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List of Abbreviations

AFS - Army Film Studio (Armeefilmstudio)

KVP - Barracked People's Police (Kasernierte Volkspolizei)

ÚD - Central Dramaturgy (Ústřední dramaturgie)

HV Film - Central Film Administration (Hauptverwaltung Film)

KSČ - Communist Party of Czechoslovakia
(Komunistická strana Československa)

KPSS - Communist Party of the Soviet Union
(Kommunisticheskaya Partiya Sovetskogo Soyuza)

ČAF - Czechoslovak Army Film (Československý armádní film)

ČSFÚ - Czechoslovak Film Institute
(Československý filmový ústav)

ČSF - Czechoslovak State Film (Československý státní film)

DEFA - Deutsche Film-Aktien Gesellschaft

DFF - Deutscher Fernsehfunk

FRG - Federal Republic of Germany

FIUS - Film Artistic Board (Filmový umělecký sbor)

RFK - Film Chamber of the Reich (Reichsfilmkammer)

FR - Film Council (Filmová rada)

FAMU - Film faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts
(Filmová fakulta Akademie múzických umění)

FDJ - Free German Youth (Freie Deutsche Jugend)

KPD - German Communist Party
(Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands)

GDR - German Democratic Republic

FIAPF - International Federation of Film Producers Associations
(Fédération Internationale des Associations de Producteurs de Films)

MFF KV - Karlovy Vary International Film Festival
(Mezinárodní filmový festival Karlovy Vary)

ÚV KSČ - KSČ Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia

LUF - Leipzig University Film Club (Leipziger Universitätsfilmklub)

MPAA - Motion Picture Association of America

NVA - National People's Army (Nationale Volksarmee)

VEB - people-owned enterprise (Volkseigener Betrieb, VEBpeople-owned enterprise)

KF - Short Film (Krátký film)

SED - Socialist Unity Party of Germany (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands)

GDSF - Society for German-Soviet Friendship (Gesellschaft für Deutsch-Sowjetische Freundschaft)

SEF - Sovexportfilm

SMAD - Soviet Military Administration in Germany (Sowjetische Militäradministration in Deutschland)

SBZ - Soviet Zone of Occupation Zone (Sowjetische Besatzungszone)

TOBIS - Ton-Bild-Syndikat AG

UFA - Universum Film AG

Introduction

Pavel Skopal and Lars Karl

Historical studies of the Soviet influence in Eastern Europe after World War II have undergone a radical transformation as a consequence of the fall of communism. This is due in part to the ability of historians from the region itself to ask fresh questions and offer new judgements on their own past, free from the strictures of Marxist-Leninist historical orthodoxy, party control, and the strict injunctions of state-sponsored censorship. Even more important is the loosening of state control over archival collections that document the Soviet role in the establishment of communist states during the period 1945–1965. This volume strives to benefit from both of these stimulants for original historical research.

This volume focuses on the first two decades of the postwar period. While individual essays regularly and inevitably begin their stories in the 1940s and follow them into the 1960s, the primary focus is on the 1950s, a period of rapid and rather abrupt changes in international relations, cultural policy, the economy and indeed, the film industry within the Soviet Bloc in general and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and Czechoslovakia in particular. In the GDR, the decade was strongly influenced by the relationship with its Western alter ego, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). As the editor of a recent volume addressing the cinema culture of the GDR's Western counterpart phrased it, 'the long 1950s' marks the period 'between the founding of the two German states in 1949 and the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961'.[1] At the same time, it was a decade of ideological alignment between the

GDR and Czechoslovakia, squeezed between decades of tension, animosity and war atrocities at one end,[2] and the subsequent ideological estrangement of the 1960s at the other. Only two of the essays in this volume are explicitly comparative, whereas others address transnational phenomena like film festivals or international co-productions. Most of the essays are grouped into parallel pairs or thematic clusters offering perspectives on the two film cultures and industries at the centre of this volume. The first two essays, by David Bathrick and Jiří Knapík, aim to provide an overview of the rich historical context and orient the reader within the sphere of cultural policy, addressed by all the individual essays. In effect, and despite the fact that most of the essays are not comparative in their methods, the thoroughly researched topics collected here give readers a clear 'stereoscopic' overview and deep understanding of phenomena that so far have been analysed only within national frameworks, if at all. The perspectives in this volume, although situated outside the national context, thus offer insight into the two national industries, their indigenous specificities and respective relationships, and above all their position with regard to the USSR, which provided inspiration, influence and direction.[3] The essential advantage of this approach is that it rids 'national' histories of their nonreflexive conceptions of 'specificity' or 'special paths', thereby revealing structural similarities. Ultimately, though, specificity lingers in the re-evaluation of the individual national cultural traditions, political practices and economic and social structures enabled by this stereoscopic approach.

The GDR and Czechoslovakia

Although relations between the GDR and Czechoslovakia were not fully harmonious in the sphere of cinema in the 1950s, they were certainly very intimate and motivated by a number of mostly pragmatic interests that allowed the uneasy alliance to survive the era of Khrushchev's Thaw. While East German officials occasionally envied Czechoslovak production (they admired Czech comedies and fairy tales, which were popular with audiences too, particularly the fairy tales),[4] party officials and film industry leaders in both countries were alarmed by the pace of the 'October' reforms in their shared neighbour, Poland.[5] At the same time, the practitioners and leaders of both leading national film studios, Barrandov and DEFA (formally the Deutsche

Filmaktien Gesellschaft), gazed ambitiously towards the West. Within this mode of ideological distraction, the Czechoslovak and East German film industries often promoted their mutual cooperation and cultural exchange in the 1950s as proof that they were sufficiently active, loyal members of the Eastern Bloc.

At the same time, the relationship between the two countries was influenced by their specific geopolitical position as members of the so-called Northern Triangle, together with their rebellious Polish neighbour. The USSR understood Czechoslovakia, the GDR and Poland as a defensive bloc on the border of the FRG.[6] The unique position that the GDR and Czechoslovakia occupied in the eyes of the Soviets confirms that the political and social links between the two states in the postwar order did not arise from their geographical proximity alone but were also fostered by the Cold War strategy of Soviet hegemony.

Any functional implementation of a geopolitical bloc, though, encounters fundamental barriers and contradictions. In the GDR and Czechoslovakia, these were rooted in the historical memory of the states and their citizens, as well as in the attitudes of party leaders in each state. The Czechoslovak population's resentful attitudes towards Germans and the resulting strain on political relations and cultural contacts with the East German state were not as strong as those in Poland,[7] but memories of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia as well as the postwar expulsion of Germans from Czechoslovakia still caused tensions and mistrust between these two allies.[8] Like their Polish neighbours, Czechs and Slovaks did not entirely buy into the imagined division between 'good' Germans in the socialist state (constructed on the myth of antifascism) and 'bad' Germans in the FRG, the alleged inheritor of the Nazi empire.[9]

The coalition had its own internal motivations and driving forces: in addition to sharing certain economic interests, the partners were unified in their resistance to the militarization of the FRG at the end of 1954. Unfortunately, another major point of convergence between the East German and Czechoslovakian socialist programmes was a negative one – a shared scepticism of the Polish 'October' and Władysław Gomułka's attempt to restore relations with Western nations. This pragmatic rapprochement – which survived until the mid-1960s, when the East German leadership grew to distrust the process of Czechoslovak liberalization – influenced the sphere of cinema culture via a bilateral exchange of movies (in both directions) and film practitioners (mostly from Barrandov to DEFA).[10]

A Closely Watched Alliance – the Sovietization of the Cultural Sphere

Along with analysis of the dynamics of the bilateral relationship between the GDR and Czechoslovakia, a proper evaluation of the cultural-political dimension of the region's transnational cinema culture in the 1950s necessarily demands consideration of a third entity, namely the USSR and its implied influence, typically labelled Sovietization.

