind us that we ignore history at our peril.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>. Quoted in Regine Sylvester, “Welt und Halbwelt” *Sonntag* 6 (1989).

<sup>2</sup>. Ruth Herlinghaus, ed., “Schreiben für Film. Mit Wolfgang Kohlhaase sprach Ruth Herlinghaus,” *Der Bruch: Werkstatterfahrungen aus Theorie und Praxis des Films* 2 (1988), 67-76 (69).

<sup>3</sup>. As Klaus Wischnewski observes, “Sie [Frank Beyer und Wolfgang Kohlhaase] wollen keinen Kriminalfilm im Gewand von Kaltem Krieg und Klassenkampf.” See Klaus Wischnewski, “Blick zurück ohne Zorn: Der Bruch (1989),” *Regie: Frank Beyer*, ed. Ralf Schenk (Berlin: Hentrich, 1995), 242-7 (243).

<sup>4</sup>. As Horst Claus has pointed out, it is in this respect that the film bears out Wolfgang Kohlhaase’s conviction that “Ortszeit ist immer Weltzeit.” See Horst Claus, “Personal Memories of Change, Freedom and Opportunity: The Postwar Years in Wolfgang Kohlhaase’s Films *Inge*, *April und Mai*, and *Der Bruch*,” *Cultural Perspectives on Division and Unity in East and West*, Clare Flanagan and Stuart Taberner, eds. (Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 2000), 245-57 (257). See also Hermann Herlinghaus, “Wolfgang Kohlhaase: Ortszeit ist immer Weltzeit,” *Aus Theorie und Praxis des Films* 1/2 (1988).

<sup>5</sup>. Barton Byg, “Two Approaches to GDR History in DEFA Films,” *Studies in GDR Culture and Society* 10: *Selected Papers from the Fifteenth New Hampshire Symposium*

on the German Democratic Republic, Margy Gerber, et al. eds. (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1991), 85-103 (85-87).

<sup>6</sup>. Quoted in Byg, 85. Original source: "Mitteilungen des Verbands der Film- und Fernsehschaffenden der DDR," III. Kongreß des Verbands der Film- und Fernsehschaffenden der DDR, Berlin, May 3-5, 1977, 52.

<sup>7</sup>. The two approaches that Byg singles out as possible means of avoiding socialist realism are, on the one hand, comedy and irony (as found in such films as *Karbid und Sauerampfer* (Carbide and Sorrel, dir. Frank Beyer, 1964), *Anton der Zauberer* (Anton the Magician, dir. Günter Reisch, 1977) and *Die besten Jahre* (The Best Years, dir. Günter Rucker, 1964), and on the other, the neorealist aesthetics of the Berlin films made by Gerhard Klein and Wolfgang Kohlhaase. See Byg, 87-91.

<sup>8</sup>. See, above all, Anna in *Bürgermeister Anna* (Mayor Anna, dir. Hans Müller, 1950), Agnes in *Roman einer jungen Ehe* (Story of a Young Couple, dir. Kurt Maetzig, 1952), and Annegret in *Schlösser und Katen* (Castles and Cottages, dir. Kurt Maetzig, 1957).

<sup>9</sup>. Guste's "individualism" at this point in the film was to attract the criticism of DEFA's General Director at the time, the Soviet Andrej Andrijewski. On this see Christiane Mückenberger and Günter Jordan, *Sie sehen selbst, Sie hören selbst... Die DEFA von ihren Anfängen bis 1949* (Marburg: Hitzeroth, 1994), 107-11.

<sup>10</sup>. 1949 also saw the release of a third film, *Rotation* (dir. Wolfgang Staudte), another family story though this time set in the Third Reich. For a detailed discussion of this film and its relation to the proletarian cinema of the Weimar Republic, see Marc Silberman, *German Cinema: Texts in Context* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995), 99-113.

<sup>11</sup>. The relationship of this particular character trait to the success of reactionary political movements in Germany is explored in some detail by Wolfgang Staudte in his film *Der Untertan* (The Kaiser's Lackey, 1951). Staudte extends the political implications of Heinrich Mann's novel by adding a sequence relating to the Second World War at the end of the film and, in so doing, posits a direct link between the subservient behavior of Diederich Hessling and the catastrophe of the Third Reich.

<sup>12</sup>. For a general discussion of literary treatments of the June 1953 uprising, see Peter Hutchison, "History and Political Literature: The Interpretation of the 'Day of German Unity' in the Literature of East and West," *Modern Language Review* 77 (1981): 367-82.

<sup>13</sup>. For a discussion of treatments of the *Wende* in the documentary cinema of the GDR, see Steffi Pusch, *Exemplarisch DDR-Geschichte leben: Ostberliner Dokumentarfilme, 1989-90* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2000).

<sup>14</sup>. "Was dieser heute baut, reißt jener morgen ein; Wo itzund Städte stehn, wird eine Wiese sein."

<sup>15</sup>. Some of the scenes from the film can be found in Steffen Mensching and Hans Eckhardt Wenzel, *Allerletztes aus der DaDaeR—Hundekomödie*, ed. Andrea Doberenz (Leipzig, 1991), 11-64. However, the text reproduced here is based upon the live cabaret performances of the same and corresponds only roughly to the film version.

<sup>16</sup>. “Die allgemeine Dummheit ertränkt mich. Als ich mein Land krepieren sah, spürte ich, dass ich es liebte.”

**MANAGING STARS:  
MANFRED KRUG AND THE POLITICS OF  
ENTERTAINMENT IN GDR CINEMA**

Stefan Soldovieri

Most commonly associated with Hollywood, the phenomenon of stardom—with its overtones of elitism, individualism, excess, and commercialism—would seem to be largely antithetical to centralized film industries of the former socialist countries of eastern Europe and the strictures of state-sanctioned production plans. After all, what is a better symbol of the capitalist pedigree of western cinema than the glossy image of the star? While the film industry of the GDR did not generate anything resembling a full-blown star system, the central DEFA Studio did give rise to its share of popular film personalities. Appearing in a range of entertainment genres—which included musicals, ice skating revues, historical adventures, science fiction films, and the GDR’s own version of the Western—DEFA actors were by no means exclusively identified with the upstanding antifascists and worker-heroes they were regularly called upon to portray in the studio’s more serious productions.

Although DEFA’s efforts in the area of popular entertainment were considerable, studies of East German cinema have concentrated primarily on its ideological function and on its role in the legitimation of—and intermittent resistance to—official narratives on the history and identity of the GDR state. The reasons for this focus are apparent enough. Film production in the GDR was a highly administered affair that could prompt the participation of a dizzying assortment of state and party agencies. Mandated to promote a socialist film culture, the central DEFA studio was obliged to promote the political agenda of the SED throughout its history. Despite the bureaucratic and politicized nature of film production in the GDR, culture administrators, party functionaries, and filmmakers alike remained keenly aware of the entertainment needs of GDR audiences—which naturally included the matter of fostering popular actors.

The issue of stardom offers an instructive example of the inherent tensions in DEFA’s efforts to reconcile ideological pressures with the demand for genre films and popular entertainment. It also directs attention

to a neglected aspect of the GDR cinema—the audience. Rarely addressed in considerations of East German cinema, GDR spectators have implicitly been relegated to the bottom tier of an overly hierarchical and unidirectional model of cinematic communication, with party functionaries and film administrators at the top of an inverted pyramid bearing down on a naive and reluctant audience. An examination of the star phenomenon in the GDR cinema of the early 1960s suggests that a more complex view is warranted. Not only did GDR spectators negotiate DEFA's images in a number of ways, such as viewing context, genre, expectations, and other factors, but widespread public knowledge of film censorship also facilitated the development of sophisticated, even subversive, viewing strategies. GDR film audiences were highly adept at decoding contradictory messages and images and re-functionalizing them for their own purposes.

#### **DEVELOPING A STAR SYSTEM—IN MODERATION**

The early 1960s are typically seen as the beginning of a period of relative stabilization and reform in GDR society. Khrushchev's critique of Stalin, the completion of radical transformations in the GDR's political and economic structures, and the new situation marked by the installation of the Berlin Wall on August 13, 1961 allowed the state to turn to practical matters of government and the economy. This period of liberalization coincided with a shift in media trends marked by the growing significance of television and a corresponding drop in film attendance. The problem was exacerbated by the western films and programming that could be received in the GDR via West German television stations.

Beginning in the early 1960s, these political and media developments led to a broad-based initiative to improve DEFA's feature films and the production of more and better films in a range of popular genres. This initiative was by no means solely an industry-led proposal, but part of a comprehensive plan that was ultimately authorized by the *Politbüro* in September 1961. Among the measures designed to promote more "exciting, engaging, gripping, and aesthetically effective films" was a plan to increase the studio's material interest in the success of DEFA

features at the box office using a bonus system designed to reward the makers of popular films.<sup>1</sup>

Culture administrators—while wary of concessions to western-style marketing strategies and film publicity—were understandably interested in improving DEFA’s image and tentatively accepted the need to promote popular actors to aid a struggling film industry. In fact, in many ways the GDR cinema had long been adapting the forms (while transforming the contents) of western film industries. DEFA actors were featured on star postcards and in collectible programs. There were fan contests, most-popular-actor polls, and a film magazine, *Filmspiegel*, which offered a fair share of international coverage, industry gossip, and—admittedly tame—pin-up-type images. DEFA performers were also enlisted in advertising campaigns. In *Filmspiegel*, for instance, actress Christel Bodenstein, who played opposite the popular Manfred Krug in Ralf Kirsten’s *Beschreibung eines Sommers* (Story of a Summer, 1963) and Gottfried Kolditz’s *Revue um Mitternacht* (Midnight Revue, 1962), could be found modeling the latest fashions in a two-page advertisement



*Revue um Mitternacht*

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publicizing a Berlin clothing outlet.<sup>2</sup> In the January 1965 issue of the *Neue Berliner Illustrierte*, DEFA performers recommended sparkling wines with Günther Simon, the hero of DEFA veteran Kurt Maetzig's two-part antifascist epic, *Ernst Thälmann* (1954/55), declaring his penchant for a GDR label. A coy Christel Bodenstein admitted a weakness for a rather sweet Bulgarian vintage.<sup>3</sup> DEFA could even be caught engaging in some rather flashy examples of product placement. A production still for the aforementioned musical comedy *Revue um Mitternacht*, for instance, featured dancers posed atop an oversized LP by the GDR record label Amiga.<sup>4</sup>

During the 1950s and early 1960s, film officials also tolerated modest efforts to enlist western star power in the framework of co-productions. Even the staunchest opponents of cooperation with capitalist film industries were tantalized by the prospect of using internationally-known actors to spread the reputation of DEFA in markets outside of eastern Europe and perhaps even of making inroads against their West German rival. With the help of the French Pathé company, the studio was able to sign Simone Signoret and Yves Montand to play Elisabeth and John Proctor in a 1957 adaptation of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* (1953), entitled *Die Hexen von Salem* (The Witches of Salem). Signoret won the British Academy's "Best Foreign Actress" for her performance in the film, which was based on a script by Jean Paul Sartre.

DEFA's maneuvering in the context of an extremely ambitious science fiction project a few years later provides another example of the studio's active pursuit of foreign star power. Hoping for a repeat by stars Montand and Signoret, DEFA proposed an elaborate financing scheme to underwrite the actors' fees, which were not only well above those of GDR actors, but also had to be paid in scarce western currency. DEFA was so anxious to launch the film abroad with internationally established actors that it was prepared to give up most of the returns for foreign distribution to cover the production's exorbitant casting outlays. According to the production documents of the film, which was released as *Der schweigende Stern* (First Spaceship on Venus)<sup>5</sup> in 1962 and chronicled a fateful journey to Venus, other candidates under consideration to play the international cosmonauts included Marcello Mastroianni—although it seems that a popular British actor would also have done in a pinch. Shooting perhaps a bit too high in

terms of the kind of talent DEFA could realistically hope to attract, the director regarded Ingrid Bergman, Ulla Jacobsson and Hildegard Knef as appropriate models for the crew's astrobiologist in the event of Signoret's unavailability. For the role of the African communications officer, the director envisioned a performer with the presence of Harry Belafonte. As the Berlin crisis heated up during pre-production, however, any hopes of signing western actors were abandoned. The part slated for Montand was eventually cast with Czech actor Oldrich Lukes. The African astronaut was played by a Kenyan medical student enrolled at the time in Leipzig. Actress Yoko Tani, a former cabaret and *varieté* dancer born in Paris as the daughter of a Japanese diplomat, eventually played the astrobiologist. While Tani was no Signoret, DEFA nevertheless boasted of having signed the relatively well-known starlet in various film dealings.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the realization that the film industry needed a boost and their willingness to support promotional efforts, culture officials continued to regard the star phenomenon with suspicion. Published in 1962, *Unsere Filmsterne* (Our Film Stars) provides a good example of the contentious nature of star discourse during the early 1960s. Although the book's "popular" format of actors' photos and production stills with accompanying texts endorsed the idea of stars in the GDR, its preface, penned by none other than the Deputy Minister of Culture, indicates how the makers of cultural policy hoped to frame the discourse on stardom. Making it clear what popular GDR actors were not, the official wrote, "Although the title of this book is 'Film Stars,' this is by no means a call for 'star' arrogance [...] which we unfortunately so often find in the case of the 'top performers' in the western film industry."<sup>7</sup> Additionally, the book's title refrained from using the ideologically objectionable English word "star," which was otherwise in common use as loan word. The title's "our" also signaled the calculated distinction between serious GDR film personalities and their shallow capitalist counterparts. Used to navigating such officious preambles, which were frequent appendages to publications of all types, GDR film fans no doubt skipped directly to the photos and commentaries, where they could find background information on DEFA productions and the lives of prominent GDR actors in far more moderate ideological tones.

