# Introduction

## *Documenting Socialism*

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Looking back at the *Wende* and the events leading up to German unification in 1990, few would have predicted the rapid expansion of scholarship focusing on East German cinema that has taken place over the past thirty years. Thanks to the efforts of the DEFA-Stiftung, PROGRESS Film, ICESTORM, Kanopy and the DEFA Film Library, a large number of feature films produced at the DEFA studio in Potsdam-Babelsberg are readily available in streamed or DVD format (many of them in subtitled versions). In the past, many scholars were all too inclined to dismiss these films as crude works of propaganda designed to shore up the position of the Socialist Unity Party (SED) in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). However, the increased availability of DEFA's feature films has brought about a much more differentiated approach to the analysis and appreciation of this rich film culture. No longer seen simply as a window onto life in East Germany, these films have become embedded into debates about memory studies, representations of gender, sexuality, race, and film aesthetics. Moreover, as the very concept of national cinema has increasingly been called into question, recent research into DEFA's transnational entanglements has opened up new avenues of research that no longer see the studio's output in terms of the cinema of a small nation.

However, in the case of nonfictional film, the picture is much less clear. While some of the better-known East German documentaries have been released on DVD, very few are available in subtitled versions, and many are only accessible in archives and/or in unrestored versions. In part this is understandable for, as this volume demonstrates, although the DEFA-Studio für Wochenschau und Dokumentarfilme (DEFA Studio

for Newsreel and Documentary Films) had the main responsibility for documentary production, some of the most interesting films were produced by specialist subunits of the DEFA Studio such as defa futurum, by independent units such as the East German army's Armeefilmstudio (Army Film Studio [AFS]) or by radical collectives and activist filmmakers. Some of these collectives – the Homosexuelle Interessengemeinschaft Berlin is an obvious example – operated on the margins of mainstream film production in the GDR, while others – such as Studio H&S – grew out of, and were subsequently reintegrated into, the DEFA Studio itself. Although the works of such celebrated filmmakers as Annelie and Andrew Thorndike, Karl Gass, Jürgen Böttcher, Winfried and Barbara Junge, Kurt Tetzlaff, Volker Koepp, Gitta Nickel, Helke Misselwitz and Petra Tschörtner might be approached in terms of quasi-auteurist models of filmmaking, one of the aims of this volume is to serve as a reminder of the limitations of such an approach when dealing with the broader output of filmmakers in the GDR. If our volume succeeds in contributing to a deeper understanding of art and filmmaking under state socialism in all its diversity and contradictions, then it will have realized one of its key aims.

While scholarly interest in DEFA in the English-speaking world initially focused on feature films, it has become increasingly clear just how incomplete our picture of East German film production is if we ignore the huge number of nonfiction films (including newsreels and related productions such as *Kinobox*) that were released in the GDR. As this volume shows, many of these nonfictional films reflect the transnational aspirations of some East German filmmakers insofar as they were often conceived of as a means of exercising soft power and targeted at developing nations during the Global Cold War. The discovery of such entanglements has been encouraged by a paradigm shift in film studies in recent years as contemporary scholars seek to decolonize the discipline and explore ways in which it might move beyond conventional European and US agendas and engage more fully with the Global South. As several of the chapters in our volume demonstrate, East German documentary filmmakers were heavily engaged in reporting the liberation movements that had arisen in the wake of postwar decolonization, even if they sometimes struggled to escape the limitations of their own European perspective.