With regard to its influence on the cultural sphere, Sovietization could be defined[11] as a process of export from the USSR of organizational principles, norms and values, which were implemented through orders and administrative measures, or by cultural policy and film production practitioners in the satellite nations. Sovietization has been investigated from various perspectives in the last two decades, notably in a thoroughly researched comparative study of the Sovietization of higher education.[12] Nevertheless, historical research on the film industries in the Soviet Bloc has not yet focused on the question of how far Soviet cultural functionaries or film industry leaders attempted, successfully or not, to implement their own standards and norms within the cinema culture of the socialist countries. Many of the essays in this volume point to obvious traces of such efforts, but they clearly were not part of a systematic endeavour, and their efficacy was strongly influenced by local functionaries' activities. Besides, Sovietization tendencies took widely varying courses in different countries due to specific local traditions in film cultures and industries as well as variable degrees of distrust towards Soviets. While Russophobia was strong and deep-rooted in postwar Germany, acceptance of Soviet culture was significantly greater in Czechoslovakia, where a strong sense of Germanophobia prevailed.[13]

Some scholars criticize the use of the term 'Sovietization', claiming it oversimplifies the complex processes of give and take between the Soviet Union and its East European subordinates.[14] They instead promote the concept of 'self-Sovietization', which shifts the emphasis to the many East European functionaries who willingly adopted and used Soviet models themselves without direct instructions or pressure. The concept of 'self-Sovietization' is used to describe the activities of people and organizations with a degree of structural independence from the regime and a seemingly obsessive interest in introducing Soviet methods and practices. John Connelly has fruitfully applied this conception (originally coined in the context of standard 'political' discussion of Sovietization in the GDR) in his study on the Sovietization of

universities in Central European communist countries.[15] However, he uses the term in a relatively narrow sense to describe the efforts of the 'compulsive Sovietizers' among communist functionaries. In the case of film industry and culture, this term can also describe (communist or noncommunist) activists who were fascinated by communist values and technology as well as by the communist emphasis on 'planning'.

As the detailed research contained in this volume implies, there was no systematic, successful Sovietization of film industry or cinema culture, even though discussions about the Soviet lead were intensive and the demand to follow the organizational principles was occasionally strong, as various industry reorganizations according to the Soviet model in the early 1950s demonstrate. The Soviets never invested sufficient resources to consistently implement a transfer of organizational principles, and in effect the most radical and active initiatives indeed came from ambitious promoters of 'self-Sovietization' – 'Learning from the Soviet Union means learning to win,' went the famous East German mantra. A representative example of this phenomenon would be the director of the 'creative unit for Soviet-Czechoslovak co-operation' who, in 1950, developed a proposal for reorganizing feature film production according to the Soviet model.[16] But as Petr Szczepanik's essay demonstrates, many features of the traditional production culture that had taken shape in the 1920s and 1930s and been consolidated during World War II survived into the 1950s. Both the Soviet film industry and the Soviet Ministry of Culture attempted to maintain influence on production and distribution throughout the Soviet Bloc countries, but the implementation of their interests and wishes was significantly dependent on the 'sensitivity' of the respective state functionaries. Their tendency to fulfil all the Soviets' demands and follow their signals was much weaker in cases when it contradicted their own local interests. This was especially obvious in the sphere of film distribution and exhibition, as the essays by Lars Karl and by Kyril Kunakhovich and Pavel Skopal illustrate with relevant examples.

Though the concept of Sovietization might seem worn and actual intentional Soviet influence was often lacking or ineffective, the current moment is a propitious one to revisit the many dimensions of the imposition of Soviet-style institutions, culture, politics and 'life itself' in the East European film industries that fell under Moscow's sway after World War II. This volume's contributors focus on topics suited to the task. International film festivals could serve Soviet global ambitions and ideological interests, as Jindřiška Bláhová shows in her research on the festival in Karlovy Vary. Meanwhile, other festivals (or even the

same one, a few years later) were instead shaped by the political and representative interests of their host country, as Andreas Kötzing's research on the Leipzig Documentary and Short Film Festival reveals. The essays by Mariana Ivanova and Pavel Skopal show that while some co-productions were made under compulsion from Soviet representatives demanding cooperation between the socialist countries, others were shot with partners from capitalist countries in projects undertaken by film studios ambitious to gain access to better technical equipment, skilled practitioners, higher profits or international prestige. Yet at the same time, Mariana Ivanova's story of DEFA's 'undercover' co-productions with a West German film producer vividly illustrates the specificity of the East German film industry in comparison to Czechoslovakia – a specificity based on DEFA's shared past with, yet present political distance from, West German filmmakers.

Two Film Industries – Comparison and Transfer

The process of Sovietization is not analysed here (or elsewhere) within the conceptual framework of cultural transfer, for an obvious reason: transfer studies emphasize cultural exchange between two entities that are relatively equivalent and commensurable, which was not the case with the Soviet Union and its satellite countries. Nevertheless, the application of the notion of transfer to the supposedly one-way process of cultural flow from a centre of power to peripheries can reveal the possible simplifications entailed by the model of Sovietization – as well as that of Americanization.[17]

A history of cultural transfer follows a relationship between two entities (e.g. nations, regions, cities, institutions) and focuses on phenomena that cross the borders (technology, sport, a model of a social state, etc.), highlighting the role of various mediators, such as booksellers, publishers and universities[18] – and in this case we could add filmmakers, cultural functionaries and movies. These processes come into being through migration as well as through personal meetings or the study of texts originating in the other culture.[19] No such history of cultural transfer between the GDR and Czechoslovakia in the sphere of cinema has yet been written,[20] and it would be beyond the scope of the current volume. Such an approach would inevitably demand a significantly different perspective from that adopted here. Rather than focusing on mutual influences, this volume attempts to highlight structural and functional similarities between the respective film

industries and the cultural policies related to their respective position within the Soviet Bloc. But the existence of obvious conceptual differences between the approach of transfer studies on the one hand and comparative studies on the other does not mean that they are entirely incompatible. Indeed, they can be quite complementary:

> Without explicit comparison, historical studies of transfers and of entanglements are in danger of becoming airy and thin. On the other hand, comparative studies are not damaged, but improved by considering connections between the units of comparison wherever and whenever they exist.… Such connections – i.e., mutual perceptions and influences, transfers and travels, migrations and trade, interaction, relations of imitation and avoidance, shared dependence from one and the same constellation or common origin – may contribute to explaining similarities and differences, convergences and divergences between the cases compared.[21]

The present volume aims to take a step in this direction, that is, towards a better understanding of the Soviet bloc film industries from a transnational perspective, hopefully providing a foundation for future research on cultural transfer.

