

Katie Trumpener

**'When Do We Get  
Our Cinema?'**  
**Stalinist Populism and  
East German  
Media Critique\***

★ An earlier version of this essay appeared in Mandarin as 重组认同结构：谈东德德发制片厂1946至1961年间拍摄的电影，当代电影，北京：中国电影艺术研究中心，第5期，2007。(Restructuring identification: DEFA as counter-cinema, 1946–1961. Trans. Qinna Shen.—*Dang Dai Dian Ying [Contemporary Cinema]* 2007, Vol. 5.) A much longer version of this argument will appear in my book *The Divided Screen: The Cinemas of Postwar Germany* (to be published by Princeton University Press).



*Two arts needed development  
under socialism: the art of acting and  
the art of spectating.*

—Bertolt Brecht quotation on the façade of  
Leipzig's main art cinema

'When do we get our cinema?' a woman demands in Milo Harbich's *A Free Country* (*Freies Land*, 1946), speaking from the crowd of refugees and dispossessed farm workers trying to launch a communist agricultural collective in Germany's Soviet Occupation Zone. An official voice explains that film must wait: tools and feed take priority, economic reconstruction preceding cultural renewal. The second feature film shot in postwar Germany, *A Free Country* was also the second feature produced by DEFA (Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft), the new Soviet-German film studio, later to become the East German state film studio. With its lay acting, and experimental blend of neorealism and Brechtian parable, Harbich's film is also a manifesto for a radical postwar cinema. Yet precisely for this reason, it flopped completely. Audiences found it too didactic *and* too avant-garde; officials criticized its refusal to develop socialist realist characters (Mückenberger, Jordan 1994: 52–59).

'When do we get our cinema?' With its expectation that the cinema now will belong to its audience in some new way, Harbich's question echoes 1930s German manifestos calling for a new leftist, anti-fascist cinema, from Willi Münzenberg's 1935 'Conquer the Cinema' ('Erobert den Film!', Münzenberg 1972) to Hans Richter's 1937 *The Struggle for the Film* (*Kampf um den Film*, Richter 1986). During the same era in the Soviet Union, the political ascendancy of Stalinism, the aesthetic ascendancy of socialist realism led to the increasingly violent repression of high modernism. And this aspect of Stalinism deeply shaped aesthetic life in the postwar German Democratic Republic (GDR). Many early DEFA films are stylistically innovative, drawing on neorealism, Expressionism, and cabaret. By the late 1940s and early 1950s, however, the studio's socialist mandate was taken to preclude such formal experiments.

Yet despite socialist realist prohibitions against any return to modernist *form*, Soviet

Zone and GDR cinema officials did succeed, at least intermittently, in radically reconfiguring cinematic life and in implementing interwar political and avant-garde dreams. The DEFA films of the early 1950s are often didactic, politically unnuanced, and formally flat—yet they announced and inaugurated major cinematic transformations.

Since 1989, a substantial new body of scholarship has focused extensively on the *repressive* aspects of GDR film life: official and internalized censorship mechanisms; Stasi surveillance of films-in-progress; petty and not-so-petty forms of coercion in the cinema itself; the Stasi-orchestrated 1966 cinema riots which furnished the excuse to ban a particularly trenchant anti-Stalinist film (Agde 1991 and Geiss 1997). This research has been vital in complicating Communist tradition of celebratory official cinema history. Yet what it threatens to efface, in turn, is the radical character of Stalinist political culture, and early postwar attempts to re-imagine film culture, to remake not only cinematic experience but spectators themselves.

Despite all this research, moreover, GDR cinema remains a 'lost cinema', still virtually unknown by viewers beyond Germany. From the early 1950s to the early 1990s, East German film largely vanished from Western cinematic consciousness, one of the Cold War's many cultural consequences. Since 1989, in turn, it has largely vanished from Eastern cinematic consciousness, having been retroactively (somehow) reunified with West German cinema or at least a longer German cinematic tradition (see, for instance, Iordanova 2005).