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Treatments of stardom could be considerably more charged than the critique of western stardom found in the preface to *Unsere Filmsterne*. This collectible pales in comparison to the 1963 film book entitled *Mach dir ein paar schöne Stunden* (Enjoy Yourself for a Few Hours). Unobtrusively subtitled on the inside title page, “Film Art versus the Economic Miracle”—the allusion of course being to the economic revival of West Germany—the book contained a sweeping condemnation of the neighboring film industry and its “star trusts”:

[T]he economy grinds down starlets and stars alike. As long as they are in demand, they’re hunted and pursued, have to shoot and act in the theater, appear on television, do dubbing and local appearances, smile, serve as attractions for premieres, festivals, receptions, and parties; they make recordings, give autographs, advertise for margarine and scented soaps, provoke scandals and love affairs; they’re forced to consult plastic surgeons, numb themselves with nicotine and alcohol, and represent an “economic miracle” that only needs them for a brief engagement. Because all too soon they’ve been consumed and expended and have to make room for a new “product” that will be just as quickly sold and discarded.<sup>8</sup>

But as was the case with the aforementioned star book, a censorship-seasoned public was unlikely to have been detained by such vehement rhetoric. GDR readers approached such texts strategically, effortlessly circumventing ideology and eagerly consuming the gossip, scandals, and images that were the aim of the authors’ condemnation. On the whole, star discourse in East Germany was both heterogeneous and contradictory, with anti-western posturing coexisting uneasily with the publicity put out by DEFA’s distributor for its own films and imports and the relatively light-handed coverage supplied by *Filmspiegel* and other periodicals.

### MANFRED KRUG: THE SUBVERSIVE HERO

In the mid-1960s, one of the most visible personalities on the GDR entertainment scene was Manfred Krug, who was well-known as a jazz musician and had toured and recorded a number of popular titles with the ingeniously named “Jazz-Optimists” and other groups. Krug had by this time also played leading parts in several television and DEFA films, among the latter, Ralf Kirsten’s *Auf der Sonnenseite* (On the Sunny Side, 1962), the actor’s breakthrough role. The film—as DEFA never failed to note in its promotional material—was loosely based on Krug’s life and also featured music by him and the “Jazz-Optimists.” The title track was a hit on GDR radio.

As a prominent performer with a large youth following, Krug’s activities on and off the screen and stage did not go unnoticed by state officials, who were eager to take advantage of the actor’s celebrity to further cultural policy objectives. At the same time, they also recognized that an actor like Krug, whose popularity was based on his reputation for ignoring the party line, could easily become a serious political liability. Although it was possible to discipline disobedient personalities through orchestrated media campaigns, publications, or performance bans—familiar practices used against troublesome public figures—restrictive measures generally only served to stir up resentment among GDR citizens.<sup>9</sup> Krug would later experience such restrictions following his support in 1976 of dissident poet Wolf Biermann, shortly after which the actor left the GDR for West Germany.

The subversive edge to Krug’s persona had its roots both in association with jazz, which was rejected by culture functionaries as another form of western decadence and “pessimism” (hence the thinly concealed pun behind the name “Jazz-Optimists”), and in a number of early film performances in which he had been repeatedly cast as a young, leather-jacketed tough guy on the margins of society, a kind of GDR “rebel without a cause.” The studio heavily publicized Krug’s pre-DEFA career as a steelworker, fostering the image of an actor in touch with the concerns of the common people. Krug’s live performances in particular were characterized by a covert pact with his audience in which insinuation,

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gesture, and irony transported rebelliousness, if not outright political dissent.

While film regulators in the GDR were potentially well positioned to influence filmmaking by monitoring the scriptwriting process and post-production editing, controlling the meanings that audiences could construct in conjunction with the star was difficult. The reason for this lies in the discursive complexity of the star phenomenon. The star is a highly composite textual phenomenon, consisting not only of the image on the screen, but also of the texts produced by film agents and studios and those disseminated in various other media.<sup>10</sup> In recognition of this complex structure, the star has been aptly described as “an intertextual construct, produced across a range of media and cultural practices, that is capable of intervening in the working of particular films.”<sup>11</sup> This notion that the star image can impinge on the film text suggests the point at which the star phenomenon and political interests collide. For the possibility that an actor’s persona can imbue dialogue and gesture with shades of meaning external to the diegesis complicates the work of the censor trying to limit a film’s possible interpretations. Stars are not merely images on the screen sprung upon naive spectators, but spaces for the projection of political, sexual, and social fantasies.

Thus, casting an actor like Manfred Krug, who by 1965 had earned a reputation for nonconformity and outspokenness, could raise expectations about the roles in which he was cast. Whether singing opposite a Bulgarian starlet in Vladimir Jantshev’s comedy adventure *Die antike Münze* (The Ancient Coin, 1965) or in the guise of an antifascist hero of the Spanish Civil War in Frank Beyer’s *Fünf Patronenhülsen* (Five Cartridges, 1960), the Krug persona remained present in the imaginations of GDR spectators as something larger than any one role, charging films with latent ironies and double meanings.

In mid-1965, two Central Committee departments conferred to examine the results of a running probe concerning the prominent and problematic actor. The exchange between the *Abteilung Sicherheitsfragen* (Security Department) and *Abteilung Kultur* (Culture Department) had to do with the perception that Krug’s public statements on the GDR’s armed forces were not sufficiently supportive. Behind the Security Department’s concern about Krug’s position on the army was the state’s

continuing effort to increase the acceptance of mandatory military service, which had been instated in early 1962. At the same time that Krug's sentiments regarding the army were being scrutinized by the Central Committee, the party's youth magazine was using Joachim Kunert's *Die Abenteuer des Werner Holt* (The Adventures of Werner Holt, 1965), a DEFA feature about a young German soldier who comes to realize the immorality of the war, to begin a multi-issue campaign for airing official positions on western militarism, the GDR's legitimacy as an antifascist state, and the historical significance of military service in the GDR.<sup>12</sup>

Citing the actor's growing fame, the security official investigating Krug urged the Culture Department to step up its efforts to control him. Recognizing the potential for public embarrassment, the well-informed security official noted that Krug was under consideration for the leading role in a historical documentary on the German communist Richard Sorge.<sup>13</sup> From the perspective of the SED, an actor who could not be relied upon to support the proper standpoint on the defense of the GDR off screen was clearly a rather poor candidate to play such an exemplary political figure on screen.

In response to the Security Department's inquiry into the Krug investigation, culture officials urged studio administrators to arrange a meeting with the actor to discuss his public statements on the military.<sup>14</sup> DEFA later reported back to the Central Committee that the requested discussion had taken place and that Krug had no intentions of creating any problems in the event of his assignment to the army reserves. In Krug's defense, the studio head suggested that Krug's seeming uncooperativeness merely reflected his concern that his physical condition was below par and that he might be harassed due to his fame.<sup>15</sup> According to the studio, in the interest of dispelling any rumors that he was a "refusenik," Krug was prepared to go on tour for army units and to appear in uniform at all events, televised or otherwise, in which he was required to participate. The studio head also promised that his star performer would behave himself at conscription interviews and in related situations. Emphasizing that DEFA had big plans for Krug in 1966, the studio head requested that any engagements be cleared with him beforehand. In his report, the studio head also suggested a way of handling Krug that would be more effective in terms of public relations and less disruptive of

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DEFA's production plan than his enlistment. He wrote, "My recommendation in this whole matter is to appoint Manfred Krug—if he is in fact to be drafted—to the Erich Weinert Ensemble. This [having Krug join the army orchestra] would generate more public interest than assigning him to six weeks of training duty somewhere."<sup>16</sup>

Apparently satisfied with these assurances from the studio, and no doubt aware of the limits to the kind of influence that could be effectively and inconspicuously exerted on Krug, culture officials reported back to the Security Department that the appropriate steps were being taken and that Krug appeared to be willing to help deflate damaging rumors surrounding his person. Taking the cue from the studio head, the suggestion was made to find a way of working with the difficult actor to promote a favorable image of military duty among GDR youths.<sup>17</sup>

Given his popularity, it was only fitting that Krug was cast to star in DEFA's most important project in its production plan for 1965—*Spur der Steine* (Trace of Stones), a film that was eventually withdrawn from distribution as the political tide turned against reform.<sup>18</sup> Based on the acclaimed novel by Erik Neutsch,<sup>19</sup> which had first appeared in serial form in *Junge Welt*,<sup>20</sup> the high-budget, 70mm release was originally scheduled to open in dual celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the Party and DEFA. Although *Spur der Steine* was ultimately produced as a standard-length feature film, initial plans were for nothing less than a two-part, 4500-4800 meter epic. To direct the film, the studio enlisted the services of an eager Frank Beyer, the respected director of *Fünf Patronenhülsen* (1960), the Spanish Civil War drama that also featured Krug in a prominent role.

The promotion of *Spur der Steine* reflected the studio's high hopes for the film as a way of combining an endorsement of liberalizing trends in GDR society with the entertainment appeal of a high-budget film with a star actor. In the publicity for the film, of course, the emphasis was on the latter. In this regard, the character of the press notices and promotional material that appeared in GDR media differed markedly from those for the rest of the films of its production year, several of which appealed to the same progressive policies as *Spur der Steine*. Despite the importance of the film's treatment of issues like party discipline, socialist development, and the integration of nonconformist elements into society,

the film's publicity was organized largely around the drawing power of actor Manfred Krug.

The build-up for the premiere of *Spur der Steine* commenced in Summer 1965 and culminated with a two-story billboard mounted in East Berlin's center, which depicted a swaggering Krug in the role of Balla, the head of a carpenters' brigade at a large industrial complex. Advertising such as this had far more in common with the publicity surrounding recent Krug genre-film vehicles than *Spur der Steine*'s serious subject matter would seem to warrant. A *Filmspiegel* preview went so far as to insinuate a sequel to *Mir nach, Canaillen!* (Follow Me, Scoundrels), a successful Rococo-era action comedy, in which Krug played a swashbuckling peasant-turned-rebel.<sup>21</sup> For this high-budget costume film, the actor even had a hand in shaping his role as co-author of the screenplay, which was shot in wide-format *Totalvision* (DEFA's answer to Cinemascope), ORWO-color, and the best sound system at



*Mir nach, Canaillen!*

the studio's disposal. For the elaborate outdoor premiere, Krug appeared on horseback in front of the screen in what the actor later recalled as "an extremely American entrance for the GDR."<sup>22</sup> Heralding a "new starring role for Manfred Krug," *Filmspiegel* published a two-column feature dedicated to the actor's new film and ventured an uncharacteristically racy title for a DEFA film, "At Sea, on Land, and in Bed."<sup>23</sup> A mounted, pistol-wielding Krug leaped from the flashy, color program

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put out for the film's promotion by Progress. Inside, fans were given a preview of the actor sailing out of a castle window and wooing female lead Monika Woytowicz.<sup>24</sup> Typical of Krug publicity, the caption supplied a still of Krug and a corseted Woytowicz played on the blurred lines of biography and screen persona indicative of star discourse, divulging that the actress was also Krug's partner off-camera.