The essays collected here illustrate how the regimes used cinema culture for self-presentation in two directions: externally to the West, and Internally to their own citizens. The intensity of the centrifugal or centripetal tendencies of the regimes shifted constantly, as indicated by the essays dealing with the prestige co-productions of DEFA; Barrandov's pragmatic co-production alliances; the international film festivals in Karlovy Vary and Leipzig; and the exhibition of movies from the other side of the Iron Curtain, whether as part of the regular distribution network or presented in film clubs, some of which arose as an alternative distribution sphere organized 'from below', as Fernando Ramos Arenas illustrates in his study on the Leipzig University Film Club. The essays in this volume provide insight into the role of institutional networks and cinema infrastructure and their influence on the intended construction of a specific socialist film culture. Christin Niemeyer and Lukáš Skupa each present a story of children's cinema as a kind of production that the government and party authorities promoted as ideologically significant, although production efficiency was influenced by the varying degrees of institutionalization in this branch of moviemaking. Thomas Beutelschmidt reveals the contradictions inherent in the relationship between the two institutions that represented the two mass media most highly valued by top GDR functionaries: the DEFA film studio and state television broadcaster

Deutscher Fernsehfunk. Václav Šmidrkal's comparison of the military film studios in the GDR and Czechoslovakia vividly depicts significant differences in both the use of the studios' film facilities and the artistic ambitions of the personnel in accordance with the attitude and goals of the army leadership. While the case of military film production is obviously a paramount example of a 'cinema in service of the state', all the essays inevitably deal with the influence of state demands, intentions and ideological programmes. Equally inevitably, however, these essays based on meticulous archival research reveal tensions and contradictions rooted not only in the varying intentions of the individual participants, but also in the different temporalities of various processes and structures. Lucie Česálková's essay on so-called "custom made film production" offers an illustrative example: while this production was obviously and quite directly intended to 'serve the state' and its planning, the contrasting temporalities of moviemaking and the production of consumer goods created situations whereby movies promoted items that were not in fact available on the market. Consequently, this type of film production was often, in effect, rather a disservice to the state.

This volume offers generalizations as well as a better understanding of specificities. The East German and Czechoslovak film industries are well suited for this purpose because they were among the most prolific in the Soviet Bloc and followed two different yet related traditions. What is distinctly, and fully intentionally, missing from the book is an aesthetic history of textual objects and their interrelations. Some of the essays deal with textual features of individual movies, but they do not place aesthetic concerns at the centre of their research and always locate the 'text' within a wider nexus of research questions concerning institutions, political discourses, film industry strategies or cinematic reception. A good number of books in English focus on individual, mostly 'representative' DEFA movies, on the history of the DEFA studio in the 1950s, or on the distribution of Western movies in the GDR, and at least a word or two has been published on Czechoslovak production of the relevant period.[22] We intend to follow a rather different research programme, however. From our point of view, the history of East German and Czechoslovak cinema is not a history of ideologically charged regime prestige projects, works of creative talent marred by 'them', or a few 'hidden gems' to be revealed and newly interpreted. We see it rather as part of a broader history of institutional structures, international diplomacy, state economies, personal networks, education, marketing strategies and consumption. This volume aspires to contribute one small grain to the mills of cinema history.

Notes

1. Sabine Hake, 'Introduction', in John Davidson and Sabine Hake (eds), *Framing the Fifties: Cinema in a Divided Germany* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007), p. 2.
2. For excellent books in English that deal with Czech-German relationships from the viewpoint of national policy, national self-determinacy or national behaviour, see Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900–1948* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2008), Nancy Wingfield, *Flag Wars and Stone Saints: How the Bohemian Lands Became Czech* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2007), and Chad Bryant, *Prague in Black: Nazi Rule and Czech Nationalism* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2009).
3. Two recent volumes, though focused solely on the East German studio, put DEFA into a transnational perspective; see Michael Wedel, Barton Byg, Andy Räder, Skyler Arndt-Briggs and Evan Torner (eds), *DEFA International: Grenzüberschreitende Filmbeziehungen vor und nach dem Mauerbau* (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2013) and Marc Silberman and Henning Wrage (eds), *DEFA at the Crossroads of East German and International Film Culture* (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2014).
4. See Volker Zimmermann, 'Medzi kooperáciou a konfrontáciou. Kultúrnopolitické vzťahy medzi NDR a Československom v 50. a 60. rokoch 20. Storočia', in Dušan Kováč, Michaela Marek, Jiří Pešek and Roman Prahl (eds), *Kultura jako nositel a oponent politických záměrů. Německo-české a německo-slovenské kulturní styky od poloviny 19. století do současnosti* (Ústí nad Labem: Albis, 2009), pp. 321–348.
5. 'October' refers to the Polish 'thaw', a period of political reform between October 1956 and early 1958 initiated by the appointment of Władysław Gomułka as First Secretary of the Party after he had been expelled from the Polish United Worker's Party and imprisoned.
6. See Beate Ihme-Tuchel, *Das „nördliche Dreieck": Die Beziehungen zwischen der DDR, der Tschechoslowakei und Polen in den Jahren 1954 bis 1962* (Cologne: Wissenschaft und Politik, 1994).
7. Sheldon Anderson, *A Cold War in the Soviet Bloc: Polish-East German Relations: 1945–1962* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000), pp. 5–6.
8. See e.g. Volker Zimmerman, 'Proměnlivá spojenectví. NDR a její vztahy k Československu a Polsku v padesátých a šedesátých letech 20. století', in Christoph Buchheim, Edita Ivaničková, Kristina Kaiserová and Volker Zimmermann (eds), *Československo a dva německé státy* (Prague: Kristina Kaiserová and Albis International, 2011), p. 86.
9. See e.g. Ihme-Tuchel, *Das „nördliche Dreieck"*, p. 48.
10. See Pavel Skopal, 'Reisende in Sachen Genre – von Barrandov nach Babelsberg und zurück. Zur Bedeutung von tschechischen Regisseuren für die Genrefilmproduktion der DEFA in den 1960er und 1970er Jahren', in Michael Wedel, Barton Byg, Andy Räder, Skyler Arndt-Bryggs and Evan Torner (eds), *DEFA international: Grenzüberschreitende Filmbeziehungen vor und nach dem Mauerbau* (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2013), pp. 249–266.
11. We use 'Sovetization' as an analytical term. Nevertheless, it has its own long history: used by Soviet leaders as early as the 1920s to describe the consolidation of Soviet power over the non-Russian republics, it was then more widely applied by critics of the Soviet regime in the 1950s. See Konrad H. Jarausch and Hannes Siegrist, 'Amerikanisierung und Sowjetisierung. Eine vergleichende Fragestellung zur deutsch-deutschen Nachkriegsgeschichte', in Jarausch and Siegrist (eds),

Amerikanisierung und Sowjetisierung in Deutschland 1945–1970 (Frankfurt and New York: Campus Verlag, 1997), pp. 20–21; E. A. Rees, 'The Sovietization of Eastern Europe', in Balázs Apor, Péter Apor and E. A. Rees (eds), *The Sovietization of Eastern Europe: New Perspectives on the Postwar Period* (Washington DC: New Academia Publishing, 2008), pp. 1–3.