Already by the last half of the Cold War, in fact, East Germany had become peripheral to East European narratives of cinema history and indeed of regional history, despite its persistent, unprecedented, attempts to *move Germany eastward*. GDR's philo-Slavism was in some ways strategic (an officially sponsored cultural attempt to justify the Oder-Neiße line and Soviet military presence), but to a significant extent also expiatory, anti-fascist, and post-colonial. For it involved a renunciation not only the blandishments of Western European and American culture but of Germany's historic sense of itself as *the* dominant cultural force in Central and

Eastern Europe. Instead, the GDR imagined itself as a coeval, sharing the struggles of other fledgling socialist societies.

In some ways, of course, East Germany itself was an anomaly within Eastern Europe. In other parts of the Communist bloc, influential intellectuals remained staunch anti-Communists, and the film communities, too, were full of renegades and dissidents. GDR filmmakers, in contrast, welcomed the postwar arrival of Soviet films as an epochal event, displacing fascist cinema, and enabling the recovery and continuation of the Weimar Republic's Soviet-inspired revolutionary workers' films. Most GDR intellectuals, moreover, were convinced socialists, who viewed West Germany as a militarist inheritor of Nazi Germany—and revered the Soviet Union not only as a utopian experiment but as a historic refuge for the German left. In East Germany, public discussion of the Stalinist purges began only in the 1980s. In fact, as post-1989 studies have documented, the large group of German anti-fascists who took refuge in the Soviet Union were deliberately decimated during the late 1930s and early 1940s. So many key figures were killed, in fact, that it was not literally possible for the GDR to reassemble the Communist workers' film milieu of the late 1920s and early 1930s (see Agde 2001 and Agde 2002).

Yet many anti-fascist émigrés did return from Soviet and from Western exile to settle in the GDR, with incalculable, if sometimes indirect, effects on film culture. Bertolt Brecht, for instance, disliked most East German films—and his repeated attempts to collaborate directly with DEFA all failed (Brecht 1993 and Gersch 1975). His Berliner Ensemble nonetheless exerted a lasting influence on acting styles, dramaturgy, and conceptions of cinematic life. Throughout the Stalinist period, indeed, East German cinema was marked not only, as one might expect, by the cult of personality—newsreel adulation of Stalin, histrionic biopics about Communist martyrs—but also by the revival of interwar, radical, and in some ways essentially *modernist* attempts to transform the nature of cinematic experience.<sup>1</sup>

Yet Communist efforts to orient cultural life to Soviet models remained deeply unpopular

with the general population; until the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961, thousands of East Berliners thus crossed every night to West Berlin to see Western movies—and many frequented the special 'border cinemas' the West German government had established exclusively for East German spectators. East German films were conceived in the full knowledge that part of their intended audience had easy, regular access to the West German competition—and were being lured into capitalist film culture. This awareness pushed them not only to refute, but at moments, also to imitate Western media. The Party would eventually justify the erection of the Berlin Wall as an 'Anti-Fascist Protective Wall' preventing cross-sector movie-going and shielding the East German public from toxic Western media influences; the Party subsequently considered building an additional 'electronic Wall' to jam all West German radio and television signals as well. The critique of Western media forms—cast as successors to fascist media—was thus a central aspect of official ideology. Yet it also spurred filmmakers to renewed meditation on the nature of media itself—and hence helped catalyze East Germany's particular iteration of New Wave aesthetics.

Despite GDR cinema's intense initial engagement with Soviet cinema, and its ongoing attempts at collaboration with other East European state studios, it increasingly fell out of step, during the late 1950s and early 1960s, with cinematic developments elsewhere in Eastern Europe, eclipsed by the visual pyrotechnics and greater political nuance in other New Wave cinemas. DEFA's two main periods of New Wave sensibility—from 1956 to 1958 and again from 1962 to 1966, were tentative and brief, and in both cases ended with large-scale political reprisals.<sup>2</sup>

After 1956, for various political reasons (including the 'premature' nature of the 1953 East Berlin workers' uprising), East Germany's de-Stalinization process was foreshortened. Stalin's picture was retroactively edited out of many GDR newsreels, but there was virtually no public or cinematic discussion of what Stalinism had entailed. While Soviet and Polish New Wave cinema revised official narratives of World War II, or debunked Stalinist show-trials, while

Hungarian and Czech *auteurs* experimented with radically new content and film form, many East German films continued to focus on anti-Western polemics, and often retained pre-existing dramaturgical, narrative, and visual strategies. Yet what is interesting, in retrospect, is precisely the narrowness of the gap between everyday Stalinist filmmaking in East Germany, and what there was of a New Wave.