In an age in which mainstream national television networks have become ever more timid in criticizing political orthodoxy, it is not hard to understand why there has been such an upsurge of interest in radical documentary filmmaking in recent years. At the same time, devel-

opments in digital technology have made it possible for many more individuals to have access to the equipment needed for the production of nonfictional film and – albeit indirectly – to reflect on the ethics and aesthetics of documentary representation. As both scholars and viewers have become increasingly sensitive to concepts of positionality and issues of bias (whether conscious or unconscious), the limitations of often unquestioned notions of (pseudo-)objectivity are now an integral aspect of cultural analysis. The ability to draw a distinction between crude propaganda and something that might be termed partisan filmmaking goes some way towards explaining the recent rediscovery of East German documentary. Nowhere is this revival of interest more clearly the case than with the films of Studio H&S, which have now become the focus of intense scholarly debate in a way that would have been almost unthinkable a decade ago.[1]

As the editors of the first full-length English-language publication on East German documentary, we cannot aspire to complete coverage. Inevitably there are some notable gaps; for example, the fact that there are no chapters devoted exclusively to the work of such key figures as Jürgen Böttcher and Winfried and Barbara Junge is not a judgement on our part on their significance for East German cinema, but rather an acknowledgement of the fact that there is already a considerable body of scholarship (in English) on these filmmakers.[2] Rather, our aim is to provide a sociohistorical context for a broader understanding of the production of nonfictional film in the GDR, to highlight some of the major players, to remind readers of the vital contributions made by those working on the margins of DEFA and to offer a range of different theoretical approaches in the hope that this volume will inspire others to explore this rich – but largely undiscovered – body of work.

## Anno Zero?

For many cultural historians, 17 May 1946, the date on which DEFA was granted its licence by the Soviet Military Administration in Germany (SMAD), marks the beginning of East German film history. Nonetheless, as early as January 1946, work on the first newsreels and nonfictional films was being undertaken by members of the Filmaktiv, a precursor of DEFA set up under the auspices of the SMAD to oversee film production in the Soviet Zone of Occupation (SBZ). Like their Soviet counterparts, the Western Allies also recognized that a thoroughgoing overhaul of the German educational system and the close mon-

itoring of all forms of mass media would be necessary to combat the legacy of fascism. However, with the founding on 27 July 1945 of the Deutsche Zentralverwaltung für Volksbildung (German Administration of Culture and Education [DVV]) under the leadership of Paul Wandel, it was the Soviets who seized the initiative in ensuring that, in the SBZ at least, pro-communist Germans would be at the forefront of a revival of German culture. While many writers and artists in the immediate postwar period were driven by a desire to rekindle the spirit of German classical humanism, one of the most pressing problems for the new generation of filmmakers was the legacy of the Nazi film industry. Writing in the first issue of the periodical *Theater der Zeit* in July 1946, the director Kurt Maetzig noted that 'for many years we were shown thousands of authentic images which were used to construct a completely false image of reality'.[3] In the case of feature films, the founding generation of directors at DEFA attempted (not always successfully) to avoid the sentimental clichés of melodrama, a genre that Goebbels had mobilized so successfully in the service of ideological indoctrination during the Third Reich. But those involved in newsreel and documentary production in the SBZ were confronted with the problem that the propagandistic character of the Nazi newsreel *Die deutsche Wochenscha*u (1940–45), together with such notorious documentaries such as Fritz Hippler's *Der ewige Jude* (*The Eternal Jew*, 1940), had undermined public confidence in the capacity of nonfictional film to distinguish between truth and ideology.

The date of 19 February 1946 saw the launch in the SBZ of the first episode of the newsreel *Der Augenzeuge*, an event that prompted its founding editor, Kurt Maetzig, to note that 'this new newsreel is designed not to have anything in common with the fascist war newsreel droning with bombastic pathos . . . It should prompt viewers to think for themselves'.[4] The efforts of Maetzig and his colleagues at DEFA to address the viewing public's lingering scepticism regarding film as a news medium are perhaps most clearly reflected in the slogan 'Sie sehen selbst, Sie hören selbst, urteilen Sie selbst!' (See for yourself, listen for yourself, judge for yourself!), which, from the thirteenth episode onwards, prefaced the then weekly editions of *Der Augenzeuge*. The newsreel – which ran continuously from 19 February 1946 until 19 December 1980 – was also instrumental in paving the way for the production of longer documentaries such as Maetzig's *Einheit SPD-KPD* (*Unity SPD-KPD*), a 19-minute film about the merger of the Communist and Social Democratic Parties and the rise of the Socialist Unity Party (SED) released in May 1946. When viewed from today's perspective, *Einheit*