12. See John Connelly, *Captive University: The Sovietization of East German, Czech, and Polish Higher Education, 1945–1956* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Michael David-Fox and György Péteri (eds), *Academia in Upheaval: Origins, Transfers, and Transformations of the Communist Academic Regime in Russia and East Central Europe* (Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, 2000).
13. Muriel Blaive, *Promarněná příležitost. Československo a rok 1956* (Prague: Prostor, 2001), pp. 280–282.
14. For a brief account of the debate, see Norman Naimark, 'The Sovietization of Eastern Europe, 1944–1953', in Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (eds), *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, vol. 1: *Origins* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 195–197.
15. It is important to note that in the standard political debate on Sovietization as the establishment of communist regimes, this notion has met strong criticism for implying that the USSR's role was not vital to the result. Indeed, 'self-Sovietization' must be understood as just one, and definitely not the most important, mode of the whole Sovietization process. Connelly, *Captive University*, pp. 45–46.
16. Národní filmový archiv, Prague, f. Filmová rada, k. R9-SI-4P-9K, 1950–1953.
17. See e.g. Russell A. Berman, 'Anti-Americanism and Americanization', in Alexander Stephan (ed.), *Americanization and Anti-Americanism: The German Encounter with American Culture after 1945* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), pp. 11–24.
18. Philipp Ther, 'Comparisons, Cultural Transfers, and the Study of Networks: Toward a Transnational History of Europe', in Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Jürgen Kocka (eds), *Comparative and Transnational History: Central European Approaches and New Perspectives* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2009), pp. 204–225.
19. See Hartmut Kaelble, 'Between Comparison and Transfers – and What Now? A French-German Debate', in Haupt and Kocka, *Comparative and Transnational History*, pp. 33–34.
20. However, small steps have been taken in this direction; see Skopal, 'Reisende in Sachen Genre – von Barrandov nach Babelsberg und zurück'.
21. Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Jürgen Kocka, 'Comparison and Beyond', in Haupt and Kocka, *Comparative and Transnational History*, pp. 20–21.
22. Daniela Berghahn, *Hollywood Behind the Wall: The Cinema of East Germany* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005); Joshua Feinstein, *The Triumph of the Ordinary*: *Depictions of Daily Life in the East German Cinema, 1949–1989* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Seán Allan and John Sandford (eds), *DEFA: East German Cinema 1946–1992* (Oxford: Berghahn, 1999); Sebastian Heiduschke, *East German Cinema: DEFA and Film History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Rosemary Stott, *Crossing the Wall: The Western Feature Film Import in East Germany* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2012); Anke Pinkert, *Film and Memory in East Germany* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008). Two volumes address Czechoslovak cinema of the 1950s to a significant degree: Mira Liehm and Antonín Liehm, *The Most Important Art: Soviet and Eastern European Film After 1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980) and Peter Hames, *Czech and Slovak Cinema: Theme and Tradition* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010).

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PART I

Cultural Policy and Cinema

Chapter 1

From Soviet Zone to *Volksdemokratie*

The Politics of Film Culture in the GDR, 1945–1960

David Bathrick

From UFA to DEFA: 1945–1948

The planning for film production in the Soviet Occupation Zone (Sowjetische Besatzungszone, SBZ) was already underway a scant four months after Nazi Germany's total capitulation in May of 1945. The call for a gathering of those committed to working on such a project resulted in a now famous meeting at the Hotel Adlon on 22 November 1945. Here Soviet occupation officers and political leaders of the German Communist Party (Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands, KPD) met with German film and literary artists, some coming from Soviet exile, others from so-called 'inner emigration' or from the Nazi Film industry. The president of the newly formed Central Administration for Education, Paul Wandel, opened the proceedings with a call for renewal that was to be repeated often in the succeeding years: 'Let us make films which breathe a new spirit, films with humanist, antifascist, and democratic content, films that had nothing in common with UFA'.[1]

Making films that had nothing in common with UFA? That task, it turned out, would be far easier said than done. The two-day meeting of the Central Administration was devoted to laying the ideological and organizational groundwork for what would emerge one year later as the Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft, known as DEFA. The personages assembled also quite literally prefigured some of the confluences

of old and new that were fated to make any absolute renewal a difficult, protracted affair.

Let us begin with ideology. Certainly all present in the Hotel Adlon saw the struggle against the 'Ungeist der UFA-Traumwelt' (the pernicious ideology of the UFA dream world) as the central cultural and political task in the rebuilding of mass forms of media communication with the potential to have an impact upon millions within a beleaguered population. 'Everyone was united in their loathing of racial hatred and genocide, the cult of the Führer and war mongering'.[2] Less clear, and indeed, increasingly contested already in the late 1940s, were precisely the inherent meanings of signifiers such as humanist, antifascist and even democratic. Initially serving within the cultural policies of the SBZ as the lowest common denominators for political reconciliation around a once imagined 'united front', they gradually transmogrified into the ideological binaries of a growing Cold War culture. The term humanism soon generated its pejorative Other in the fight against modernist aesthetic variants of so-called 'formalism', 'avantgardism', and 'degenerate art'. Antifascism connoted a legacy of genuine artistic attempts to come to terms with the Nazi past that later became re-encoded within the cultural discourse of an emerging authoritarian Stalinist infrastructure. And democracy – a linguistic representative for the once hopefully shared notions of liberation and egalitarianism – was soon folded into the metanarrative of 'dialectical materialism's' claim for legitimate power by the chosen representative of proletarian good will, the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands, SED). All modes of political discourse – culture generally, and film more specifically – were to find their expression within these cultural and political frameworks, and we shall return to that expression in a discussion of filmmaking and its development throughout the 1950s.

But what of the resources at hand – in this case experienced artists and technicians as well as capital and equipment? Another look at the 1945 conference, this time focusing on the immediate histories of the writers and filmmakers assembled, is revealing.[3] With the exception of the left-wing writers Friedrich Wolf and Günter Weisenborn, all others present had been active participants in the Nazi public sphere. Of the nine filmmakers named in the programme, seven had worked in the studios of UFA and Ton-Bild-Syndikat AG (Tobis), another important film production and distribution company in Germany. Most prominent among them were Wolfgang Staudte, Gerhard Lamprecht and Hans Deppe. Staudte, director of the first postwar German film, *Die*

Mörder sind unter uns (The Murderers are Among Us, 1946) for DEFA, had played small roles in a number of films, including two of the most notorious Nazi feature films – Veit Harlan's *Jud Süss* (Jew Süss, 1940) and Arthur Maria Rabenalt's *...reitet für Deutschland* (Ride for Germany, 1941) – in addition to directing one of the premiere comedies of the period, *Akrobat schö-ö-ön* (1943). Lamprecht and Deppe, both prolific directors of light entertainment films, went on to make films for DEFA in the immediate postwar period. Lamprecht's *Irgendwo in Berlin* (Somewhere in Berlin, 1946) became the classic rubble youth film of the period. Deppe's considerably more forgettable *Kein Platz für Liebe* (No Room for Love, 1947) and *Die Kuckucks* (The Cuckoo Family, 1949) were soon to be overshadowed by his now classic Heimat films, *Schwarzwaldmädel* (Black Forest Girl, 1950) and *Grün ist die Heide* (Green is the Heath, 1951), which he made in the Federal Republic.

One survey states that between 1949 and 1952, 62 per cent of all DEFA directors, 73 per cent of its camera people, and 60 per cent of its producers had once worked for UFA or Terra.[4] This high percentage of former Third Reich filmmakers working for and affiliated with DEFA was emblematic of a dependency on the remnants of the Nazi film industry in all the allied zones that would last well into the 1950s. In their discussions in Moscow during the spring of 1944, the KPD cultural émigrés and their Soviet colleagues were already stressing the importance of postwar political rehabilitation for film and electronic media, given that 'still too many people who would not be reading newspapers not to mention the books, will be going to the movies'.[5] Certainly this emphasis upon the powers of 'controlled policies' (*gesteuerte Politik*) carried over into the early decision to build a powerful centralized cinema industry, and as such marked out clear differences between the Soviet and the other three zones in postwar Germany. Unlike in the SBZ, decision makers in the western zones, particularly the Americans, initially remained suspicious of the potential misuse of the manipulative powers of the cinema, embracing instead print media as primary for 'denazification' and relegating cinema to the realm of entertainment, which in their minds could be covered by Hollywood.

Thus, whereas Western allies were initially concerned with breaking up any German cinematic monopolies that might form, the SBZ devoted itself to building a concentration of large-scale production and distribution in the areas of documentary and feature films.[6] Such a project, of course, entailed a large outlay of material resources at every level of production – a considerable challenge, considering that the technical capacities of the once all-powerful UFA and Tobis concerns

lay in ruins. The bombing attacks on Berlin in the last two war years and on Potsdam in April of 1945 had destroyed 90 per cent of the (then) largest film industry in Europe, and the reparation policies implemented by the Soviet Union made accruing capital to rebuild studios and individual cinemas, and produce technical equipment and film stock – difficult in and of itself – even more so.