FROM THE STARS TO  
THE MASSES?  
STALINIST FILM CULTURE  
IN LIGHT OF 'THE CLEANING  
WOMAN SYSTEM'

GDR cinema understood itself as a counter-cinema on two fronts, trying to break decisively with the Third Reich cinema, and with its implicit restoration or continuation in West Germany. DEFA films, indeed, look particularly avant-garde when compared to contemporary West German studio productions. Throughout the 1950s, West German critics lampooned the provincialism, banality and sentimentality of their own films, conceived 'as if the German film public consisted of young girls, high school students, and chambermaids' (Schnurre 1950: 9). One of West Germany's most successful distributors, Ilse Kubaschewski, was known to rely heavily on the opinion of her cleaning woman in deciding what to distribute. Producers thus treated this cleaning woman as 'an important personality', holding special previews for her, and handling her with extreme deference, telling 'jokes before the screening to loosen her up' and anxiously studying her face to anticipate her verdict. This 'cleaning woman system' had some virtues, one producer remembers, in that some of the star-vehicles she liked went on to become hits. But she was an inappropriate judge, he felt, for more artistically ambitious productions (Brauner 1976: 201).<sup>3</sup>

When the West German studio system solicited the feedback of a single, 'representative' working-class viewer, it did so to gauge probable popularity and profitability. East German studio heads were animated not by financial but by political considerations, by the genuine wish to reach and move millions, changing

spectators' self-perception, political consciousness and sense of self-worth. DEFA was particularly interested in working-class subjects and audiences. Yet it also attempted to integrate viewers across classes and generations into a new, egalitarian public. Every DEFA film thus tried to appeal simultaneously to sophisticated and uneducated, male and female viewers. One reviewer thus criticized the 'abrupt ending' of Erich Engel's social comedy *The Beaver Coat* (*Der Biberpelz*, 1949); although this might make sense to the 'intellectual, literary' portion of the audience, it left 'simple' viewers puzzled and frustrated (Müller 1970: 28).<sup>4</sup>

DEFA's mandate to reach and unify the entire audience made formal experiment difficult: its dramaturgy, as one West German critic put it, was to catalyze insight 'not through the unexpected or provocative, but through the already-known'. Better to 'imprison' viewers by over-explaining every detail than leave any possibility of ambiguity or doubt (Roth 1969: 535–536). Within the limits of realism, however, the studio worked to produce films of the highest aesthetic caliber, often sparing no expense: the detective story, the romantic melodrama, the anti-imperialist Western should be as carefully conceived, as memorably executed, as able to transform viewer sensibilities and consciousness, as the epic history of German communism.

Especially during the late 1940s and early 1950s, publicists portrayed DEFA as exemplifying the country's new collectively-owned and operated businesses (*volkseigene Betriebe*). DEFA film credits, accordingly, underscored

1 Socialist realism is itself arguably a form of modernism; see, for instance, Trumpener 1994 and Hell, Kruger, Trumpener 1994.

2 Ralf Schenk's revelatory 2002 retrospective *Zwischen Tauwetter und Eiszeit*, at Berlin's Filmkunsthaus Babylon, showcased the experimental films made between 1956 and 1958. On the mid-1960s New Wave and the 1965 clamp-down, see Agde 1991, Mückenberger 1990 and Trumpener 2001.

3 Her famously profit-obsessed employer, meanwhile, was particularly fond of genre pictures, sequels and series, and correspondingly determined to avoid 'flashbacks', 'unsympathetic' protagonists and anything save a 'happy ending' (Reichart 2002: 152).