*SPD-KPD* comes across as a curious blend of 're-staged' events, political reportage and propaganda; however, as Günter Jordan notes, in 1946 many contemporary reviewers praised the documentary precisely because of its 'modern composition and lack of pathos'.[5]

Another way of combating the unwelcome legacy of Nazi propaganda was through the production of hard-hitting films focusing on German culpability such as Richard Brandt's *Todeslager Sachsenhausen* (*Sachsenhausen Death Camp*, 1946), a film that to some extent draws on the approach adopted by Hanuš Burger and Billy Wilder in *Die Todesmühlen* (*Death Mills*, 1945) and that presented German viewers with uncompromising images of the suffering endured by concentration camp victims. Technological constraints in both filming and sound recording meant that certain sequences – notably those in which an SS officer describes the executions at the camp – had to be shot several times with overdubbed sound. However, while that was not in itself seen as detracting from the film's authenticity, it soon became apparent that the dramaturgical underpinning of this type of documentary left spectators cold and unable to engage with the ethical issues being presented. In the light of this and the low morale of the German population generally, the Filmaktiv proposed a series of short documentaries about postwar reconstruction – Kurt Maetzig's *Berlin im Aufbau* (*Rebuilding Berlin*, 1946) is just one example – which rather than condemning Germans for wartime atrocities highlighted the contributions of forward-looking citizens to the construction of a modern, antifascist society. Just how enduring a trope reconstruction (*Aufbau*) would become in the history of East German film and literature is evident in Stephan Ehrig's discussion of films about the construction of new towns such as Halle-Neustadt in the GDR of the 1970s (see Chapter 15).

In their search for progressive models of documentary filmmaking, there were essentially two traditions on which the new generation of filmmakers at DEFA could draw: on the one hand, there were those films that deployed the avant-garde cinematic techniques of the late 1920s such as Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin – Die Sinfonie der Großstadt* (*Berlin – Symphony of a City*, 1927) or Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929); on the other hand, there was the proletarian cinema of the Weimar years associated with Prometheus-Film GmbH set up by the German Communist Party (KPD) in 1926, and Weltfilm, which was established a year later in 1927.[6] Examples of such films included short factual documentaries such as Phil Jutzi's short *Blutmai* (*Bloody May Day*, 1929) and Slatan Dudow's *Zeitprobleme. Wie der Berliner Arbeiter wohnt* (*Problems of Our Time: How the Berlin Worker Lives*, 1929). Given

the hostility in the GDR from the early 1950s onwards towards so-called formalist aesthetics, it is hardly surprising that, over time, the model provided by the proletarian film culture of the 1920s and 1930s would prove more acceptable to the SED's cultural theorists than Ruttmann and Vertov's more formally innovative work. However, as Günter Jordan has noted, the dominance of Nazi film culture in the previous decade meant that names like Ruttmann, Vertov, Jutzi and Dudow were but distant memories, and the political vacuum of the immediate postwar period required a more affirmative aesthetic that promoted the activities of the SED and the reconstruction of society along socialist principles. Accordingly, as the vicissitudes of the Cold War came to be felt ever more keenly during the Berlin Blockade and the run-up to the founding of the GDR on 7 October 1949, the DEFA studio found itself under pressure to produce a series of partisan documentaries in support of the SED and its Two-Year Plan. Increasingly from 1948 onwards, documentary films such as Eva Fritzsche's *Die Brücke von Caputh* (*The Bridge of Caputh*, 1949) – the first DEFA documentary produced by a female director – were explicitly politicized in accordance with the SED's needs and, like Maetzig's *Einheit SPD-KPD*, had to resort to the re-staging of historical events to make their political point. Made by DEFA's department for short films, the Abteilung Kurzfilm, Fritzsche's film used actors to re-stage the construction of a bridge that that had already been rebuilt and, in the process, anticipated the forms of agitprop filmmaking that stood in the sharpest possible contrast to the more aesthetically complex documentary forms of the later years and indeed the appeal to spectator autonomy encapsulated in the opening slogan of *Der Augenzeuge*.