Even more off-putting was the lack of experience and personnel in the form of artistic and technical know-how. Whereas a significant number of leading German literary writers had returned to the SBZ from western and eastern exile (Johannes R. Becher, Bertolt Brecht, Friedrich Wolf, Anna Seghers, Bodo Uhse, etc.), the same cannot be said for those émigrés working in the cinema. From the mass exodus of over one thousand top directors, actors, screenwriters, producers and technicians who had left Germany after 1932 because of racial policies and political oppression, only a small number returned to Germany in 1945, and far fewer of them to the SBZ. One exception was Slatan Dudow, the director of *Kuhle Wampe oder Wem gehört die Welt?* (Kuhle Wampe or to Whom Does the World Belong? Germany, 1932), who did go on to make DEFA films.

Soviet cultural authorities' initial efforts to meet viewing needs resulted in two major policy developments that were to have far-reaching impact upon the media public sphere in the Soviet Zone. The first was their effort to provide cinema entertainment as soon as possible, which in turn led them to release their own films for distribution. One month after the German capitulation, the Soviet Military Administration in Germany (*Sowjetische Militäradministration in Deutschland*, SMAD) commissioned German technicians to refit a synchronization studio in Berlin for the purpose of dubbing Soviet films for German audiences. Here the main emphasis was upon the 'Soviet Classics' of the 1930s and 1940s, together with musicals and light entertainment, as a means of countering anti-Sovietism among the German populace and 'making them acquainted with the achievements of Soviet art'.[7] It should also come as no surprise that for both cultural and political reasons, the Soviet revolutionary avant-garde cinema of the 1920s – films by Eisenstein, Pudovkin, and Vertov – were for the most part withheld from distribution. Eisenstein's *Bronenosets Potyomkin* (Battleship Potemkin, 1925) was not screened until 1949, and *Stachka* (*Strike*, 1925) and *Oktyabr': Desyat' dney kotorye potryasli mir* (October: Ten Days that Shook the World, 1927) were not shown at all during this period.[8]

A second source of immediate programming came from UFA films of the 1930s and 1940s, for the most part 'harmless light comedies and musicals' that had been inspected to determine whether they 'contained subliminal [*unterschwellig*] traces of fascism, racism or militarism'.[9] By 1948, the Allies had cleared for distribution 454 of the approximately 1,300 feature films and full-length documentaries made in Germany between 1933 and 1945. Once again, entertainment value for legitimation purposes was of prime importance,[10] as Vladimir Gall, a cultural officer for the SMAD during this period, reminds us: 'For the most part these films were "*kitschig*", sometimes even ridiculous [*albern*] and in no way did they contribute to the re-education of the German population … but they also weren't dangerous and they did provide people with diversion [*Abwechslung*]'.[11] Finally, the population of the SBZ was eventually also permitted to view films from the United States, Great Britain and France.

The Soviets' second commitment during this period was their complete support for the immediate production of German films and the building of a domestic film industry. The first documentary shorts, cultural films and newsreels made by DEFA, beginning with Kurt Maetzig's newsreel series called *Der Augenzeuge* (The Eyewitness), appeared as early as the spring of 1946 at the same time that initial shooting began for Wolfgang Staudte's *Die Mörder sind unter uns.* This was followed by the officially celebrated licencing of DEFA on 17 May. The main speaker at the ceremony was the highest-ranking authority on matters of cultural policy in the SBZ between 1945 and 1949, Colonel (later General) Sergei Tiul'panov of the Information Bureau of SMAD, who stated that:

> DEFA faces a number of important tasks. Of these, the most important is the eradication of all traces of Nazism and militarism from the conscience of every German; the struggle for the reeducation of the German people – especially the young – towards a true understanding of genuine democracy and humanism; and in so doing, to promote a sense of respect for other people and other nations.[12]

Significantly, Tiul'panov's carefully worded statement lacks any obviously ideological implications. Its notion of re-education is devoid even of phrases like 'antifascism', not to speak of references hinting at a socialist future. This is not to suggest that there was a dearth of censorship or control – as the only officially sanctioned film corporation in the SBZ, DEFA soon became a 'German-Soviet Corporation' dominated by

members of the SED and under the tutelage of SMAD, with a monopoly on supervisory powers over every single film made on that territory for the next forty-one years. Nonetheless, the Soviets under Tiul'panov also realized from the very outset that the building of a financially viable 'education and entertainment' film industry entailed making compromises with a number of competing constituencies.

The first area of concern emerged at the level of film production. As mentioned above, virtually all the available major artists (directors, actors, screenwriters, technical engineers) had previously worked in the Third Reich, so the cultural-political frameworks of the initial projects were necessarily kept at the rather vague level of phrases such as 'the struggle for a new beginning'. In fact, the Soviets – as opposed to their more partisan brethren in the SED – felt comfortable with a very general notion of antifascism: neither explicitly anticapitalist nor narrowly ideological or didactic, nor by any means encouraging self-initiated terrorist action. Of the first eighteen feature films produced by DEFA between 1946 and 1948, only three suggest any sort of proselytizing for the socialization of the status quo: Milo Harbig's *Freies Land* (Free Land, 1946) attempts to popularize the notion of land reform; Walter Schleif's and Erich Freund's *Grube Morgenrot* (Coal Mine of the Dawn, 1948) agitates in favour of the postwar socialization of key industries; and Arthur Maria Rabenalt's *Chemie und Liebe* (Chemistry and Love, 1948) draws the connection between capitalist greed and war production. The majority of the other films feature individuals struggling with postwar distress and renewal in the broadest sense: returning soldiers and war prisoners, refugees, resettlers, single women, parentless children and homeless youth on the move through the cities, still bearing the marks of their National Socialist upbringing.

Certainly Wolfgang Staudte's *Die Mörder sind unter uns* appropriately serves as a cultural political paradigm for many of the films that followed over the next two years.[13] The narrative of the returning soldier Dr Hans Mertens, who hunts down and seeks to murder his former senior officer, who once issued orders to kill a group of helpless Polish partisans – orders that Mertens himself did not refuse to carry out – is not, in any literal sense, Staudte's own story. Yet, like the works of many of his cinematic colleagues who came from UFA to DEFA, this film did serve as a way to work through his wartime complicity and its aftermath – in this case, the desire for revenge served as an act of atonement for one's own guilt. Staudte's two fold revision of the film's ending represents a compulsive re-enactment of the psychic/collective crime. In the original ending, the filmmaker has the wanton hero Mertens trap

his helpless former officer Brückner, now a successful capitalist and family man, and murder him on the spot. Told by the Soviet cultural officer Alexander Dymshits that this kind of vigilante justice would not be appropriate, given the potential mayhem it might encourage among the postwar German population, Staudte settled on an ending in which Mertens simply attempts to assassinate Brückner, only to be prevented from doing so by his faithful woman, the concentration camp survivor Susanne Wallner, who throughout the film has stood by her suffering man as a nurturing source of succour and now quite literally enables his abrupt reversal and rehabilitation. Viewed from the perspective of postwar realities, the final words of this ultimate version of the screenplay stand indeed as a clear example of the humanist *Neuanfang* (new beginning) sanctioned most explicitly by the officers of Soviet Military Administration of Germany in the early days of DEFA.[14]

> Susanne: Hans! We do not have the right to judge!
>
> Mertens: No Susanne, but we do have the duty to bring an indictment, to demand atonement in the name of the millions of innocently murdered people.[15]

The main significance of the ending and indeed message of this first DEFA film was that it 'did not delve into the political background of fascist atrocities, but rather argued from a subjectively moral position (*innermoralisch*), and in so doing, put more emphasis on the inner remorse of the fellow traveller rather than the punishment of the perpetrator – a move that was absolutely in line with official allied policy'.[16]

Already in this first post-UFA feature, we encounter a number of the ingredients that marked the interface of ruptures and continuities, pasts and presents, represented here aesthetically in the suggestive combination of expressionist, classical (Third Reich) UFA, Italian neorealist, and film noir styles peculiar to early DEFA productions as a whole.[17] During this period individual directors wrote their own screenplays, without intense Soviet or SED supervision, and in so doing projected onto the screen their ongoing struggles to work through and subsequently reach resolution, replete with blockage, distortion and revelation, and expressed a continued fascination with and confusion about a past that haunted the present as a chosen means of producing the new through occasional re-enactments of the old.