4 On the use of 'accessibility' arguments as grounds for censorship, see Miltshitzky 1996.

filmmaking as a collaborative process.<sup>5</sup> Early DEFA films also celebrated lay acting and mass participation, staging a fusion of actors and audience. Late 1940s activist films like *And '48 Again* (*Und wieder 48*, 1948) and *Sour Weeks, Happy Holidays* (*Saure Wochen, frohe Feste*, 1950) show a veritable cultural revolution in progress, as teams of young socialist students and workers transform aesthetic along with economic production, boycotting or interrupting the production of costume films or operettas, to create new, more critical, and more topical forms of entertainment. Even extras, *And '48 Again* insists, can catalyze political discussion on the set, resulting in the picture's complete political reorientation.

Spectators, meanwhile, were asked to identify not with the glamour but with the *ordinariness* of film characters, as of the actors who embodied them. Particularly in its early years, DEFA self-consciously resisted a Third Reich or Hollywood-style star system, to implement a different philosophy of acting. As Kurt Maetzig demonstrates in his backstage drama, *The Story of a Young Couple* (*Roman einer jungen Ehe*, 1952), actors were introduced to a new socialist repertoire, and coached to understand their character's socio-historical dimensions. After their filming day ended, moreover, they might find themselves performing at workers' cultural events or even performing manual labor with a volunteer street crew, alongside their proletarian audiences. Like the Hollywood cinema it partly modeled itself on, Third Reich cinema had repeatedly paid tribute to itself in backstage musicals. DEFA films recast this plot to showcase the coming-into-being of new collectives and new forms of entertainment.

GDR intellectuals remained constitutionally suspicious of movie stars, whose fan cults seemed uncomfortably reminiscent of the Nazi cult of genius and the racist-eugenicist celebration of Aryan beauty. Joseph Goebbels, moreover, had cultivated a charismatic, star-centered cinema culture to divert attention from increasingly harsh political realities: Third Reich 'entertainment films' were thus as much part of Nazi strategy as explicitly 'propagandistic' films. Any postwar attempt to wean the German people from Nazism had to include a

critique of Nazi illusionism, inside and outside the cinema.

Georg Klaren's *The Sonnenbrucks* (*Die Sonnenbrucks*, 1951), for instance, centers partly on an apolitical musician who gradually becomes critical of Nazi cruelties, harbors a friend who escapes from a concentration camp, and is herself finally shot by the Gestapo. The actress cast in this role bore a marked resemblance to Third Reich movie diva Zarah Leander, and the resemblance was heightened by dress, make-up and acting style. So when her character confronts the mass execution of hostages, the casual cruelty of Nazi leaders, it is as if Zarah Leander herself has been pulled out of the sheltered world of patriotic homefront melodrama, and forced to see the consequences of her alliances and blind-spots. *The Sonnenbrucks*, tellingly, was released a year after the real Zarah Leander had made her comeback film in West Germany—and suggests an alternative, more expiatory path this movie star might have taken.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, West German studios re-engaged most of the Third Reich's stars, then worked to recreate the aura which had surrounded Third Reich cinema. In West Germany, as in Hollywood, stars attempted to influence major artistic decisions about the films they appeared in; on some sets, co-stars vied to determine the choice of cameraman, and thus the most flattering style for their own close-ups (Hembus 1961: 73–74). Third Reich 'premieres in the big Berlin cinemas were always terrific, pomp-filled shows', attracting autograph-seeking crowds who stopped traffic for blocks (Leander 1983: 151). West German film premieres and film festivals followed suit (see Jacobsen 1990: 24–26, 51–52, 57–58; Grünwald 1992: 139–143). Early DEFA premieres, in contrast, show-cased a kind of anti- or counter-glamour; the GDR celebrities in attendances tended to be work activists, union officials, politicians and artists (Lüdecke 1970: 31).

Yet by the mid-1950s, DEFA's feature films register some exhaustion with its own cinematic revolution. One backstage comedy *Star with Borrowed Feathers* (*Star mit fremden Federn*, 1955) thus shows the studio canteen

worker and janitor voicing their opinions after the film shoot, pushing the beleaguered movie actor to lose his temper and walk off the set. The film focuses mainly on the opposite danger—that those treated as stars will get swelled heads, or forget their responsibility to the public. Yet this moment of contretemps also suggests new distance from the aesthetic populism the studio previously embraced.