The June 30, 1965 issue of *Filmspiegel* took a similar focus on Krug in reporting on the filming of *Spur der Steine*, trumpeting from its cover "Krug Takes to the Water!" The reference was to a notorious scene from the film's literary source in which a skinny-dipping Balla and crew throw the local guardian of law and order into a reflecting pond in front of the town courthouse. This same episode was also the subject of an *Neue Berliner Illustrierte* feature issue later in the year, which dedicated its cover to Krug and warned its readers with tongue in cheek: "The Balla brigadiers! In *Spur der Steine*—readers, there's no cause for alarm—even if they are coming to the theater with Manfred Krug at the fore!"<sup>25</sup> The feature contained a two-page spread with photos of an ear-ringed Krug in full gear, with the broad-rimmed hat and traditional costume of the carpenter's trade—an outfit that made him look like a cowboy straight off a Hollywood set. "That's Hannes Balla," says the caption, "[...] You're right, he looks like Manfred Krug. Whether or not you imagined the carpenter from Erik Neutsch's best-selling novel quite like this—soon you'll have the chance to meet DEFA's Balla yourselves."<sup>26</sup>

What is telling about the coverage of the pond scene is the way in which it adroitly played on the subversiveness associated with the Krug persona without openly condoning the irreverent treatment of state authority at the hands of the Balla brigade. By suggesting a discrepancy between the character in the novel, who becomes a party member and an exemplary worker, and the Krug persona, the text solicited the magazine's readership to consider how the anarchic actor would go about portraying this worker-hero. The captions supplied to the pond scene stills went on to sarcastically boast that the photos were so "exclusive" that they would not even be appearing in the completed film. This initially disconcerting news about the stills is diffused with the explanation that as opposed to the magazine's color photos, the film was being shot in black and white. Given the text's provocative undertone, sophisticated GDR readers no

doubt perceived behind this tease an allusion to the censor in the notion of somehow “absent” images. At the very least, the treatment of the scene ensured that future moviegoers would be alerted to see how far Krug and DEFA could go in representing the challenge to state authority embodied by the dousing of a GDR policeman.

As the magazine publicity surrounding the pond scene demonstrates, *Spur der Steine* offered scenarios that were perfectly suited for the unfolding of the subversive Krug persona. Not surprisingly, the majority of the changes demanded of the DEFA Studio during the production of *Spur der Steine* targeted scenes featuring Krug. However, despite numerous alterations, officials remained dissatisfied with the effort to dampen the actor’s impact through cuts and re-working the dialogue.<sup>27</sup>

The introduction of the Balla brigade in the film’s second sequence contains some of the film’s most visually striking images, and these play an important role in establishing the disruptive presence of the Balla figure. Exploiting the film’s widescreen format, the sequence begins with a shot of the brigade striding toward the camera seven abreast in the distinctive regalia of traditional German carpenters, with broad-rimmed hats and black leather vests evoking the imagery of Hollywood Westerns. Sporting cocked beers instead of revolvers, the brigadiers force their way through a crowd heading in the other direction to an official gathering.<sup>28</sup> “A rally in this heat,” mocks Balla, as he leads his boisterous troupe to a tavern out of sight of the proceedings. Balla’s dramatically choreographed entrance in this scene as the leader of a proletarian posse situated the character in the context of previous Krug roles, suggesting to the audience that it was in for a rather different sort of workplace epic.

With the momentum behind reform policies coming to a grinding halt in late 1965, the initial cut of *Spur der Steine* found culture officials scrambling to adjust to the new political course. In order to save the production, director Frank Beyer was forced to submit to the Ministry of Culture a list of alterations designed to tame the film’s more provocative scenes—half of which featured Manfred Krug. Despite the changes promised by director Beyer, not all of them were actually carried out. Culture functionaries remained discontented with *Spur der Steine* and the Balla figure in particular, whose rebelliousness was perceived as threatening to socialist morals. In acknowledgement of the influence of

Krug's persona in enhancing the attractiveness of Balla in the film, officials warned that moviegoers with uncertain political loyalties would uncritically identify with the character's disregard for authority. "There is no need," as one official remarked, "to emphasize the extent to which Manfred Krug's powerful performance encourages this effect."<sup>29</sup>

Manfred Krug's performance was, of course, by no means solely responsible for *Spur der Steine*'s ultimate withdrawal in summer 1966. In fact, the publicity surrounding the star actor actually contributed to the pressures on film administrators to arrange a displayable version of the film despite the objections of the Central Committee. With the support of a few culture bureaucrats who had supported the film reaching the theaters, DEFA even succeeded in securing the controversial film's release, although it was brief. *Spur der Steine* was removed from circulation almost immediately under the pretense of public outrage over the portrayal of contemporary GDR society.

In contrast to director Frank Beyer, who was banned from the studio, Manfred Krug suffered no noticeable setback as a result of the scandal of the ban. He continued to entertain GDR audiences—and ruffle the feathers of culture bureaucrats—until his relocation to West Germany in response to Wolf Biermann's forced expatriation. Characteristic of the relationship between the star and the state, the SED grudgingly agreed to allow Krug to leave the country rather than suffer additional bad press at the hands of one of the GDR's most popular performers.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>. "Vorlage für das Politbüro des Zentralkomitees der SED, Betr.: Die Verbesserung der DEFA-Spielfilmproduktion im Jahre 1961/62" (September 28, 1961, SAPMO: J IV 2/2 A855).

<sup>2</sup>. "Treff bei Treff," *Filmspiegel* (January 25, 1963): 18-19.

<sup>3</sup>. *Neue Berliner Illustrierte* 1 (1965): 13.

<sup>4</sup>. Reproduced in Manfred Krug, "Ich bin immer, wie ich bin . . . Ein Gespräch mit Manfred Krug," *Manfred Krug: Die großen Kinofilme*, Ralf Schenk ed. (Berlin: Parthas, 1997), 16.

<sup>5</sup>. Editors' note: *Der schweigende Stern* was also known in English as *Spaceship Venus Does Not Reply*, *Silent Star*, and *Planet of the Dead*.

<sup>6</sup>. See Stefan Soldovieri, "Socialists in Outer Space: East German film's Venusian Adventure," *Film History* 10.3 (1998), 388.

<sup>7</sup>. *Unsere Filmsterne* (Berlin: Junge Welt, 1962).

<sup>8</sup>. Joachim Hellwig and Claus Ritter, *Mach dir ein paar schöne Stunden* (Berlin: Henschel, 1963), 10. The authors ventured an even more pointed attack in their comparison of Kurt Maetzig's *Ehe im Schatten* (Marriage in the Shadows, 1947) and Harald Braun's FRG feature, *Zwischen Gestern und Morgen* (Between Yesterday and Tomorrow, 1947), which likened the West German film industry to Nazi cinema. Another example of anti-western polemics in the area of film commentary is Claus Ritter's *Seid nett zueinander* (Berlin: Henschel, 1966), directed against Westerns, horror films, science fiction, and other genre films.

<sup>9</sup>. For an autobiographical account of his troubles following the Biermann affair, see Manfred Krug, *Abgehauen* (Düsseldorf and Munich: Econ, 1996).

<sup>10</sup>. On the nature of the star text, see Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (London: British Film Institute, 1986). The classic early account is Edgar Morin's *Stars*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Grove, 1960).

<sup>11</sup>. Christine Gledhill, "Introduction," *Stardom: The Industry of Desire*, ed. Gledhill (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), xiv.

<sup>12</sup>. For the first installment, see "Wie stehen wir zu Werner Holt," *Junge Welt* 20/21 (February 1965): 3.

<sup>13</sup>. Letter from Borning to Kimmel (April 26, 1965, SAPMO: IVA2/906/10). Plans for a GDR feature dedicated to Sorge probably arose following the critical official reception in the GDR of Yves Ciampi's *Qui êtes-vous Monsieur Sorge?* (Who Are You, Mr. Sorge?, 1960). This French/Italian/Japanese co-production was released in the GDR in 1965 as *Wer sind sie, Dr. Sorge?* See the disapproving review of the film by GDR critic and culture functionary Horst Pehnert, *Junge Welt* (February 3, 1965): 7.

<sup>14</sup>. Letter from Kimmel to Mückenberger (May 3, 1965, BArch: DR 117 A/240).

<sup>15</sup>. Real or feigned, Krug's apprehensions about possible maltreatment at the hands of army regulars may have been the inspiration for Wolfgang Luderer's comedy *Der Reserveheld* (Hero of the Reserves, 1965), featuring actor Rolf Herricht in the role of Ralf Horricht, a drafted film star.

<sup>16</sup>. Letter from Mückenberger to Kimmel (May 31, 1965, BArch: DR 117 A/240).

<sup>17</sup>. Letter from Kimmel to Borning (June 3, 1965, SAPMO: IV A2/906/10).

<sup>18</sup>. Among the controversial films of 1965/66, *Spur der Steine* has received the most attention. For a description of the film's complicated production history, see "Gespräch mit Frank Beyer," *Regie: Frank Beyer*, ed. Ralf Schenk (Berlin: Hentrich, 1995), 8-105; Joshua Feinstein, "The Triumph of the Ordinary: Depictions of Daily Life in the East German Cinema, 1956-66," dissertation, Stanford University, 1995, who sees the film as "the last major attempt by an East German director to present a critical yet still affirmative vision of the GDR as a forward-moving society" (250); and Stefan Soldovieri, "Negotiating Censorship: GDR Film at the Juncture of 1965/66," dissertation, University of Wisconsin Madison, 1998, particularly Chapter 5, "Censored Stars: Frank Beyer's *Spur der Steine*," 171-216. See also J.H. Reid's earlier, "Erik Neutsch's *Spur der Steine*: The Book, the Play, the Film," *Geist und Macht: Writers and the State in the GDR*, eds. Axel Goodbody and Dennis Tate (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1992), 58-67, and Hans Lohmann, "'Kellerfilme' damals und heute," *Beiträge zur*

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*Film- und Fernsehwissenschaft* 40 (1991): 30-49. Without referring to the context of stardom, Lohmann's highly theoretical article touches on the concerns of the following discussion in its attention to the film's various registers and subtexts.

<sup>19</sup>. Erik Neutsch, *Spur der Steine* (Halle: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1964).

<sup>20</sup>. Negotiations for the rights to film Neutsch's novel were already underway in mid 1963 even before the last installment had been completed. DEFA was so eager to acquire the rights that the studio agreed to pay an initial 12,000 marks for the novel even though it was still in progress. This was the sum the studio typically offered for published works of fiction. Letter from Wischnewski to Neutsch (May 14, 1963, BArch: DR 117 A/1188).

<sup>21</sup>. "Mir nach, Canaillen," *Film Spiegel* (June 30, 1965): 6.

<sup>22</sup>. Krug, 16.

<sup>23</sup>. "Zu Wasser, zu Lande und im Bett," *Film Spiegel* 17 (August 21, 1964): 19.

<sup>24</sup>. Among the anecdotes circulating in the press about this film was that Krug had learned to ride horseback in a short two weeks and that he had performed all but one of his own stunts.

<sup>25</sup>. *Neue Berliner Illustrierte* 45 (1965).

<sup>26</sup>. *Neue Berliner Illustrierte* 45 (1965).

<sup>27</sup>. For information on the film's censorship, see Feinstein, Schenk, and Soldovieri.

<sup>28</sup>. The scene has often been used to draw parallels to *The Magnificent Seven* (John Sturges, 1960). See Lohmann 37, and Feinstein 263.

<sup>29</sup>. "Kritische Überlegungen zur dramaturgischen Konzeption der Egel-Beyerischen Filmversion des Neutsch-Romans *Spur der Steine*" (July 8, 1966, BArch: DR 117 A/1188).

**FILMMAKING AFTER THE WENDE:  
A PERSONAL STORY**

Tamara Trampe

**EDITOR'S NOTE**

*Tamara Trampe, in addition to being a noted documentary filmmaker, has served as dramaturge<sup>1</sup> on over twenty full-length documentary and feature films—both at the DEFA Studios and since German reunification. Her acclaimed documentary portrait of a Stasi psychologist, Der schwarze Kasten: Versuch eines Psychogramms (Black Box, 1994, co-authored with Johann Feindt), was screened in conjunction with the AICGS workshop. Trampe also serves on the selection committee for the Leipzig International Festival of Documentary and Short Films. Her current work reflects the ongoing concern with eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union apparent in her essay here. She is working on a film in Ukraine to be called Die sieben Träume meiner Tante Tanja (The Seven Dreams of My Aunt Tanya), and on a film on young Chechen refugees called Weisse Raben (White Ravens). An expanded version of her contribution here is to become a book, published with the support of the DEFA-Stiftung.*

Several days ago some friends and I went to Café Burger, a so-called *Szenekneipe* (a currently “in” pub) located in Berlin’s center in the former East. The café is dark and the equipment, floor lamps from the 1950s, small round tables and the GDR wallpaper with big flowers were inherited from the former owner. We were sitting there on our uncomfortable chairs for quite a while when a very thin, pale man came to our table and said, “Here you will not be served. Self service.” Immediately I started to laugh—a defense mechanism left over from a long-gone period of dealing with unfriendly waiters. While I was still laughing the man said, “Oh Tamara—how nice to see you.” I had not seen Karli, a director and colleague from DEFA, and one of the co-founders of the political party Demokratischer Aufbruch (Democratic Renewal) in 1990, for nine years. One day, on a windy suburban express train platform, he whispered in my ear a bit of confidential information that two days later became the

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headline in all the newspapers: a member of the executive committee of the SED—a lawyer—was unmasked as an informer of the *Stasi*, the East German secret service. Karli had unmasked him. I had not seen him since then. Here in this dark pub, he enjoyed hearing me laughing as loud as ever.