What is also of importance, beyond its non-tendentious narrative message, is the extent to which *Die Mörder sind unter uns* articulates its contradictions at the aesthetic level. It has often been mentioned that

the mise-en-scène of the film strongly suggests a reprise of German expressionist cinema.[18] For instance, the camera work of Friedl Behn-Grund draws on his pre-1930s work, with its focus on differing dimensions of German silent film's suggestive 'dramaturgy of shadow and light' as well as its extraordinary use of camera angle for distortion and highlighting.[19] Displaying inspiration from early expressionist film, *Die Mörder sind unter uns* engages in a painterly transformation of landscape and human figure, whether by demonizing the ruins of Berlin into haunting metaphors of a lost moonscape world or by highlighting physiognomy, particularly in the close-ups of the suffering Mertens, shot at a low angle and casting shadows for the haunting effects of a tortured soul.

Yet as much as Behn-Grund draws on Weimar cinematic expressionism in his enhancement of outdoor space, it is surely his use of light and dark contrasts emanating from a very different system that made him an occasional lighting designer for UFA and Tobis during the Third Reich. If we look more carefully at the camera work, particularly in relationship to its enhancement of facial close-ups, then we see that the counterpoint to the lurking, shadowy, melancholic 'expressionist' Mertens is precisely the paradigm of goodness, virtue and above all patience embodied in the character Susanne Wallner, played by Hildegard Knef. Not accidentally, Susanne's face, whether in close-up or a long shot, is consistently bathed in bright light from the very beginning and in almost every subsequent take. In the words of Ralf Schenk, 'Hildegard Knef hovers ever present as a figure of light (*Lichtgestalt*) throughout the film: with white make-up, her smooth, even face highlighted mostly in bright hues as it rises up out of the darkness of its surroundings – she is indeed a principle of hope. "UFA-Stil" we would say today, in a somewhat abbreviated and inexact way'.[20]

The success of the DEFA studio during the first three years following the war is in no small degree attributable to the Soviet authorities' willingness to provide a policy of industrial support and political leeway for a kind of film production that was surprisingly free of ideological and aesthetic constraint, in terms of both the issues it addressed and the heterogeneity of its modes of artistic expression. There was little effort to invoke a policy of Socialist Realism, although some members of the SED were pushing in this direction. That a majority of the DEFA filmmakers and film technicians were commuting from West Berlin is but further indication of the extent to which this highly eclectic and successful endeavour itself 'arose from the rubble'.

From Soviet Zone to Volksdemokratie: 1948–1955

In the fall of 1947, an eventual unification of Germany 'was still the guiding principle for formulating cultural policy in the SBZ'.[21] Unlike in the other Eastern Bloc countries, which under the mantle of Soviet hegemony would be evolving into so-called 'Peoples' Democracies', the SMAD in the SBZ continued to adhere to a policy that emanated originally from the 'united front' and defined itself officially as the 'antifascist democratic renewal'. But this would all begin to change rather precipitously in the months to follow. The collapse of the London Conference of Foreign Ministers in December of 1947 was followed by increasing economic and political confrontations between East and West globally, culminating in Germany with the Berlin blockade in June of 1948 and the intensification of the Marshall Plan in the three western zones in that same year.

The gradual evolution into 'two Germanys' confronted cultural policymakers in the SED with a complicated situation. On one level, it soon became clear that a policy based simply on a concept of 'antifascist-democratic renewal' would no longer prove adequate within the rapidly increasing intensity of Cold War politics. Just as obvious, however, was that the geopolitical limitations of postwar zonal Germany made this an inopportune time to launch a campaign for a 'People's Democracy' with a fully developed 'socialist cultural policy'. In September of 1948, it was none other than Walter Ulbricht who, in light of the soon to be implemented two-year plan in the SBZ, chose to remind the party's 'culture producers' of their past misdemeanours and expected responsibilities in the rapidly evolving global bi-polarization:

> I am going to begin with the following critique because it can no longer be tolerated that those of you who produce culture feel free to reject the new tasks at hand and simply act as though others will complete these tasks for you. I simply want to state openly what the situation is that we find ourselves in now. We will not be able to complete the two-year plan successfully, if the cultural level (*Niveau*) of the population is not raised at a rapid pace, as well as the ideological level; if the struggle on the cultural front is not carried through with total energy and determination. That is not what is happening today.[22]

The cultural-political implications of an accelerating Stalinization would soon be felt at every level of cultural life in the SBZ. In December of 1948 Alexander Dymshits, the heretofore 'liberal' head of the SMAD information bureau, published a polemic against 'formalistic

directions in German painting' in the daily East Berlin newspaper *Tägliche Rundschau* – a clear warning that SMAD might no longer be in a position to support deviations from 'official policy', as once was the case.[23]

In January of 1949, the first SED Party Conference announced the opening of the 'struggle against signs of decadence and the formalistic and naturalistic distortion of art'.[24] What the artists and even some party intellectuals in the SBZ did not always understand is that the language and the cultural politics of the so-called formalism or modernism debate had their genesis in 1946 with the policies of the then Central Committee Secretary and Stalin appointee for cultural policy Andrei Zhdanov. The main principle of the Zhdanov doctrine was often summarized in one phrase: 'The only conflict possible in Soviet culture is the conflict between good and best.'[25] Although initially aimed at the arts, particularly the "bourgeois" music of Dmitri Shostakovich, Sergei Prokofiev and Aram Khachaturian, it soon became clear that the underlying strategy of Zhdanovism was to divide the world into two camps by defining the enemies and the cultural values at the heart of the Cold War itself.

The most important German Democratic Republic (GDR) document to deal with modernism was a declaration of the Central Committee of the SED on 17 March 1951 entitled 'The Struggle against Formalism in Art and Literature for a Progressive German Culture', which was the product of a similarly named conference. The categories it employs reflect its historical origins: formalism or 'cosmopolitism', we are told, is a form of 'American cultural barbarism' that, when practiced in the new society, 'leads to a rupture with art itself, a destruction of national consciousness and indirect support of the war policies of world imperialism'.[26] Important here is not the content but rather the structure of the political relationship. The rhetoric and posturing with such terms as 'cultural barbarism' and 'cosmopolitanism' were an obvious part of the then prevailing Cold War climate that was later to abate somewhat with de-Stalinization and a greater focus on political conflicts within the social order.[27] But what would not disappear was this re-establishment, within GDR socialism, of the classical antagonism between the institution of affirmative culture, on the one hand, and its potential subversion at the hands of various forms of modernism on the other – an antagonism now transferred into the legitimacy struggles of 'a state that was not supposed to be'.[28]

The politicization of culture is always a double-edged sword. Though Anton Ackermann's demand to wed 'nationalist form to

socialist content' did indeed serve nationalist identity claims of the new order – in contrast to the 'cosmopolitanism' of the newly founded Federal Republic – it also meant that any iconoclastic alternative to that form was, perforce, a challenge to the larger political order. Nobody understood this dialectics of legitimation better than Bertolt Brecht,[29] who, when summoned by the highest ministers of the state to discuss the formalist and ideological deviations of his and Paul Dessau's controversial opera *Das Verhör des Lukullus* (The Trial of Lucullus), asked with characteristic double entendre: 'Where else in the world can you find a government that shows such interest in and pays such attention to its artists?'[30]

The shift in political orientation at the upper reaches of the SED towards rigid versions of Zhdanovian *Kulturpolitik* was soon accompanied by administrative reorganization within the party apparatus as well as personnel changes within DEFA itself. Film, along with radio and the press, was relocated from the Department of Culture (*Kulturabteilung*) of the SED to the Department of Agitation. In February of 1950 the Film Commission of the SED became the DEFA Commission, which in turn was resituated within the Politburo. This newly configured DEFA Commission amalgamated leading party functionaries with the top information and political power in both the party and the state. Being accountable only to the Politburo and the Central Committee meant in practice that the newly founded DEFA Commission henceforth became directly responsible for the solicitation of screenplays along with the production, censorship, approval and distribution of every film made in the GDR.