## Structure and Organization in the Early Years

During the period from 1946 to 1949, the SED was responsible for supplying much of the needed film stock and equipment, while the SMAD initially censored and approved both newsreels and documentaries up until the founding of the GDR. Due to the financial constraints of these early years, many documentaries filmed under DEFA's licence had to be commissioned and/or externally funded, and some films made in this period were even subcontracted to the privately owned company Produktion Brandt (named after its owner, Richard Brandt, the producer and director of *Todeslager Sachsenhausen*).[7] After the founding of the GDR in 1949, the SED gradually nationalized such private companies

and turned them into publicly owned enterprises known as Volkseigene Betriebe (VEB).[8]

The year 1952 saw a complete restructuring of film production in the GDR, including its centralization under the supervision of a newly created central film administration, the Hauptverwaltung (HV) Film. As part of the Ministry of Culture, the HV Film was in overall charge of censoring, producing, distributing and exhibiting films in the GDR. Two studios, the DEFA-Studio für Populärwissenschaftliche Filme (DEFA Studio for Popular Science Films) and the DEFA-Studio für Wochenschau und Dokumentarfilme (DEFA Studio for Newsreel and Documentary Films), now oversaw the production of documentaries, newsreels and the satirical cabaret film series *Das Stacheltier* (*The Porcupine*, 1953–64) that provided a space for critical and dissenting voices. Over the course of the 1950s, the DEFA-Studio für Wochenschau und Dokumentarfilme experimented with a variety of internal structures, including allocating production staff to specific genres in the early 1950s and setting up dedicated production teams under the leadership of a group of (exclusively male) heads in 1959.

## History and Ideology

During the early 1950s, the efforts of the DEFA-Studio für Wochenschau und Dokumentarfilme were largely focused on films designed to convince postwar Germans that, in backing socialism, they were standing on the right side of history, both politically and materially. Nowhere is this more clearly the case than in the struggle for the cultural legacy of prewar Germany where a succession of anniversaries provided the perfect opportunity for the GDR to portray itself as the natural heir to the humanist legacy of the past. Films such as Ernst Dahle's *Johann Sebastian Bach* (1950), Max Jaap's *Beethoven* (1954) and Wernfried Hübel's *Händel* (1960) are just some of the key documentaries produced by DEFA during this period. These films, which sought to situate contemporary developments in German politics in the context of historical events such as the Reformation, the Thirty Years' War and the French Revolution, and that presented their revolutionary protagonists as embracing a proto-socialist outlook,[9] were conceived at a point in history where in both East and West, the division of Germany was seen as simply a provisional state of affairs.[10] Underpinning these and other documentaries of this kind was the view that, as the GDR's then Prime Minister Otto Grotewohl put it in a speech of 1950, 'what is at stake is German culture

itself, something that cannot simply be divided. Our goal is to nurture and preserve the notion of a genuinely national German culture'.[11]

What Grotewohl envisaged – and what remained enshrined in the GDR's constitution up until the early 1970s – was a unified Germany under socialism, and to that end it was vital to demonstrate the technological and historical progress being achieved in the East. Alongside DEFA's contribution to the culture wars of the 1950s, there was a wave of films about technology and improvements in production, typified by documentaries such as Joop Huisken's *Stahl* (*Steel*, 1950) and *Turbine 1* (1953), which highlighted the achievements of socialist labour in the GDR. These were complemented by a range of films contextualizing the rise of the GDR including Andrew Thorndike and Karl Gass' *Der Weg nach Oben: Chronik eines Aufstiegs* (*The Way up: Chronicle of an Ascent*, 1950), which focused on economic progress in the GDR, and Annelie and Andrew Thorndike's *Du und mancher Kamerad* (*The German Story*, 1956) which traced the roots of fascism back to German Imperialism and sought to position the GDR as a progressive state that had arisen in response to the catastrophe of the Third Reich.