“Did you know that I am living in your former flat?” he asked.

I remember very well that the apartment is small and dark, even in summer. I did not like the apartment. I was not happy there.

“I have been living there, not alone, for three years,” he said.

I started smiling—he is not alone.

“I live there with a Mongolian.”

Oh that’s it, I thought. One alone cannot pay the rent.

“And in which room do you live?” I asked.

“In the children’s room—the dark, little one in the back.”

“And the Mongolian is living in the two big rooms in the front part?”

“There must be six by now,” he said.

“What, six Mongolians?”

“After a fortnight he asked me if his wife could move in, too. How can one answer such a question? Then the wife came with the two children, and suddenly her brothers were there, too. What should I have done? There was no place for them to go.”

I was invited to participate in this workshop to speak about “filmmaking after the *Wende*”—the change of power or the big changes in the East, as it is often called. So I sat in front of the computer to compose my contribution. I am not a film scholar, or a journalist, sociologist or statistician. I am a dramaturge. And I have my problems with the word *Wende*. What does it mean? What changed and what did it change into? There were and are several expressions for the historic moment referred to as the *Wende*. It is called a “start” or a “new beginning,” the “upheaval,” the “collapse;” and the totally unaware call it the “revolution.” It means something different for everyone. While considering this, I decided to tell some stories about my friends. Maybe we will find something in their personal histories that can inform us about life after November 1989. As most of my friends are filmmakers, it will have something to do with filmmaking. The anecdote about Karli might be one example of the changes in people’s lives after 1989.

### LIFE AFTER SWEEPING DISMISSALS

Karl Heinz Heymann is a graduate from the Hochschule für Film und Fernsehen Konrad Wolf (Academy for Film and Television) in Potsdam-Babelsberg. After finishing school he got a job as a junior film director in the DEFA studio for feature films. Like most of the graduates, he spent years pitching stories or working as an assistant director, making three films. Then he—like all of us—was fired. It was then that he finally wanted to be active, to no longer wait for the changes to come but instead do something, get involved, seek out and speak the truth. And truth was simply to say something that had not been said before. The party for which he had worked so hard in the first months of its existence did not survive the first free elections. The lawyer, who was unmasked as a *Stasi* informer, now heads a successful firm in West Berlin. Karli runs a pub that preserves a lifeless atmosphere—the one he hated so much that all the heroes of his films were desperately fighting against it. He lives in the smallest room of his apartment because he is unable to pay the rent by himself and because he, as a socialized citizen of the GDR, cannot throw someone out of an apartment if there is no other place for that person to go. He has not made another film since 1989.

For most of the artistic colleagues from the DEFA studios for feature films, the day they lost their jobs marked a break in their lives that was not a change for the better. In my group of dramaturges in the DEFA studio for feature films, where I had been working for twenty years, I had nine colleagues—four women and five men. By March 1991, the group no longer existed. In 1989, 2,400 people were employed in the studio. By the end of 1990 more than half had been fired. At first the creative personnel were fired: the directors, cinematographers, dramaturges, set designers—the film-specific specialists. Only those dealing with projects still in production were allowed to stay. Because I was involved in two films, I was one of the last remaining employees. The two directors, Andreas Höntsch and Ulrich Weiß, had already been waiting for years to realize their projects. The day I lost my job was the first day of shooting for the film *Der schwarze Kasten* (The Black Box, 1993).

Besides me, no one from my group is working in filmmaking any more. And even I am working only very sporadically in this profession. No one likes

to pay for a dramaturge; it is not calculated into film budgets. In the first years after the *Wende*, I had to fight for every payment for my script consultations. Too often, it was supposed that developing a film story, analyzing, and structuring it is just a hobby. There were three other women in my group. Heidi became the director of the first women's shelter in Potsdam. She founded it in 1991 and is still working there, as dedicated today as she was in the beginning. Another woman works on children's video projects. That means she is doing poorly-paid social work with children in the new housing projects in Brandenburg. Sixteen percent of the children's parents are unemployed. Another woman, Ellen, we have lost track of. She has broken off contact with everyone. She was the most gifted one, very thin-skinned and vulnerable, rigorous in her work and demanding of herself.



*Der schwarze Kasten*

There were five men in our group: Werner receives his pension; Manfred is working in an environmental testing office; two have vanished; and Torsten is a successful author. He is the youngest. For him, the year 1989 really was a change. He did not feel at ease in the studio, he could not work to his potential and felt constantly restricted. In the first year after he lost his job he worked as a journalist, wrote screenplays, and tried to get a job as a dramaturge in several production companies. Then he decided to only write scripts. In the

last few years, the films for which he wrote scripts were screened in movie theaters as well as shown on television. Not long ago he bought a small digital camera and shot three films—one in Mozambique, one in Cuba, and one in the United States. All three are portraits of women, scraping through as strangers in a foreign country. He gives lectures on film analysis at Berlin universities and recently applied for a professorship for dramaturgy at the Academy for Film and Television Konrad Wolf in Potsdam-Babelsberg.

In the studio for feature films, there were four groups of dramaturges. The biographies of these colleagues are very similar to those of the colleagues from my group. Hardly any one of them is working in his profession, and only a few have found alternatives that make them happy. It is the same in the other artistic fields. The directors of the older and middle generations, with the exception of a few, were not able to find work at the television stations or to make feature films for the cinema funded by the film support offices. In the GDR they had been well-known, they had had an oeuvre, but in unified Germany, they were just no-names. They were fired and had to work as freelancers without any financial resources. The new production structures were unknown to them, and the few producers from the east who tried to establish themselves in the first years were new and inexperienced in the market, having neither contacts nor financial resources.

In the first years, the directors of the old and middle generations tried to reflect on their experiences and on their lives in the GDR. Often those lives were linked with war memories and the knowledge about German war crimes. Many of them shared the longing described by Brecht in his children's hymn:

Do not save grace nor effort, not passion or reason so that  
a good Germany will blossom like another good country.  
So that the nations will not pale as in the face of robbers...

The question asked by those who came back to Germany after emigration, from prisons and camps was, "What shall a society look like in which such barbarism is not possible?" In the beginning, many regarded highly the expropriation of the heavy industry that encouraged and supported the National Socialist system. But the answer to this vital question—the true

development of a counter-model, the socialist society—came more and more into doubt. These were the things the older filmmakers wanted to examine. However, no one was interested in it. The GDR was history; Germany is the future. Maybe it will take another ten years before the powerful stories about the lives of people in the east can be told again—stories that are not only based on clichés or stereotypes of East Germans. Easterners are often portrayed as living bleak, unhappy lives, and are often humiliated as the poor yet clever characters—particularly in comedies.

### **CULTURAL MISCONCEPTIONS**

In 1990 I sat in a suburban train, traveling from West Berlin to the East. In front of me were a couple and their daughter from Bavaria. The mother was whispering to the child, “We are crossing the border now.” She took the child tightly by the hand. And she said, “Please do not stare at the people. They were poor and for a long time they did not have enough to eat.” I was speechless. Sure, the young woman does not represent the West, but only a few months later I sat with one of the best-known contemporary German philosophers in a panel discussion. Eight West Germans spoke about the East Germans. I was the only one from the East. It was as if they did not know I was there. And this intelligent, educated woman said, “We must be prepared for a long period of patience. The dictatorship has broken these people. They are helpless and disordered.” I asked her, “Do I look like a helpless, disordered person? What do you think you can do to help me?” Suddenly there was an immense silence, then the talk simply continued. Many things have changed since then, but many things were simply swept under the carpet. That is something that Germans are experts at doing.

### **WORKING UNDER NEW CONDITIONS**

Ulrich Weiß, one of the most interesting, gifted people I met, was always handled with suspicion in the GDR—in the studio for documentary films as well as in the studio for feature films, to which he transferred. His stylized, cryptic films were always observed with distrust by the authorities. After making four films, he quit. For eight years (I was his dramaturge in the last years), we

were continually making new proposals for films, but none of them was realized. Then in 1991, the year of the great firings, he was allowed to make a film we had proposed many years ago. *Miraculi* would have been a real provocation in those days. In 1991 the film went nearly unnoticed; after being shown at a special screening, it disappeared for good. Before 1989, Ulrich Weiß had reacted to all rejection with irony and immense self-discipline. He must have used up all his energy for this project; afterwards he fell ill and did not become well enough again to fight for new film projects.

At the beginning of the year 2000, he sent me a script. He started working again. Similar to all his scripts, it is a story about the inability of the petty bourgeois to renounce private ownership. Ownership, the paradigm of petty bourgeois thinking, has become the leading state of mind penetrating all classes and social strata. Inherent in the ability to tempt the petty bourgeois, as a mass phenomenon, is the constant danger that violence and brutality—and their counterpart, sentimentality—will emerge. The subtitle of the script is, “Are the petty bourgeois capable of learning? Or does only the lightning that kills him enlighten him?” This is not the subject everyone is waiting for. Ulrich passed the script around to several big production companies, and while many found it gripping, none has given him any money for it. Several days ago he told me that he is working on a second script. Laughing, he said, “Listen Tamara, forty years ago I knew a man who said at a family gathering, ‘Dear guest, please help yourself, there is more food in the cupboards! But you probably don’t want more...’”

Only the very young people who were in their early twenties in 1989 when they left film school have been able to work continuously. Andreas Kleinert and Andreas Dresen have become well-known directors in Germany. Their recent films, *Wege in die Nacht* (Paths into the Night, Andreas Kleinert, 1999) and *Nachtgestalten* (Night Shapes, Andreas Dresen, 1999) have won national as well as international prizes. Both are working on new projects. The adoption of, and dealing with, the new political, social, and cultural situation define the topics of their films. Their stories are set primarily in the east and they like to work with actors from the former east.

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**DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKING DURING  
AND AFTER THE *WENDE***

The working situation for documentary filmmakers has been totally different—at least for the time being. The period between 1989 and 1993 was the time when most documentaries were made. The change in the atmosphere in the country was noticeable to everyone. Starting in January 1989, there were demonstrations in Leipzig. The filmmakers wanted to shoot material but were unable to do so. The technical equipment belonged to the studio, and they could not get permission to use it. In his urgent application for shooting, Thomas Heise explained that he would like to film the people who are working while others are celebrating. The celebration was the anniversary of the founding of the GDR in October 1989. He received permission to shoot. On that special day, there were demonstrations and confrontations with the police and military. Heise's cinematographer, Sebastian Richter, shot the first pictures that did not come from television reports.

Thomas Heise was not a colleague from the studio. He had been expelled from the film school for rebelliousness. When ostracized, he always reacted by immersing himself in work. When he was not allowed to make films, he wrote radio plays or worked as a stage director. And when he could not do that any longer, he worked on the stage sets of Heiner Müller's adaptation of *Titus*, using an empty factory with street kids from the new housing projects. He has made two films: One about juveniles who shout right-wing slogans out of boredom and frustration, and another film about a spy in the secret service who changed his identity so often that he lost his own. Because the secret service no longer existed, the character was unemployed and terrorized his family. At the moment, Thomas Heise is looking for funding to make a film about his former school class. I asked him what he will do if he does not get the money, to which he replied, "I rediscovered such a wonderful play. I will look for some kids and then start again." Thomas will always work, whether the conditions are good or bad. And the conditions for documentary filmmakers are bad—worldwide. Documentaries do not make profits in theaters, and it is hardly possible for the artistic documentary to appear on television.