This folding of DEFA into high-level party and state structures would soon affect the daily functions of filmmaking as well as artistic personnel. Those filmmakers not in the party, or for that matter not living in the East, were under increased pressure to toe the line when it came to the choice of subject matter for their films and their aesthetic realization of such themes. Whereas earlier screenplays had often been initiated by individual authors or even directors, now the initiation process increasingly came directly out of the Central Committee itself, in an effort to coordinate the production of cinema in the newly founded German Democratic Republic with the cultural political needs of this or that two-year plan. Here it must be noted that during this first period, this top-down cultural politicization produced somewhat of a double bind within the party itself because it was the experienced 'bourgeois' cinema artists who tended to make the films that, by doing well at the box office, enabled DEFA to compete with German-made

films in the other three zones. In 1948, five of seven DEFA films were made by directors who had worked for German companies prior to 1945 and now lived in the West. In 1949, it was six of twelve, in 1950 five of eleven, and in 1951 five of eleven.[31]

Nevertheless, 1949 was also the year when DEFA produced three feature films by pre-eminent communist filmmakers that the SED enthusiastically endorsed as outstanding examples of socialist realism: Slatan Dudow's *Unser täglich Brot* (Our Daily Bread), Gustav von Wangenheim's *Der Auftrag Höglers* (Hoegler's Mission) and Kurt Maetzig's *Rat der Götter* (The Council of the Gods). As an articulation of Cold War tensions, the latter film argues that the same economic and political structures that led to the rise of fascism persist in the Federal Republic of Germany and the United States: 'While IG Farben in the West continues (after Auschwitz) to produce lethal gas and explosives, Germans in the East are taking to the streets in Berlin in an anti-war march on May 1, 1950.'[32]

With *Rat der Götter*, Kurt Maetzig unwittingly provides a poignant testimony to the shifts that occurred in the meanings attached to the notion of an antifascist cultural politics between 1945 and 1950, from both his own perspective and that of the SED. In 1947 Maetzig wrote and directed the film *Ehe im Schatten* (Marriage in the Shadows), which tells the true story of the popular theatre and film actor Joachim Gottschalk who, together with his Jewish wife and son, committed suicide in November 1941 when it became clear that his family would be deported to Theresienstadt. This film shines the spotlight on the persecution of Jews by the German population at home: crimes of omission at the level of the everyday, quotidian acts of cowardice, be they denunciations, a lack of civil courage, or simply a failure of will to do what one knew was right. Twelve million people in the GDR and in West Berlin saw that film, which was so popular in part because its powerful emotional cadences offered Germans a rare opportunity to identify with Jewish victims.[33] In *Rat der Götter*, Maetzig, himself a Jew whose mother had not survived the camps, no longer worked in the way he once had. In the resulting expression of antifascism, the enemy is now American and West German 'imperialism', which he sees as in the process of restaging the Holocaust.

Rat der Götter, though one the first films held up as a model for socialist realism, was by no means the worst product of what Thomas Heimann has described as the 'fatal cultural political narrowness at the beginning of the fifties in which to an extreme degree artistic expression had been totally subordinated to Party doctrine'.[34] In point of fact,

the party's acclaimed goal to move ideologically from *Volkserziehung* (people's education) to *Volksdemokratie* (people's democracy), and from critical realism to socialist realism, had in very fundamental ways brought about a crisis of serious proportions with regard to production schedules in the film industry. After setting a production goal of twenty films per year in 1949, by the end of 1952 the party had to face the reality that the annual average for those four years was only ten films, considerably less than the eighteen-film average for 1947 and 1948, the two years prior to the establishment of the GDR. The paucity of films from 1949 to 1952 clearly must be attributed to the increasing interventionist activities of the DEFA Commission, including pre- and post-censoring of manuscripts and films in combination with exertion of constant pressure on filmmakers to adhere to the norms, disallowing what some ideologues might happen to glimpse as an indulgence in the realm of formalism or cosmopolitanism.

The presence of Soviet 'advisers' during the early 1950s was another factor compounding the already excessive monitoring process. As indicated earlier, up through 1948 Soviet advisers most often were liberal artistic professionals coming from the Control Commission and the Soviet Ministry for Cinematography. Between 1950 and 1952, though, the Soviet presence was assuredly more politically oriented to working with the SED leadership at a time of crisis in the Cold War.

In 1953, DEFA officially became a people-owned enterprise (Volkseigener Betrieb, VEB – the GDR's legal form of publicly owned industrial enterprises), which in turn led to the company being split up into 'three constituent studios, each specializing in the production of feature films, educational films and documentary features respectively'.[35] With this structural reorganization in the interest of greater artistic autonomy for individual filmmakers came discussions at the highest level about the need for greater freedom in film production and programming. Speaking at a special meeting between Otto Grotewohl and 'leading personalities of art and culture' in October of 1953, the director of the DEFA film studio Hans Rodenberg made it absolutely clear that fundamental changes in the quality of GDR cinema would only be achieved 'with the help of a powerful advocate with passionate interest in the momentous problems of DEFA'.[36] As things indeed began to open up, Kurt Maetzig felt empowered enough to state publicly: 'It is essential to have free and unrestricted debates about artistic matters. Such debates are valuable if they lead to more and better films. They are pointless when they are exploited so as to put a potential film project out of existence.'[37]

In comparison to the period 1949–1952, the years following Stalin's death and the uprising of 17 June 1953 were a relatively productive period for DEFA in terms of the quantity of films made. This improvement was most probably partly attributable to the so-called *Neuer Kurs* (New Course), a Soviet economic policy introduced in the GDR on 9 July 1953 that aimed to improve the standard of living, increase the availability of consumer goods and relax ideological standards. Whereas the New Course indeed contributed to greater output in the short run, the same cannot be said about the reception of the films by the population at large or their aesthetic quality. Kurt Maetzig's two-part biopic about the life of the Communist leader Ernst Thälmann, with a script by Willi Bredel (*Ernst Thälmann: Sohn seiner Klasse* [Ernst Thälmann: Son of the Working Class, 1954] and *Ernst Thälmann: Führer seiner Klasse* [Ernst Thählmann: Leader of the Working Class, 1955]), was successful at the box office but is most memorable for being an exemplary incarnation of a socialist-realist blockbuster.