Opportunities for documentary filmmaking at DEFA also attracted left-wing filmmakers from outside Germany, and in March 1953 the Dutch cinematographer Joop Huisken was joined at DEFA by his former mentor and fellow countryman, Joris Ivens.[12] Ivens is perhaps best known in the GDR for his groundbreaking documentary *Lied der Ströme* (*The Song of the Rivers*, 1954), a transnational production that not only showcased the benefits of technology and socialism in a global context, but also drew in a network of collaborators from all over the world, including Bertolt Brecht, Ernst Busch, Pablo Picasso, Paul Robeson and Dmitri Shostakovich (Figure 0.1).

In Ivens' film, the viewer is invited to draw a metaphorical comparison between the six great rivers of the world – the Volga, the Mississippi, the Nile, the Yangtze, the Amazon and the Ganges – all heading towards their common destination, the sea, and the common goal of the Weltgewerkschaftsbund (World Federation of Trades Unions) to implement socialism on a global scale. Given the film's reliance on political affect, it is perhaps hardly surprising that the result is a highly poeticized, but essentially uncritical, picture of the communist bloc generally and of the Soviet Union under Stalin in particular.

Although the East German filmmakers Annelie and Andrew Thorndike also produced a series of highly partisan documentaries, the compositional techniques underpinning their work – especially their use of documented archival sources – were quite different from Ivens' more


**Figure 0.1.** Poster for *Lied der Ströme* (1954). © DEFA-Stiftung/Kurt Geffers

self-consciously poeticized style. However, as Helen Hughes notes in her discussion of the Thorndikes (see Chapter 4), to focus exclusively on the propagandistic aspect of their films is not only to ignore their personal histories and the political context in which they worked, but also to downplay the genuinely innovative character of their approach. Alongside films such as *Du und mancher Kamerad* and *Das russische Wunder* (*The Russian Miracle*, 1959–63), which presented idealized histories of the GDR and the Soviet Union respectively, the Thorndikes were perhaps best known for their contributions to the series *Die Archive sagen aus* (*The Archives Testify*), including *Urlaub auf Sylt* (*Holiday on Sylt*, 1957) and *Unternehmen Teutonenschwert* (*Operation Teutonic Sword*, 1958). These films, which presented documentary evidence showing how former high-ranking Nazis had been entrusted with prominent positions of power and influence in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), reflected a new strategy in film production at DEFA that was designed to

bolster the SED's mythologization of the postwar division of Germany whereby the GDR was presented a state made up exclusively of antifascists, while in the FRG the legacy of German fascism lived on. Moreover, as Elizabeth Ward's analysis of Joachim Hellwig's *Ein Tagebuch für Anne Frank* (*A Diary for Anne Frank*, 1958) demonstrates (Chapter 12), even a documentary ostensibly about Holocaust memory could be mobilized to expose the rehabilitation of former National Socialist perpetrators in the Federal Republic.