By the early 1960s, the pressure to compete with Western cinema culture finally led DEFA to begin orchestrating fan-cults around some lead actors. Yet more explicitly socialist conceptions of the actor still persisted inside the studio. In the late 1970s, when DEFA lead Arnim Mueller-Stahl emigrated to the West, he realized in retrospect (and somewhat bitterly) the fundamental differences between this studio culture and that of West Germany or Hollywood. For at DEFA

the tone is usually set by the stage workers. His majesty, the primary worker! [---] Even the lighting crew made their comments about the actors. The actors weren't the stars. When the actors appeared, everyone didn't fall silent, the way they do in America. Everyone made comments about whether one was good or not. (Mueller-Stahl 1990: 63.)

On one level, then, the participatory socialism extolled by GDR films *was* partly realized within the studio itself. Yet on another level, the gradual centralization of the cinema (like other cultural, political, and economic institutions) had brought virtually every aspect of film life—from planning and casting, to distribution, publicity, and reviewing—under direct Party scrutiny.

As Konrad Jarausch and Michael Geyer have argued, the early GDR 'deliberately set out to remake and create a nation on the principle of mass mobilization in industry, in defense, and in culture.' Yet 'the mobility of desires and wants it unleashed' frightened Communist leaders into 'paralysis'; until the collapse of the GDR, they spent 'ever greater efforts' controlling, containing and trying to fathom what their own campaigns for mass empowerment had

unleashed. Over the 1950s, the GDR's initial 'mass-cultural activism' thus 'disappeared' behind a 'bureaucratic screen of 'mass organizations'', even as the campaigns against modernism and cosmopolitanism doomed an earlier coalition between socialists and humanists (Jarausch, Geyer 2003: 299).

What this account emphasizes is the influential GDR rhetoric of self-emancipation and self-empowerment which accompanied—and in crucial ways contradicted—the onset of Stalinist authoritarianism. During the early postwar years, Communist cultural officials had tried to rebuild the German cinema along new lines, and to address audiences in new ways. These efforts—and their implicit empowerment of the audience as a critical mass—continued to resonate long after such initiatives were discontinued.

## BORDER CINEMAS

Throughout the 1950s, GDR studio officials tried at once to differentiate their vision of filmmaking from that on offer in West Berlin and to make films that would attract domestic viewers. For if the GDR continued to 'hemorrhage' population every month, East Berlin 'hemorrhaged' movie audiences every night, as they crossed the city to spend the evening in West Berlin cinemas. GDR films therefore addressed spectators as sophisticated, 'bilingual' consumers. And particularly during the brief thaw of 1956–1957, DEFA filmmakers openly acknowledged the competing attractions of Western cinema.

In 1950, *The Sonnenbrucks* implicitly put a key Third Reich movie star through a course of consciousness-raising. Mid-1950s DEFA films used related tactics to try to cure GDR audiences of their addiction to Hollywood cinema. Some offered critical variations on favorite genres or favorite film moments. Kurt Maetzig's comedy *Don't Forget My Traudel*

5 The resulting penchant for lengthy credit sequences was eventually mocked in the satirical Rainer Lakomy song accompanying the opening credits of Günter Reisch's *Carnations in Aspic (Nelken in Aspic, 1977)*: the misplaced democratic desire that everyone 'belonging to the Collective' be included, down to those who 'sewed on a button' leads to credits so extensive that they make 'the telephone book look like a page-turner', dampening audience interest in the film to come.