From De-Stalinization to Re-Stalinization: SED Cultural Policy 1956–1960

In a speech 'On the Personality Cult and Its Consequences', delivered to a closed session of the Twentieth Party Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Kommunisticheskaya Partiya Sovetskogo Soyuza, KPSS) on 25 February 1956, Nikita Khrushchev shocked his listeners and eventually the world by denouncing Stalin's dictatorial rule and the crimes committed by the associates of Lavrentiy Beria. The impact of this policy change on the cultural politics of the Peoples' Democracies initially caused confusion, followed in turn by crisis. On the one hand, it offered hope for much-desired reform and liberalization of a system that had not undergone fundamental structural change since the 1930s. On the other hand, it soon became clear that any departure from the Stalinist era would be accomplished only by the existing ruling parties in the various Peoples' Democracies, and consequently in a manner that would not seriously question the absolute omnipotence of the KPSS itself.

The issue of total control was particularly central and complicated when it came to the cultural organs of the SED. In this case, proximity to the Western 'enemy' was not only politically problematic due to the form of Germany's geopolitically sundered national identities, but also existentially threatening because of the dominant presence of West

German media (film, radio, newspapers and subsequently television) in the everyday life of the GDR. The SED's initial strategy regarding de-Stalinization was to withhold information. The Politburo went out of its way to assure that only mid-level party members – the district party leaders – were permitted to receive written reports about the controversial proceedings. 'A public discussion of the various decisions and reports of the 20th Party Congress was simply not permitted',[38] nor was the SED tolerant of those artists and intellectuals whom they viewed as taking advantage of this perceived 'thaw' on the cultural-political front.

How, then, did cultural intellectuals in the DDR react to the party's crackdown? Perhaps the most unexpected initial response was that of Willi Bredel, revered author of proletarian novels from the 1920s and current member of the Central Committee, who used his status as socialist icon to call for a critique of Stalin within the SED. In so doing, he demanded self-critical behaviour from the party leadership, which in his eyes had 'permitted the political education of the SED to be reduced to forms of deranged collective chanting'.[39] He went on to assert that such dogmatism is the result of a 'sacrosanct cult of personality' whose damaging and impeding effects are synonymous with 'narrow minded notions of art on the part of cultural functionaries and subservient behaviours on the part of writers and artists'.[40]

Bredel was not alone. Not only did such public intellectuals as Professor Hans Mayer turn against the 'pan-politicization' of the authorities, bemoaning as well the lack of 'opulence' in the literature of the land, but established writers such as Anna Seghers, Eduard Claudius, Stefan Heym and Bodo Uhse also voiced misgivings about the 'emptiness' (Claudius) and 'wooden primitivism' (Heym) of the entire cultural scene.[41] In addition, even a select few from the younger generation – artists such as Heinz Kahlau, Manfred Bieler, Jens Gerlach, Manfred Streubel or Gerhard Zwerenz – dared to question the party's claims of omnipotence and its increasing efforts at manipulation. Film scriptwriter Kahlau, inspired by the Polish writer Jan Kott, dared, for instance, to draw a connection between a basically 'anti-Marxist Party mythology' and the 'inquisitional repression of troublesome, yet committed literary works lying in the drawers of writers waiting in vain for their readers'.[42]

But Kahlau and the like were to remain a distinct minority who themselves suffered severely from renewed retaliations by the SED leadership. In this regard, it was none other than Johannes R. Becher, chairman of the newly formed Ministry of Culture, who chose to confront a rebellious group of university students calling for public

discussion of their officially forbidden studio films with the following punitive rebuke: 'Here we find a symptomatic attempt being made to reverse everything that has been rightfully disallowed by employing the notion of "academic necessity" as a cover for forcing a public explanation. At that rate it won't be long before the demand will be made that we publish the works of Leon Trotsky, so that individuals can make their own assessments of them'.[43] The fears driving the SED at this historical moment are clear. Given the events occurring elsewhere in the Eastern Bloc in the fall of 1956 – the installation of Gomułka in Poland and the workers' strikes and revolutionary uprising in Hungary (which were supported by Georg Lukács!) – there could not and would not be room for tolerance at the level of cultural policy in the GDR.

At the outset of 1957, the SED officially opened a 'new phase' in the area of cultural politics, initiating efforts to bring intellectuals and artists into line at all levels of cultural life. Special conferences were organized to critique 'ideological revisionism' or the younger generation's demands for more 'self-governance', more 'theories of spontaneity' and more 'discussion about the death of the state'.[44] At a meeting of the 32nd Plenum of the Central Committee, the conformist writer Kuba (Kurt Barthel) delivered a rousing address in which he asserted that GDR writers and artists had theretofore done far too little in defence of the leadership of the SED, 'especially our comrade Ulbricht', against 'enemy attacks'.[45] He then went on to accuse them all of opportunism as regards the question of socialist realism:

> It is now the place and the time to ask the writers and artists why so many of them have so easily put aside their earlier resolutions; and how they deal with the question of honesty; and why some comrades have such a silly grin on their face when they utter the word socialist realism. Ergo the struggle must begin anew. Ergo the Marxists among the writers must fire one across the bow of those liberals shooting out of every buttonhole.[46]

Kuba's allegation was in fact quite valid in respect of a substantial segment of the cultural intelligentsia, and as such stands ironically as a verification of the significant failure of the SED's overly doctrinaire cultural policy.

All these points force the question of whether we can indeed speak about a 'period of thaw' when it comes to the production of films in the latter half of the 1950s in the GDR. Certainly one film subgenre that has often been referenced within the framework of cinematic reform during this period was that of the so-called 'Berlin Films': films set in contemporary Berlin of the mid-1950s that focused on the personal

experiences of working-class youth under the age of twenty-five in the divided city.[47] As Horst Claus argues, 'these films are generally regarded as authentic of a generation which was expected to realize the dream of a fair and equal German society in the East. They also bear witness to their creators' insistence on remaining critical voices within the context of the GDR's changing political and cultural policies'.[48]

The 'critical' aspects of the Berlin Films did not emanate from a rejection of socialist values but rather from a determined desire to realize, and at the same time rub against the grain of, a normative socialist realism. Instead of moralistic recrimination and ideological platitudes, the authors of these films, often with considerable success at the box office, sought to provide something like 'analytical starting points' for understanding the motivations of urban youth: the broken relations within East Berlin postwar families as well as the larger generational and societal conflicts outside the home, to which party youth organizations such as the Freie Deutsche Jugend (FDJ, Free German Youth) and even the *Volkspolizei* (people's police) were failing to provide adequate answers.[49]

Unquestionably, a classic example of the Berlin Films was Gerhard Klein and Wolfgang Kohlhaase's *Berlin – Ecke Schönhauser*, which I intend to read as a dialogue with, rather than a repudiation of, the reigning cultural political policies of the 1950s in the area of cinema. This film tells the story of four teenagers between the ages of sixteen and nineteen who belong to a group of youths whose regular meeting place is underneath the elevated train tracks at the corner of Schönhauser Allee and Dimitroffstraße. They provoke passers-by with rock and roll dancing and aggressive reactions to complaints about their appearance and behaviour. Angela, a seamstress, is the daughter of a single mother whose husband was killed in the war. Dieter (played by Bertolt Brecht's son-in-law Ekkehard Schall), a building worker, has lost both his parents and lives together with his brother, a law enforcement officer with the *Volkspolizei*. Kohle is unemployed and lives in a small flat with his widowed mother and her drunken lover. Karl Heinz, the son of a tax consultant, has dropped out of school. All four end up in trouble with various authorities (parental, legal, political, etc.) in East and West Berlin that leads ultimately to Kohle's accidental suicide and a ten-year prison sentence for Karl Heinz for homicide (in an unrelated incident). Blame for the fates of the four teens is meted out to all the parties involved, as summed up succinctly by a sensitive *Volkspolizist* in an exchange with Dieter at the film's conclusion: 'So it's my fault and it's your fault. Where we are not, there are our enemies.'