I remember very well those first two years when we thought we should be in the streets day and night. Just shortly after the Wall came down in November 1989, we—four documentary filmmakers from the east and four from the west—met in a café to found a production group, which we called *Blick ins Land* (View of the Country). We dreamed of documenting the first ten years of the changes in Germany. The first omnibus film (as we call a film for which various directors shoot episodes) was made with the title *Im Glanze dieses Glücks* (In the Brightness of this Happiness, 1990). Already at the beginning of shooting, some members left the group. One German Jew, born in Argentina, wanted to have no part of the German feelings. “That is too loud for me, too bombastic. The world is bigger, and it has totally different problems.” We made the film without her, but have remained friends. Then two East German colleagues left the group. In the end we were four—two colleagues from the east and two from the west. We were all not happy with this first project and did not produce a second film. We all spoke German but it was not the same language. We had to get to know each other before we could learn to respect one another. Without respect, one could not work together.

To me, the most beautiful part of the film is a portrait of two workers made by Dieter Schumann. He very carefully observed two men, who anticipate that their factory will be closed soon and that the loss of their jobs will also mean the loss of their center of life. Work not only meant money but also friendship, conversation, and having fun together—simply said, it meant daily life. Dieter Schumann belonged to a generation of young documentary directors in Berlin. He lives as his protagonists; he speaks their language and knows their gestures. And he understood their silence. This part of the film tells you more about the feelings of people who were unexpectedly forced into a totally different world and try to get along in it, something well-meaning colleagues from the west could not capture. Often, they only look at the phenomena and seldom look inside.

One year later, Dieter Schumann founded—together with a group of documentary filmmakers from the Berlin studio—the regional film center Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania and built up a regional film support office. They founded an art film house, which they now run, as well as the Film Art Festival Schwerin that celebrated its tenth anniversary this year. Every year a film workshop takes place, where funded film projects are presented and discussed. Unfortunately, Dieter Schumann does not make

films anymore, but the work he is doing now is probably much more important than making a film.

### WOMEN FILMMAKERS

Few women have survived the competition in the market as filmmakers, but two of the most important films shot after 1989 that subtly reflect this period were made by women: *Verriegelte Zeit* (Locked-Up Time, 1991), by Sybille Schönemann, and *Prenzlauer Berg* (1991) by Petra Tschörtner. Sybille Schönemann returned to question those who had put her and her husband in prison after they had applied for emigration visas from the GDR. She asked them how they feel today about what they did to her and her family. It has often been said that this is one of the few “women’s films.” However, I do not know what to do with that term. *Verriegelte Zeit* shows the personality of the filmmaker, which is extraordinary. It is her directness, her imperturbability and capability to ask questions to which answers cannot usually be found. “They knew that we had two little children and still they came to get us?” It is the judge’s silence that is more important than any spoken answer he could have given. Perhaps a man does not ask such questions. It could be. Then Sybille Schönemann made one or two television reports and a film about women who had survived the Theresienstadt concentration camp. After this last film, she retreated into herself and today she is considering entering a totally different profession.

Petra Tschörtner’s film about a city district in the east of Berlin was long believed to be lost because of the buy-out of DEFA films. Since then, one film print has been found, and the filmmakers are fighting for screening rights. It is a very special film because it shows the anarchy of the first months following the fall of the Wall. Some people believed that everything would be possible, while others suspected that life would totally change and people would see the future in a very pessimistic light. As one protagonist in the film said, “From now on money will rule. What should that be good for?” Today Petra Tschörtner is working as an assistant director. She has been looking for funding for three years to make her recent film project about a Georgian poet who lives in Germany. I was the interpreter and production manager for that project. Working in film has worn her out. It was not only the

terrible working conditions that we endured, like filming in Rwanda (in her case) or Bosnia, where I have shot. Rather, it was the combination of the historic indifference and ignorance of our colleagues from the west and the total imbalance between the time she has invested in the film and the disproportionate profit made, that made us so unhappy in our work. The lack of opportunity to present a film, resulting in a lack of reaction from the audience to the work, has led her to give up her profession. I do very much hope that this will only be temporary.

Another well-known female documentary filmmaker from the GDR is Helke Misselwitz, who is now a professor at the Academy for Film and Television Konrad Wolf in Potsdam-Babelsberg and is currently editing her new documentary about Silesia.

### **MEN FROM DEFA'S DOCUMENTARY TRADITION**

Most of the male documentary filmmakers from the former DEFA are working, and they have to deal with the same problems as their colleagues from the west. Some are working for television only, others remain true to the artistic documentary, which is much more difficult. Despite many difficulties, Volker Koepp has succeeded with his film *Herr Zwilling und Frau Zuckermann* (Mr. Zwilling and Ms. Zuckermann, 1999) that was screened for a whole year in the Berlin cinemas. The film has won many prizes and is still being shown at various festivals. Moving further east, Volker Koepp traveled to Czernovitz to create a wonderful dual portrait of two Jews who survived the Holocaust. The strength of Volker Koepp, like the strength of many documentary filmmakers from the GDR, is that he can get his protagonists to the point where they promote their own image in front of the camera. We see two strong, witty people who struggle in their daily lives but have never lost their sense of humor.

Of course I could mention other colleagues, such as Andreas Voigt, Winfried Junge, Achim Tschirner, or Gerd Kroske. But it is much more important to see their films—the films that they made in the GDR and those shot since the fall of the Wall—films that did not change after 1989. They have always focused on the people who are not normally at the center of the media's interest. These filmmakers have one thing in common: they deal very carefully with their

protagonists, without prejudice. The films are very well structured and they enhance the aesthetics of the picture.

### **POST-SCRIPTUM—BEYOND THE GERMAN BORDER**

For eight years I have been working on the selection committee for the International Leipzig Festival for Documentary and Animated Films, selecting the films for the current programs. The festival celebrated its forty-third anniversary this year. In 1989, like everything else in the GDR, it was about to be closed. Christiane Mückenberger, who has also contributed to this publication, is quite familiar with the festival's fight for survival; she participated in these struggles and was the first festival director after 1989. The region for which I am responsible as a selection committee member is the former USSR. I am very proud that we have continued to succeed in presenting exceptional films from this area. Many of these films have won prizes and went from Leipzig out into the world. But it gets more and more complicated to find films.

The filmmakers from the republics of the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States of the former USSR) are not only fighting for funding like the filmmakers of the rest of the world, they fight for their survival. The studios have been closed or privatized, and all of the production structures abandoned. In many former Soviet republics, people are struggling with the aftermath of war. One price paid for Russian independence is the destruction of the economic network to which all republics were tied. Many factories are closed because their suppliers are in Russia. In 1998 the unemployment rate in Georgia was 60 percent. Many filmmakers live in the diaspora, and those who stayed are taking on any jobs available to make a living. A few days ago I received a fax from a cinematographer from Georgia that read, "The film business is no longer in existence, and it seems it will take a long time for it to recover. I have found work in a bank. On the weekends I am shooting a long-term documentary of my beloved hometown Tbilisi with a small camera. I cannot give it up. I am a filmmaker, not a bank clerk."

**ENDNOTE**

<sup>1</sup>. The position of film *Dramaturg* (dramaturge) is somewhat specific to the GDR, although it has a long tradition in German theater which has been adopted in other countries. At DEFA, the role of a dramaturge was to work with producers, directors and the members of the production groups in the development of scripts and all related materials. This would also include research for notes to accompany the script on its way through the approval process, interpreting it for those involved in the production, and providing materials to accompany its distribution and make suggestions for the context in which it might be shown. In a highly regulated system such as DEFA before 1989, the dramaturge thus might be involved in the indirect influence outsiders might try to have on the film, or conversely play a role in defending controversial film projects against interference. These dynamics provide the background for Dieter Wolf's recent book, *Gruppe Babelsberg: Unsere nichtgedrehten Filme* (Berlin: Das Neue Berlin, 2000).

**DEFA: MOVING GERMANY INTO EASTERN EUROPE**

Katie Trumpener

**INTRODUCTION**

Over the last decade, DEFA films have made remarkable and powerful inroads into the North American university curriculum. This situation is in stark contrast to GDR literature, which before 1989 had a quiet presence in the university study of German, but whose hold on the Germanist imagination seems to have waned considerably since reunification. As I know from recent classroom experiences, many DEFA films do have an immediate, powerful effect on American students, rousing their curiosity about a hitherto almost unknown world, while at the same time (especially given their interest in locale and milieu) appearing to give them a visual, sensory, experiential access to that world.

Now that DEFA films seem on the verge of becoming “institutionalized” objects of study for western Germanists and film scholars, it seems time for some intellectual stock-taking of this emergent or rejoined field of study. The last decade has seen outstanding monographs and archival reconstructions by German scholars (most of them prominent film historians from the former GDR) and, during the last few years, the beginning of Anglo-American scholarship in this domain: a number of articles and book essays, a collection of conference papers, a few dissertations.<sup>1</sup> Although it may be too early to say where this research is headed, there seems all too little comparative work being undertaken—and this may have important intellectual consequences.

Most of the best recent work on DEFA has involved archival and institutional reconstruction, getting the overall contours to make sense internally, in relationship to GDR political history and cultural policy, and reintegrating banned, suppressed, and forgotten films into the larger fabric of GDR film life.<sup>2</sup> But there is articulation of a different kind still left to be done. This essay fairly briefly describes three comparative contexts in which DEFA needs to be situated, then discusses a fourth at greater length.

### CONNECTING KNOWLEDGE FROM LITERARY STUDIES

First of all, there is a real need to reconnect the older study of GDR literature to the recovered, reconstructed legacy of DEFA. Throughout the years of the GDR, most of the literature written by GDR writers, even when banned, suppressed, or not allowed to appear, did eventually appear—if not in the GDR itself, then in West Germany. What this meant was that western observers, critics, and book-lovers were able, if they were interested, not only to maintain a pretty good overview of what was going on in GDR literature, but that their vantage point was in many ways better than virtually any readers actually living in the GDR. Indeed, as we know, GDR publishers readily sold copies of controversial books to western libraries (in exchange for hard currency), even in cases where GDR readers had quickly snatched up all available domestic copies and were avidly eager for more, which would not be quickly (or perhaps even ever) forthcoming. Furthermore, western readers had ready access to “renegade” literature—so that they could read not only whatever GDR publishers were currently bringing out but also authors and works still banned in the GDR.<sup>3</sup> After 1989, arguably one of the main tasks of literary historians and critics from the former GDR has been to catch up fully, as it were, with their own literature, and to find ways (especially given now-opened archives of all kinds) to re-narrate and rethink the whole history of GDR literature.

Before 1989, western viewers had very limited access to DEFA film—and, it must be remembered, very little interest in it, either.<sup>4</sup> So as far as the west was concerned, the situation of film in the GDR was quite different than that of literature. After 1989, international attention to the *Kaninchenfilme* and other films—from *Sonnensucher* (Sunseekers, Konrad Wolf, DEFA, filmed 1958, released 1972) to *Jadup und Boel* (Rainer Simon, DEFA, filmed 1980/1981, released 1988)—which were stopped, suppressed or given delayed release, has sparked a lot of very interesting new archival research. It is worth highlighting, moreover, that some of the most interesting conjunctures between film and literature in the GDR only became visible after 1989 with the release of previously banned material. Yet, given the institutional divides in Germany itself between film studies and literary studies, such conjunctures have gone

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unnoticed and unstudied. It is striking (but hitherto apparently unremarked), for instance, that both Thomas Brasch's *Und über uns schließt sich ein Himmel aus Stahl* (A Sky of Steel Closes Above Us) and Jurek Becker's *Schlaflose Tage* (Sleepless Days), two well-known dissident texts published in the west in 1977 and 1978 in the wake of the Biermann affair, describe at length a tumultuous cinema premiere and cinema ban that, in retrospect, is clearly that of Frank Beyer's film *Spur der Steine* (Trace of Stones); in both texts, moreover, the memory of the *Spur der Steine* riots is shown as catalyzing or hardening (if belatedly, in the case of Becker's protagonist) a stance of conscious opposition to official GDR cultural policy.<sup>5</sup> The disjointed reception history of both of these books and of the films—the books' appearance only in the west, and at the same time as the authors' departure for the west, ensuring only a western reception; the film's complete disappearance from GDR screens, if not from GDR collective memory, in 1966—has meant that until 1990, when *Spur der Steine* was re-premiered at the Berlin Film Festival, there was almost no one who could both have seen the film and read the two books. What is especially striking, however, is that no one over the last decade seems to have put the pieces together. Nor has there been sustained discussion of the equally interesting fit between the banned television film *Geschlossene Gesellschaft* (Private Party), written by Klaus Poche, directed by Beyer, banned before it was aired, and recently re-circulated after all); Poche's banned 1978 novel *Atemnot* (which describes the mid-life crisis of a DEFA scriptwriter whose latest scenario—like the last dozen—has once again run into official trouble); and Manfred Krug's recent autobiography, *Abgehauen* (Gone) with its suggestive account of the effects of the ban on his morale.<sup>6</sup> So there is still much to be done to re-contextualize and reunite the scattered eastern/western, released/banned oeuvres of the most famous generation of GDR scriptwriter/novelists, such as Becker, Poche, Klaus Schlesinger, and Helga Schütz, and to think about the interaction between their novels and their films.