(*Vergeßt mir meine Traudel nicht*, 1957), for instance, reprises Marilyn Monroe's famous subway-grating scene from *The Seven Year Itch* (1955). Yet here, the moment is not so much an homage to Hollywood glamour as a critique of American-style sexiness, for commodifying vulnerability. What underlies both Monroe's and Traudel's flirtatious allure, the film argues, is actually neediness, vulnerability, bereftness. In Traudel's case, this has historical roots: her father, an East European forced laborer, was executed by the Nazis, while her German mother died in Ravensbrück concentration camp. Traudel's dawning understanding of herself as the fruit of a forbidden, doomed, utopian love readies her to abandon the sadistic allures of Western youth culture for a mature attraction, to a protective socialist policeman. After Nazism left Germans orphaned, the film argues, capitalism commodifies their neediness; socialism, in contrast, works to alleviate it.

Other GDR films tried Trojan horse tactics, offering viewers faux-Western genre films. In their first quarter or half hour, these films seemed indistinguishable from their Western counterparts. Then, just when the viewer was lulled, they shifted decisively into a more analytic mode, offering an ideological critique of the particular genre being aped. In 1958, in the renewed chill which followed the GDR's brief cultural thaw, these films were attacked with particular vehemence. Some were reedited or remade, one banned outright. *Casino Affair* (*Spielbank-Affäre*, 1957) met a particularly strange fate. GDR officials worried that its highly critical account of West Germany's mercenary spirit, credit-based economy, and political corruption might prove inadvertently seductive, that its 'opulent' location shots of the Riviera and West Germany might encourage viewers to flee the GDR. At screenings abroad, the film was shown in its original, gorgeous Technicolor. But at home, to reduce its pictures' visual allure, it was allowed only to be screened in 'terrible-looking black and white copies' (Schenk 1994: 140).

At the same moment, ironically, Gerhard Klein's films were attacked on the opposite grounds, that both their black and white photography and their dramaturgy were

reminiscent of Italian neorealism. In many respects, their stories were quite orthodox, cautionary tales about the dangers of Western-style consumption and spectatorship. In Klein's *A Berlin Romance* (*Einer Berliner Romanze*, 1956) for instance, an East Berlin apprentice and aspiring fashion model is taken in by West German media culture, but gradually comes to appreciate the GDR alternative. At the film's outset, Uschi undertakes a journey familiar to most of the film's actual GDR viewers: she crosses to West Berlin with a friend eager to see a movie. Yet when they stand outside of the theater, looking at the posters for *Enticing Sin*, Uschi declines to accompany her in: she already knows what the film will be like. So while her friend is in the cinema being enticed, Uschi goes windowshopping along the Kurfürstendamm, inadvertently assuming a similar spectatorial stance as she projects her desires onto the exhibited goods.

Eventually, she is intercepted by a West Berlin *flâneur*, whose large transistor radio, hung around his neck, attracts her unwilling admiration. As we later learn, Lord's radio, bought on the installment plan, is not yet paid off, part of the pervasive financial anxiety that pressures Lord into nineteenth-century-style colonial fantasies of emigration to Australia for a fresh beginning on the frontier. What looks like the latest consumer accessory—a means of piping Western-style 'hits' into every urban locale, stimulating teenage fan culture and record sales—quite literally represents the shackle of capitalist desires and financing. Although discomforted by Lord's anxious self-importance, Uschi agrees to accompany him and his friend Hans to see *Enticing Sin* after all: even to this skeptical East Berlin filmgoer the erotic enticements of Western mass media prove too powerful to resist. Even we see why *Enticing Sin* transfixes its audience: onscreen, a woman wearing only a negligee talks of fleeing with Mike to Mexico. Then, she is ambushed by gunfire. At this exciting juncture, unfortunately, an untoward occurrence in the movie theater shatters the cinematic illusion: in a clumsy attempt at chivalry, Hans has bought ice cream for Uschi to eat in her seat, trips while bringing it and spills it down her dress.



*A Berlin Romance* imports Italian neo-realist aesthetics to Cold War Berlin in order to combat Western illusionism and escapism. When Hans beats out Lord as an erotic rival, when Uschi and Hans pair up, against all odds, the film shows neither violent retribution nor steamy passion, neither blazing guns nor negligees. Instead, there is social embarrassment and crossed signals, the quotidian misunderstandings of ordinary life. Klein's film offers a manifesto for a socially-engaged, anti-illusionist cinema. Yet cultural officials found his adaptation of neorealism inflammatory: an aesthetic designed for critiquing life under capitalism was unsuitable for depicting life under socialism.