Secondly, GDR literature continues to provide us with many fascinating insights into GDR media life: cinema and television viewing practices, behavior and misbehavior (from political protest to rowdiness) in the cinema, the role of star cults in GDR youth culture, production conditions at DEFA, even the reception and discussion of films among

inmates in GDR prisons.<sup>7</sup> What GDR literary texts can tell us, indeed, is what cinema meant, how cinema worked, and why cinema mattered in the GDR. Post-1989 memoirs by key GDR cultural and literary figures, moreover, give us a new sense of what cinema consisted of from the point of view of its spectators. From their vantage point perhaps, in retrospect GDR cinema is not centered on DEFA at all; indeed, DEFA appears in these accounts (as in some GDR literature as well) as the least of it.

### **SPECTATORSHIP: GDR AUDIENCE EXPERIENCE**

As GDR cultural figures have long insisted, the advent of the Soviet films in 1945 was a revelation to cinemagoers raised with the films of the Third Reich. In the late 1940s, these films made a profound impact on many viewers, and were as or more important than the early DEFA films in changing consciousness, exposing German viewers to new points of view, and facilitating their identification with their former enemies. The bigger surprise (although it seems obvious enough in retrospect) is that Hollywood cinema also hit GDR viewers with the force of a revelation—whether or not they were able to admit it openly. Before 1961, we now learn from his 1991 memoir, even a fairly rigid ideologue like Hermann Kant made many illicit visits to West Berlin, driven by an “incurable love” of Hollywood movie stars.

At the time, Kant affirmed the advent of the Wall—indeed covered it as a correspondent for *Neues Deutschland*. Yet as he now claims in retrospect, he was actually full of ambivalence, for

I saw myself being shut out of the late show... Never again Broderick Crawford's misplaced nose bone and Victor Mature with the improbable eyebrows. Never again Laramie and New Orleans. Never again evil, as it only slowly revealed itself to Arthur Kennedy. Never again Marvin at poker and Fonda dying. That was supposed to be life? Without saloon, jail, palisade, lasso and tin coffeepot. Without stagecoach and cynical taxi driver. Without the singer with the spaghetti-straps and Whisky

Gulch. Without the sounds that they make in the movies when they build the gallows. Or when the barn begins to burn. Or the patrol car rolls over the gravel road. Or when the doctor finally throws the bullet cartridge into his washbasin. What kind of life was that supposed to be.<sup>8</sup>

There is much to be learned not only from the testimony of such memoirs, but from more empirical work on the sociology of GDR cinema reception more generally (perhaps following the model of interwar Britain's Mass Observation, with its relay of amateur self-observers and oral interviewers, or of Jackie Stacey's questionnaires to elderly British women about an earlier epoch of star culture).<sup>9</sup> Now that the dust has all cleared, now that everyone has been able to get their fill (as once before, in 1945) of long-withheld American media, what do they remember about their own postwar film viewing? What was memorable? What was formative? And what role, in fact, did DEFA play in their movie-going and cinema-based fantasy life? For publicists and critics in the GDR, DEFA's new releases were the obvious centerpiece of domestic film-culture. But was that equally true from the vantage point of GDR spectators?

And what were the specifically GDR contours of the *Kinosterben* (dying movie theaters) of the 1960s and 1970s? Did television offer a space of critical collective viewing in a way that the cinema did not? GDR writers generally depicted television watching as an invidious form of social control: television, they suggest, induces a passive torpor which synchronized, all too easily, with the political passivity required by a dictatorial state, and contributed further to the breakdown of personal and social relationships. GDR spectators, however, may have experienced television watching quite differently, as a collective activity that left them free to comment critically to intimates about what they were watching, without being subjected to the same implicit and explicit police controls they would experience in the cinema itself.<sup>10</sup> To understand what television meant in the GDR, however, we would first have to know in more detail what the cinema meant—what behaviors were condoned, prohibited or punished, what kind of atmosphere viewers experienced there.

We also need to know a great deal more about GDR cinema-going in pre-Wall West Berlin, especially West Berlin's notorious *Grenzkinos*: subsidized by the West German government, and located strategically near the main border crossings to East Berlin, these cinemas were open only to viewers who could show GDR identity cards, but offered cheap tickets which could be paid in GDR as well as western currency. The atmosphere in such cinemas seems to have been furtive and surreptitious: viewers looked over their shoulders, wondering if they would recognize fellow audience members, and if other audience members, in turn, could recognize them; presumably, members of the *Stasi* (State Security) frequented the theaters as well.<sup>11</sup>

### **TWO GERMAN FILM TRADITIONS MEET**

Despite some promising beginnings, we also do not know enough about how, especially in the era before 1961, the cinema cultures of the two Berlins and the two Germanys fit together.<sup>12</sup> Both eastern and western studios, in fact, tried to learn from each other's mistakes, and to capitalize on each other's successes. If by the 1950s the ordinary viewer in West Berlin seldom saw a movie from the east, that does not mean that studio officials, government officials (and to a lesser degree, critics) on both sides of the border didn't follow the other film scene quite carefully and anxiously.<sup>13</sup> In retrospect—and if the two bodies of film are viewed together—it is clear that there was a lot of influence and borrowing between the two cinemas, between western genres and eastern anti-genres. Such borrowing was probably meant, at least in part, to stem the crossing of cinephiles (mainly in one direction, from east to west). In addition, studios were faced with the crossing of cinema personnel as well: until 1961, a large percentage of DEFA's creative personnel commuted over from the west. (The building of the Wall was thus a crisis for the studio not only because of internal debates and morale problems but because it forced many cinema workers either to commit themselves more fully to the GDR or to leave DEFA altogether.)<sup>14</sup>

It has long been remarked that a director like Wolfgang Staudte, who began his directorial career in the Third Reich, and then made a number of key early DEFA films before moving to the west in the early 1950s,

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continued to make films on similar topics—and often with much the same aesthetic sense—as he had shown in his DEFA films. Even though it was long banned in the west, his film version of *Der Untertan* (The Kaiser’s Lackey, DEFA, 1951) was a decisive influence on several generations of western filmmakers; open homage to his film appears not only in Kurt Hoffmann’s *Wir Wunderkinder* (Aren’t We Wonderful?, FRG, 1958) but also in Edgar Reitz’ *Heimat* (FRG, 1981-1984). What has less often been considered are the GDR context and connection of émigré directors like Horst Bienek and Thomas Brasch who began making films after they left the GDR. Indeed, little attention has been given to the fact that Alexander Kluge and Hans Jürgen Syberberg, whose professional filmmaking careers began in the west and had important consequences for the development of its New German Cinema, both grew up in the GDR, and are clearly influenced by Brecht and GDR cultural debates.

Syberberg’s first, schoolboy film was a silent super-8 film documentation of rehearsals at the Berliner Ensemble in the early 1950s; almost two decades after he had emigrated to West Germany, Syberberg retrieved, reconstructed, and added voiceover to the footage. Released in 1971 as *Nach meinem letzten Umzug* (After My Last Move), narrated partly by Syberberg himself, partly by fellow GDR émigré Hans Mayer, the film meditates on Brecht’s travails under the censorship of socialist realism and, in the juxtaposition between its own text and image, begins to articulate what we have come to know as the “Syberbergian aesthetic.”<sup>15</sup> In retrospect, the film seems key to understanding Syberberg’s own formation; its West German reception, perhaps unsurprisingly, was utterly uncomprehending and unremittingly hostile.

Kluge’s breakthrough *Abschied von Gestern* (Yesterday Girl, FRG, 1965), describes the travels and travails of a Jewish refugee from the GDR, a naïve to whom the rituals, religiosity and rhetoric of the west nonetheless remain alien; when she and one of her boyfriends sing the German national anthem in bed together, they therefore sing different versions. Interestingly, *Abschied von Gestern* shares several important points of visual and thematic overlap with Kurt Maetzig’s exactly contemporaneous DEFA film, *Das Kaninchen bin ich* (The Rabbit is Me, completed 1965, released 1990)—from their interest in dog-training

as a metaphor for coercive socialization to the way they imagine their heroines' passage, suitcases dragging behind them, through the male-dominated cityscapes of postwar Germany. The resemblance is all the more striking since the directors could hardly have seen each other's work: Kluge's film emerged, to help inaugurate a West German New Wave cinema, at the very moment that Maetzig's still-unreleased film was under attack at the hands of the Eleventh Plenum, and was subsequently suppressed along with most of the films produced in 1965-66, a nascent GDR New Wave that never came to be.<sup>16</sup> Nor is this the only striking resemblance between the films of the two New Waves, one about to emerge, the other soon to be eclipsed. We can see a similar—this time more conscious—overlap and influence in Frank Vogel's 1962 DEFA film, *...und Deine Liebe auch* (And Your Love Too), a partly improvised, partly documentarist feature about the building of the Wall, the division of Germany, and the need to defend socialism. Its major stylistic influence, however, is Herbert Veseley's groundbreaking 1962 West German film *Das Brot der frühen Jahre* (The Bread of Those Early Years), which both dissects the alienations of West Berlin capitalism and mirrors them in its own form.<sup>17</sup> Such coincidences are worth pondering not only because it may help us reconcile, reunite and resynchronize the apparently divergent trajectories of the postwar German cinemas, but also because it suggests there was a *Zeitgeist* shared between the Germans.

### **THE INTER-RELATIONSHIP WITH EASTERN EUROPE**

The rest of this essay will examine another important context for GDR cinema, one that deserves much more attention than it is likely to receive, at least in the Anglo-American academy. That is the question of its interrelationship with the other cinemas of eastern Europe. I will suggest three rather different vantage points from which to consider this question. First of all, film culture and film reception in the GDR: in very concrete ways, the GDR was part of a film distribution and reception circuit which spanned eastern Europe as well as encompassing various Third World or decolonizing countries interested in socialism, from Cuba to Angola. Many Hollywood films never made it to the GDR at all—but

in exchange, Soviet, Polish, Hungarian, Czech, Rumanian, Bulgarian, Yugoslav, Chinese, Egyptian, and Mexican films circulated in very substantial numbers.

As Christiane Mückenberger has described in her illuminating essay, GDR directors and film people from other Warsaw Pact countries were able to use the Leipzig Film Festival and other eastern bloc film festivals to meet, see each other's work, and exchange ideas. Travel privileges, of course, remained in short supply, and the more aesthetically experimental and politically challenging films of the eastern European New Waves were never released in the GDR at all; after 1961, in particular, many GDR film people remained dependent on domestic festival screenings (including a host of semi-illicit, informal screenings alongside the official programs) and the informational screenings conducted at the Babelsberg film school.<sup>18</sup> There was thus an important disparity or gap between what domestic audiences were able to see, and what those involved in the film industry might have had access to—a potential problem of access and audience.

Nonetheless, interested GDR viewers were able to follow other eastern European cinemas quite closely—in regular cinemas, on television, and in domestic film magazines. In Berlin, especially, various foreign cultural institutions (House of Soviet Culture, etc.) provided continuous film programs, much the way the Goethe-Institut does in North America. Even in the provinces, cinema clubs gave cinephiles significant access, for instance, to much of the eastern European New Waves.

Here as elsewhere, GDR fiction is extremely helpful in conveying a visceral sense of just how this cinephile culture functioned. In Brigitte Reimann's unfinished novel *Franziska Linkerhand*, a young architect in a grim industrial town is attracted to a co-worker when she runs into him—and his wife—at a local film club, where they all watch a screening of a Hungarian love story, *Alba Regia* (Mihály Szemes, Hungary, 1961). The wife, sensing danger, tries to assert her proprietary rights (and her superior sophistication) by reminiscing aloud about all the Soviet New Wave films the couple saw together during their student days in a “fleabag cinema” in Leipzig, yet includes in her list a film that is actually Hungarian—a mistake her husband corrects and one which discredits her as a genuine cinephile. A week later, the husband and the young woman

meet clandestinely at the film club again to watch an Italian comedy together. After the screening, they discuss topics of mutual interest, including Roman Polanski, Andrzej Wajda's *Popiół i Diament* (Ashes and Diamonds, Poland, 1958), and its star Zbigniew Cybulski; finally, inevitably, they fall into one another's arms.<sup>19</sup>

Nor was such avid interest in eastern European cinema solely the province of intellectuals. Take for instance the January 10, 1968, issue of the popular GDR film magazine, *Filmspiegel*. It features a Polish actress on its front cover, and a story on Miklós Jancsó's seminal Hungarian New Wave film, *Csillagosok, katonák* (The Red and the White, 1967), on its back cover. Inside are a center-fold photo session with a Hungarian film star, short reports about new Soviet, Polish, and Yugoslav films, about the Czech Worker's Film Festival, and about Soviet plans to film novels by Chingiz Aitmatow. In addition, there is a long feature (the first of many) on the personal and historical background to Konrad Wolf's then newly released DEFA film, *Ich war neunzehn* (I Was Nineteen); this story lays particular emphasis on Wolf's own youth and film studies in Moscow, his childhood attachment to Soviet classics like *Chapayev* (Georgi and Sergei Vasiliev, USSR, 1934) and *My iz Kronshtadta*, (We from Kronstadt, Yefim Dzigan, USSR, 1936) and the fact that major Soviet New Wave directors like Mikhail Romm, Alexander Dovzhenko and Sergei Gerasimov were teaching at the Moscow film school when he studied there.

Other issues from the same year resemble this one strongly in its photographs of eastern European movie stars (alternating with DEFA leads, western stars were often featured on the front cover, such as Catherine Deneuve) and its attention to eastern European films, festivals and premieres (the back cover, indeed, often features a "Premiere in Bucharest," "Premiere in Warsaw," etc.). To be sure, the coverage of eastern European films remained fairly superficial, focused on character, plot, actors and production anecdotes; there is little discussion of their formal innovations, of their interest in sensitive or taboo subjects, or of the political discussions they occasioned at home. Nonetheless, many of the now-canonical, politically critical eastern European New Wave films, from Wajda's *Sibirska Ledi Magbet* (Siberian Lady Macbeth, Yugoslavia, 1961) to Krzysztof Zanussi's *Struktura Kryształu* (The Structure of Crystals,

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Poland, 1969) all had their moment in *Film Spiegel*, and in GDR cinemas as well.<sup>20</sup>

### PLACING DEFA INTO EASTERN EUROPE

I want to turn now from the reception of eastern European films in the GDR to ask how DEFA tries to imagine the GDR in relationship to the East. Along with GDR literature, DEFA often tried quite literally to move Germany into eastern Europe, to explore the problematic history (especially the recent history) of German expansion in the East. On the one hand, to some extent, as I'll suggest below, the work of DEFA (as of GDR authors) might be considered an attempt at a kind of expiatory decolonization—with fairly important cultural and geopolitical consequences. On the other hand, when DEFA's film production is compared to the other cinemas in eastern Europe, the situation looks quite different. From this vantage point, indeed, it is the other cinemas—particularly those of Poland, Hungary, the Soviet Union, and Czechoslovakia—which are the “dominant” cinemas, having led the way in aesthetic experiment and political debate that captured the interest and attention of the world, while DEFA itself, in this context, looked for the most part politically and aesthetically orthodox.

Thus far, this essay has suggested some of the ways and some of the reasons that DEFA—and GDR cinema culture more generally—is bound up with the film industries of the west, that of West Germany, but also that of Hollywood (and indeed with the cinemas of western Europe). GDR rhetoric itself, however, linked DEFA much more frequently to filmmaking in other parts of the socialist world, particularly to Warsaw Pact countries, and to the cinemas of the Third World. This rhetoric in part reflected political and economic expediencies, in part the many empirical and institutional ties between film producers throughout the East. The emerging young DEFA directors of the 1950s and 1960s were partly educated at film schools elsewhere in eastern Europe: Konrad Wolf studied in Moscow (where he met not only the major directors of the Soviet New Wave, but also contemporaries like Bulgarian scriptwriter Angel Wagenstein, with whom he would collaborate on *Sterne* (Stars, DEFA/Bulgaria, 1959) and *Goya* (DEFA/USSR, 1971), both co-

productions. Frank Beyer studied at FAMU<sup>21</sup> in Prague, experiencing the Slansky show trials first hand, and forging a close relationship with actor Vlastimil Brodsky, who would later star in his *Jakob der Lügner* (Jacob the Liar, DEFA, 1974).<sup>22</sup>

From the 1940s onward, moreover, DEFA regularly invited foreign—especially eastern European—directors and actors to work on their films.<sup>23</sup> From the 1950s to the 1970s, DEFA also participated in a number of East Bloc co-productions and collaborations particularly of genre films including Westerns, science fiction, and so on. The GDR and Poland’s collaborative Stanislaw Lem film *Der schweigende Stern* (First Spaceship on Venus, Kurt Maetzig, DEFA/Poland, 1960) for example, carefully thematized international cooperation for peace. The year 1965 alone saw three such co-productions: a love story with Bulgaria (Vladimir Jantschev’s *Die antike Münze* [The Antique Coin]), an ice-revue film with Czechoslovakia (Jindrich Polák’s *Eine schreckliche Frau* [A Terrible Woman]), and a detective film with Yugoslavia (Bosko Boskovics *Mörder auf Urlaub* [Murderers on Vacation]), as well as Czech director Vladimír Brebera’s farce *Ohne Paß in fremden Betten* (In Strange Beds Without a Passport).

“Eastern” European actors, too, were repeatedly on display in DEFA films of the period, even when the filmic content did not involve *Völkerfreundschaft* (friendship with people from other nations). Hungarian and Polish actresses for instance, starred in important New Wave films: Hungarian actress Kati Székely in *...und deine Liebe auch*; Polish actress Krystyna Stypulkowska in *Spur der Steine*, who was cast after Beyer saw her in Wajda’s *Niewinni Czarodzieje* (Innocent Sorcerers, Poland, 1960). In a sense—and despite the very real constraints to its cosmopolitanism—GDR cinema thus reactivated the tradition of the Wilhelmine, Weimar, and indeed Third Reich cinemas that gathered talents from various parts of central, eastern and northern Europe.<sup>24</sup>

As a number of DEFA’s most ambitious films suggest, this interface with eastern Europe had profound ideological motivations and ramifications. From the early 1960s onward, exploratory texts by major GDR writers tried to describe the encounter and entanglement of German viewers with eastern European life. Consciously or unconsciously, their texts model a mode of approach to, and apprehension of, the “Slavic” or eastern culture—and indeed

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usually of “conversion” and historical expiation as well, as characters or narrators finally grasp what their fellow Germans, and their German ancestors, have wrought on the cultures of the east.<sup>25</sup> Such texts seem intended to provide both a template for “ordinary” cultural tourism from the GDR to the neighboring countries to the east, and grounds for contemplation, retrospection, and reassessment for GDR readers who remained at home.

A number of DEFA films attempt something quite similar, even as they reflect on the dangers that these German voyages of exploration will turn exoticist or appropriative. Konrad Wolf’s *Der nackte Mann auf dem Sportplatz* (The Naked Man on the Playing Field, DEFA, 1974) contrasts the East Berlin sculptor whose current work on the human figure and face is inspired, at least on some subterranean level, by the attempt to understand the wartime, genocidal massacres at Babi Yar, with that of a counter-cultural poseur, a postal worker who affects the *nom-de-guerre* of Igor, and lugs around a recording of Russian Orthodox liturgical music. Given his own childhood in the Soviet Union (including a cameo role in one of only two German émigré films shot there during the Nazi period), Wolf’s own DEFA oeuvre was particularly preoccupied with German-Slavic relations, from *Sonnensucher* and *Sterne* to *Ich war neunzehn* and *Mama, ich lebe!* (Mother, I’m Alive!, DEFA, 1977). All deal with the consequences of the German occupation of eastern Europe during the Third Reich as the prelude to the postwar Soviet occupation of Germany. *Ich war neunzehn*, most famously, meditates on Wolf’s own experiences as a young Red Army soldier engaged in the reconquest of Germany. The film forms a fascinating but uneasy trilogy with Wolf’s earlier *Sterne*, the story of a German soldier in wartime Bulgaria, who falls in love with one of the Jewish deportees he is supposed to be guarding and ends up deserting to join the partisans, and with *Mama, ich lebe!*, in which the conversion of a few German POW’s to the antifascist cause leave them ostracized by their fellow Germans. Following the template of antifascist conversion fiction (from Bodo Uhse’s 1943 *Leutnant Bertram* [Lieutenant Bertram] to F.C. Weiskopf’s 1944 *Himmelfahrtskommando* [Suicide Patrol]), *Sterne* explores what it is like to participate in a military occupation, such as the way the occupier’s fears about reprisals from hostile locals is mingled with doubts about the legitimacy of his own presence, and intermittently at least, an unexpected curiosity about place and people. *Ich war neunzehn* and *Mama, ich lebe!* take up these questions again from the other vantage

point in the same war, attempting to render pictorially what it means to open yourself to an alien landscape and culture, one previously seen as hostile and threatening.



*Sterne*

Egon Günther's *Die Schlüssel* (The Keys, DEFA, 1974) has a similar subtext. Here however, the attempt to describe this fundamental re-functioning of cultural prejudices and categories under the pressures of travel, takes place in the background while the foreground story focuses on the cross-class and hence tragically crossed love story of two GDR tourists in Poland. The central plot situation, then, is imported from home, although the way it plays out towards its final tragic ending is inflected at every point by the unfamiliar and historically fraught locale in which the lovers find themselves. Their cultural and class differences, for instance, work themselves out in the different ways each sets about learning the Polish language: the educated man believes in memorizing words and phrases from the dictionary, while the working-class woman immerses herself by watching and participating in social interactions. Rather surprisingly, given the genre of the conversion film and the film's political/historical, indeed expiatory, subtexts, Günther ran into sustained difficulties

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with the Polish authorities, who disliked its depiction of Poland in general, and its inclusion of religious processions in particular.<sup>26</sup>

This tension seems especially anomalous given the fact that from 1956 onwards, Poland (even more so than Hungary and Czechoslovakia) largely enjoyed a highly critical, experimental and non-conformist film culture—in comparison to which the film offerings of the GDR increasingly looked conservative, conformist, outdated, and parochial. At its best, DEFA strained to open itself to the historical problem and current aesthetic innovations of eastern Europe. But this relationship was non-reciprocal.<sup>27</sup> For the most part, the more daring and aesthetically advanced film cultures in eastern Europe were utterly uninfluenced by—and presumably, generally uninterested in—developments or non-developments in GDR film culture.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, unlike the cinemas of Hungary, Poland or Czechoslovakia, DEFA is largely (as a result of the Eleventh Plenum) missing a sustained New Wave, missing a real, sustained avant-garde, and perhaps above all, for various historical reasons, missing sustained attempts at de-Stalinization.

Even the belatedly recovered *Kaninchenfilme* of 1965/1966—aesthetically and historically important and exciting as they are—pale considerably in comparison to the later suppressed and banned films of the Prague Spring, against the anarchic inventiveness of Juraj Jakubisko, Vera Chytilová, or the satirical absurdism of Jan Nemeč. So too the critical DEFA films of the 1980s, such as Rainer Simon's *Jadup und Boel* (1981, released 1988) and *Das Luftschiff* (The Air Ship, 1983); Lothar Warneke's *Unser kurzes Leben* (Our Short Life, 1981) and *Die Beunruhigung* (Apprehension, 1982); *Fariaho* (Roland Gräf, 1983); *Die Beteiligten* (Those Involved, Horst E. Brandt, 1989); and *Coming Out* (Heiner Carow, 1989), important as they seem in context and in retrospect, for the most part appear utterly tame compared to the savage and often experimental films made—and often banned—in Poland during the late 1970s and early 1980s, both before and after the period of martial law: Wajda's *Człowiek z Marmuru* (Man of Marble, 1977); Ryszard Bugajski's *Przesłuchanie* (The Interrogation, 1981, released in 1989), Krzysztof Kiesłowski's *Przypadek* (Blind Chance, 1981) and *Dekalog* (Decalogue, 1988); to the

bitingly critical films being made in Hungary: János Rózsa's *Vasárnapi szülők* (Sunday Daughter, 1979); Márta Mészáros' *Napló szerelmeimnek* (Diary for My Loves, 1987); Béla Tarr's *Családi tűzfészek* (Family Nest, 1979) and *Sátántangó* (Satan's Tango, in progress during most of the 1980s, released 1994), or indeed to the Glasnost films released in the Soviet Union (and for the most part, prevented from receiving full, country-wide release in the GDR, for political reasons). In closing, we need to consider the uncomfortable question of just what happens to DEFA—to that artistically and aesthetically rewarding “minor” film culture western Germanists and film scholars have come to appreciate since 1989—if it is compared more systematically to its eastern European counterparts. Several institutional factors might continue to prevent such re-contextualizing and, necessarily also reassessment, of DEFA in relationship to other eastern European cinemas.