The cinematic New Waves which began elsewhere in Eastern Europe around 1956 were centrally concerned with recent history, with re-narrating World War II, with the transgressions of Stalinism. In East Germany, New Wave films like *A Berlin Romance* share much of their political critique with much orthodox film projects. Yet they are also newly open to Western film styles. By the early 1960s, ironically, key New Wave films would plead for the necessity of the Berlin Wall as a barrier against Western media culture—in modernist film language derived directly from the critique of capitalist life developed in West German experimental films.

Yet the GDR New Wave was also shaped by a renewed engagement with Weimar and fascist film culture, thanks to a 'huge fund of ... film material from ... the Third Reich and from the 1920s'<sup>6</sup> which the Soviet Army handed over to DEFA in the late 1950s. DEFA had represented and repudiated Nazi aesthetics since the late 1940s. Breakthrough New Wave films like Konrad Wolf's *Lissy* (1957) and Klein's *The Gleiwitz Affair* (*Der Fall Gleiwitz*, 1961) were novel in their stylized, analytic reconstruction of Third Reich cinema as an institution, a set of apparatuses, social technologies and trained responses. *Lissy* opens with a meditation on how Weimar-era mass culture and consumption habits aided the rise of fascism. *The Gleiwitz Affair* shows Third Reich media preparing German audiences for war—in the tone and content of the newsreels, the alternation between official hate-propaganda and blandly lulling diversion. In a controversial adaptation

of French New Wave aesthetics, Klein presents this history as an icily clinical case study, showing how the cool gaze of the Nazi newsreel camera is taken up by its spectators. For Klein, fascist cinema catalyzes a kind of moral frozenness, paralyzing or even hypnotizing viewers, rendering them unable to resist or to act. What GDR cinema must represent instead, *A Berlin Romance* insists, is an ice-cream cone dropped directly down the spectator's dress: incisive, interventionist, a wake up call.

East Germany's New Waves maintain a strong thematic proximity to the politically orthodox filmmaking of the 1950s, in its simultaneous repudiation of fascist and Western cinema, as in its attempt to develop a different kind of cinematic experience. What this immersion in Cold War media politics shapes is unusually intense self-reflexivity about the nature of media itself.

6 For scriptwriter Günther Rucker as for others, this first exposure to earlier German film catalyzed 'a time of discoveries, a shock, a very powerful impulse to work' (Rucker 1980: 196).

## FILMS

*And '48 Again (Und wieder 48)*, dir. Gustav von Wangenheim. East Germany, 1948

*The Beaver Coat (Der Biberpelz)*, dir. Erich Engel. East Germany, 1949

*A Berlin Romance (Eine Berliner Romanze)*, dir. Gerhard Klein. East Germany, 1956

*Carnations in Aspic (Nelken in Aspik)*, dir. Günter Reisch. East Germany, 1977

*Casino Affair (Spielbank-Affäre)*, dir. Arthur Pohl. East Germany, Sweden, 1957

*Don't Forget My Traudel (Vergeßt mir meine Traudel nicht)*, dir. Kurt Maetzig. East Germany, 1957

*A Free Country (Freies Land)*, dir. Milo Harbich. Germany (Soviet Occupation Zone), 1946

*The Gleiwitz Affair (Der Fall Gleiwitz)*, dir. Gerhard Klein. East Germany, 1961

*Lissy*, dir. Konrad Wolf. East Germany, 1957

*The Seven Year Itch*, dir. Billy Wilder. USA, 1955

*The Sonnenbrucks (Die Sonnenbrucks)*, dir. Georg Klaren. East Germany, 1951

*Sour Weeks, Happy Holidays (Saure Wochen, frohe Feste)*, dir. Wolfgang Schleif. East Germany, 1950

*Star with Borrowed Feathers (Star mit fremden Federn)*, dir. Harald Mannl. East Germany, 1955

*The Story of a Young Couple (Roman einer jungen Ehe)*, dir. Kurt Maetzig. East Germany, 1952

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