### TOWARD A CRITICAL LOOK TO THE EAST

Most North American Germanists, it seems, have not followed—and indeed, before 1989, hardly could have followed—eastern European film history very closely. Where it was studied and taught at all, the GDR was conceived as a fascinating or dismaying “off-shoot” of German history. A disciplinary (and linguistic) divide separated and, arguably, despite new discussions of central Europe, still largely separates Germanists and Slavicists. To the extent that Germanists had a larger picture of film history at all, it was informed largely by western European art film and by Hollywood.<sup>29</sup>

At the same time, the desperate and quite justifiable post-1989 efforts of DEFA scholars, archivists, and distributors to promote DEFA as an important, hitherto undervalued European cinema have been remarkably successful, due in large part to the artisanal strengths, formal beauty and newly topical interest of the DEFA films, as well as their ever-stronger nostalgic cult status in the former GDR and their continuing, sheer novelty value in the post-cold war United States.

In the decade since the *Kaninchenfilme* were showcased at the Berlin Film Festival and excited the curiosity of the world, DEFA studies have grown by leaps and bounds in the west, and especially in the United States. Yet it would be problematic if the legitimate wish and need of this field

of inquiry to perpetuate itself were to lead one to shy away from unflattering comparisons. If it has been a revelation for many North American professors and students to look east, to travel east, to view eastwards, then DEFA scholars should do whatever they can to help such audiences to look further eastward. Only when DEFA films are seen in the larger contexts provided by eastern European cinema, by postwar European cinema, and by other forms of GDR culture will it become possible to assess properly its innovations and artistic achievements, its orthodoxies, its role in upholding the state, its impact on its audience, and its ability to shape world-view and to change perceptions.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>. See for instance Seán Allan and John Sandford, eds., *DEFA: East German Cinema, 1946-1992* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 1999); Marc Silberman, *German Cinema: Texts in Context* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995); Daniel J. Goulding, ed., *Post New Wave Cinema in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

<sup>2</sup>. See for instance, Christiane Mückenberger, ed., *Prädikat: Besonders schädlich. Das Kaninchen bin ich; Denk bloß nicht, ich heule* (Berlin: Henschel, 1990); Günther Agde, ed., *Kahlschlag: Das 11. Plenum des ZK der SED 1965* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1991); Ralf Schenk, ed., *Das zweite Leben der Filmstadt Babelsberg: DEFA-Spielfilme 1946-1992* (Berlin: Henschel, 1992); Dietmar Hochmuth, ed., *DEFA NOVA—Nach wie vor? Versuch einer Spurensicherung, Kinemathek 82* (Dec. 1993); Christiane Mückenberger and Günter Jordan, *„Sie sehen selbst, Sie hören selbst...“ Eine Geschichte der DEFA von ihren Anfängen bis 1949* (Marburg: Hitzeroth, 1994); Thomas Heimann, *DEFA, Künstler und SED-Kulturpolitik: Zum Verhältnis von Kulturpolitik und Filmproduktion in der SBZ/DDR 1945 bis 1959* (Berlin: Vistas, 1994); Karin Fritzsche and Claus Löser, eds., *Gegenbilder: Filmische Subversion in der DDR 1976-1989. Texte, Bilder, Daten* (Berlin: Janus, 1996).

<sup>3</sup>. These included the literary works of 1950s émigrés like Uwe Johnson, Horst Bienek and Walter Kempowski, the criticism of Marcel Reich-Ranicki, and literary works written by writers still living in the GDR, yet banned there nonetheless, from Klaus Poche's *Atemnot* to Stefan Heym's *Fünf Tage im Juni*.

<sup>4</sup>. This was the result, of course, not only of a general “Mauer-im-Kopf” (wall in the head) but of particularly limited access to the more aesthetically innovative DEFA films of westerners' generally limited grasp of GDR debates, aesthetics, and conditions.

<sup>5</sup>. See Thomas Brasch, *Vor den Vätern sterben die Söhne* (Berlin: Rotbuch, 1977); Jurek Becker, *Sleepless Days*, trans. Leila Vennewitz (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), and my “Old Movies: Cinema as Palimpsest in GDR Fiction,” *East German Film*, spec. issue of *New German Critique* 82 (Winter 2001): 39-75.

<sup>6</sup>. Klaus Poche, *Atemnot* (Olten and Freiburg: Walter, 1978); Manfred Krug, *Abgehauen: Ein Mitschnitt und ein Tagebuch* (Düsseldorf: Econ, 1996).

<sup>7</sup>. I take up some of these questions in *The Divided Screen: The Cinemas of Postwar Germany* (forthcoming, Princeton University Press).

<sup>8</sup>. Hermann Kant, *Abspann: Erinnerung an meine Gegenwart* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1991), 58, translation mine.

<sup>9</sup>. See for instance Jeffrey Richards and Dorothy Sheridan, eds., *Mass Observation at the Movies* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987), and Jackie Stacey, *Stargazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>10</sup>. On television in the GDR, see Knut Hickethier and Peter Hoff, *Geschichte des deutschen Fernsehens* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1998); on GDR writers' pessimism about the medium, see my "Old Movies: Cinema as Palimpsest in GDR Fiction," *East German Film*, spec. issue of *New German Critique* 82 (Winter 2001): 39-75.

<sup>11</sup>. For one of the few first-hand accounts of such cinema-going, see Wolfgang Gersch, "Die Verdoppelung der Ferne: Notizen von der anderen Seite," in Hans-Peter Reichmann and Rudolph Worschech, eds., *Zwischen gestern und morgen: Westdeutscher Nachkriegsfilm 1946-1962* (Frankfurt: Deutsches Filmmuseum, 1989), 100-9.

<sup>12</sup>. For pioneering comparative work on the two German cinemas, see Ingelore König et al., eds., *Zwischen Bluejeans und Blauhemden: Jugendfilm in Ost und West* (Berlin: Henschel, 1995); Gabriele Seidel, ed., *Deutschlandbilder Filmreihe: Eine Dokumentation* (Berlin: Freunde der deutschen Kinemathek, 1997), and Uta G. Poiger, *Jazz, Rock and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

<sup>13</sup>. From its inception in the late 1950s, *Filmkritik* (West Germany's most important cinephile journal, despite its small circulation) did report on individual DEFA film releases, on larger trends in GDR film policy, and on GDR film festivals; Heinz Kersten's extensive articles of the mid-1960s, in particular, tracked studio reorganizations and censorship controversies, including the banning of the *Kaninchenfilme*.

<sup>14</sup>. See here Joshua Isaac Feinstein, "The Triumph of the Ordinary: Depictions of Daily Life in the East German Cinema, 1956-1966," Diss., Stanford University, 1995.

<sup>15</sup>. See Hans Jürgen Syberberg, "Berliner Ensemble 1953-1992: Syberberg filmt bei Brecht," and Syberberg and Hans Mayer, "1971—Nach meinem letzten Umzug," *Drucksache* 4 (1993): 97-116 and 141-51.

<sup>16</sup>. See my "La guerre est finie: New Waves, Historical Contingency and the GDR Kaninchenfilme," in Michael Geyer, ed., *The Power of Intellectuals in Contemporary Germany* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

<sup>17</sup>. See my liner notes to the recent video release of *...und deine Liebe auch* (Icestorm, 2000).

<sup>18</sup>. Christiane Mückenberger, "Die Leipziger Dokumentar- und Kurzfilmwoche," in Günther Jordan and Ralf Schenk, eds., *Schwarzweiß und Farbe: DEFA-Dokumentarfilme 1946-92* (Berlin: Jovis, 1996): 364-82. For a time indeed (as Mückenberger mentioned in our discussion in Washington), the film school used to borrow films playing in one of West Berlin's art cinemas; a personal connection to one of the projectionists enabled faculty to arrange unofficially for various films shown at

the cinema to be taken across the border, quickly played to a student audience in Babelsberg, then taken back over the border the same day, to resume its West Berlin run. In similar fashion, Mückenberger remembered, the film school also “borrowed” and screened foreign films being considered for distribution in the GDR.

<sup>19</sup>. Brigitte Reimann, *Franziska Linkerhand*, ed. Angela Drescher (Berlin: Aufbau, 1998), 455, 474.

<sup>20</sup>. See also “Welterfolge sowjetischer Filmkunst: Wiederbegegnung mit berühmten und beliebten Schauspielern,” *Kino DDR*, Sonderheft II (1969) and III (1970).

<sup>21</sup>. Editor’s note: FAMU is Filmová a Televizní Fakulta AMU (Film and TV Faculty of the Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts) in Prague, known otherwise as the “Czech School.”

<sup>22</sup>. See here Ralf Schenk, ed., *Regie: Frank Beyer* (Berlin: Hentrich, 1995).

<sup>23</sup>. Polish director and Ravensbrück survivor, Wanda Jakubowska, for instance, acclaimed internationally for her film *Ostatni Etap* (The Last Stage, Poland, 1948), the first postwar feature about concentration camp life, subsequently directed the 1960 DEFA/Polish co-production *Begegnung im Zwielflicht* (Twilight Encounter) about a Polish survivor’s disillusioning visit to West Germany.

<sup>24</sup>. In comparison, the West German cinema of the 1950s and 1960s remains deeply parochial; its big foreign talents are imports from Switzerland (Liselotte Pulver) and from Austria (Romy Schneider).

<sup>25</sup>. These works include Christa Wolf’s *Moskauer Novelle* (Moscow Novella, 1961) and *Kindheitsmuster* (Patterns of Childhood, 1976); Franz Fühmann’s *Das Judenauto, oder 14 Tage aus zwei Jahrzehnten* (The Jew-Car, or 14 Days in Two Decades, 1962) and *22 Tage, oder die Hälfte des Lebens* (22 Days, or Half of Life, 1973); Johannes Bobrowski’s *Levins Mühle* (Levin’s Mill, 1964) and *Litauische Klaviere* (Lithuanian Pianos, 1966); Brigitte Reimann’s *Das grüne Licht der Steppen: Tagebuch einer Sibirienreise* (The Green Light of the Steppes: Diary of a Siberian Journey, 1964/2000); Erik Neutsch’s *Spur der Steine* (Trace of Stones, 1964); Rolf Schneider’s *Die Reise nach Jaroslaw* (The Journey to Jaroslaw, 1974); Helga Schubert’s *Lauter Leben* (Nothing But Life, 1975); and Hermann Kant’s *Der Aufenthalt* (Turning Point, 1977).

<sup>26</sup>. Feinstein discusses this case in “The Triumph of the Ordinary: Depictions of Daily Life in the East German Cinema, 1956-1966,” Diss., Stanford University, 1995.

<sup>27</sup>. In part, this was due to the various layers of internal censorship which sometimes impeded the circulation of DEFA’s more experimental film in other Warsaw Pact countries, despite the many institutionalized channels for cultural exchange ostensibly designed to facilitate just such cross-viewings. During the AICGS workshop in Washington, Tamara Trampe remembered her own disillusioning discovery that the somewhat daring DEFA film she was ostensibly accompanying on a cultural tour around the Soviet Union was not actually being screened in all advertised venues, despite her own public presence in the cinema before and after each screening. As she discovered by accident partway through the tour, when she returned to an auditorium mid-screening to retrieve something she had left behind, the GDR film being played was not the one she had helped to make; those in charge had apparently switched films, and were

playing a much less controversial film instead. Audience members were perhaps oblivious, but in any event did not complain.

<sup>28</sup>. There may be some exceptions to this general rule: in its depiction of early twentieth-century street and tenement life, György Révész' *Angyalok földje* (Land of Angels, Hungary, 1962), for instance, may draw on Wolf's *Lissy* (DEFA, 1957) and on Heiner Carow's *Sie nannten ihn Amigo* (They Called Him Amigo, DEFA, 1959), as well as on Weimar Republic workers' pictures.

<sup>29</sup>. There are notable exceptions, of course. Eric Rentschler was drawn into film studies through an interest in the Czech New Wave, then moved laterally into German film; this history, however, has not been particularly visible in his scholarly work. Given the considerable emigration of eastern European students and scholars into Germany, as into German and American universities, we may perhaps expect more such cross-pollinations in the future, although they are not yet much in evidence.

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