The global resonance of such films as Iven's *Lied der Ströme* and the Thorndikes' *Das russische Wunder* (which Andrew Thorndike claimed had been viewed by 140 million viewers in 86 countries) served as a reminder of the power of cinema to reach viewers well beyond the GDR. Just how important documentary film would be in promoting the GDR was to become even more apparent following the introduction in 1955 of the so-called Hallstein Doctrine as a key strategy in the Federal Republic's foreign policy. Named after the West German Foreign Minister Walter Hallstein, the policy was an attempt to isolate the GDR politically by declaring that, with the exception of the Soviet Union, any state that formally recognized the GDR would be regarded as having committed a hostile act towards the FRG. The policy, which followed hard on the heels of the Western Allies' decision in 1955 to recognize the FRG (but not the GDR), was driven by the determination of the West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer and his Christian Democratic Union (CDU) government to present the FRG as having an exclusive mandate to speak for the whole of Germany. Although the Hallstein Doctrine remained in place until the end of the 1960s, the foundation of the Warsaw Pact in 1955 and the resulting system of alliances made it impossible to apply it consistently. Nevertheless, it was not until the 'Basic Treaty' (Grundlagenvertrag) initiated by Chancellor Willy Brandt's Social Democratic government came into effect in June 1973 that the GDR was formally recognized by the Federal Republic.

Faced with the impossibility of establishing embassies abroad, the GDR had little choice but to resort to alternative measures if it was to cultivate relations with foreign powers. Such measures included establishing trade missions and associated cultural/information centres, which, it was hoped, would be upgraded over time into consular missions. Not surprisingly, the screening of documentary features about the GDR played an increasingly important role in the exercise of such soft power. As Thomas Maulucci notes (see Chapter 2), the East German Ministerium für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten (Ministry for Foreign Affairs) regularly approached the DEFA with commissions for documentary shorts

that were designed to be screened to audiences outside the GDR. These films, many of which were produced by the Camera DDR production group that was established in 1968, presented reports not only on East German science, technology, health, sport and culture, but also included footage of East German politicians in international settings. In addition, they portrayed the GDR as a technologically advanced country in which socialist society had brought about the emancipation of women in the workplace (a claim that would be subjected to intense critical scrutiny by female documentary filmmakers such as Gitta Nickel, Helke Misselwitz, Róża Berger-Fiedler and Petra Tschörtner in the 1970s and 1980s). Finally, these films engaged in a form of public diplomacy that supported the postwar programme of decolonization and independence in the Global South, and wooed potential political allies, notably in the emerging Arab world, and in other global hotspots of anti-Americanism, such as Chile and Vietnam.

## Cinéma Vérité and the Challenges of Modernism

In 1962, the DEFA-Studio für Wochenschau und Dokumentarfilme implemented a model that the DEFA-Studio für Spielfilme (feature films) had launched three years earlier in 1959, and created five artistic collectives (Künstlerische Arbeitsgruppen [KAGs]) and added two more in 1965. In a similar undertaking, five KAGs covering educational films, television commercials and animation films were established in the DEFA-Studio für Populärwissenschaftliche Filme. The KAGs were an important innovation in East German film production, providing semi-autonomous spaces for permanent collectives of industry professionals, including screenwriters, cinematographers and production designers under the leadership of a director. The KAGs all had their own budgets and were responsible for the successful planning and production of their films within the overall guidelines of the DEFA studio under which they operated. The KAGs were very male-dominated; Ingeborg Bissert was the only woman to head up a KAG – Sach- und Zeichentrick (animation) – in the DEFA-Studio für populärwissenschaftliche Filme, which at the time was under the overall leadership of Gerhard Haufe. Inge Kleinert directed the DEFA-Studio für Wochenschau und Dokumentarfilme between 1962 and 1966, and appointed another female employee at DEFA, Renate Wekwerth, to be head of the KAG Wochenschau.

While the building of the Berlin Wall on 13 August 1961 created significant and, for many, insurmountable boundaries to travelling to the

West, the relative stability that ensued made it possible for East German politicians and filmmakers alike to focus increasingly on the social and material conditions of life and work in the GDR itself. Now that the German-German question seemed, at least temporarily, to have been 'resolved', many filmmakers felt confident in adopting a more critical stance concerning contemporary East German society.[13]

In part this change of direction was also facilitated by developments in technology, and the use of concealed cameras together with the possibility of recording sound on location made it possible for filmmakers like Karl Gass in his documentary *Feierabend* (*Leisure*, 1963) to observe at close quarters the after-work activities of a brigade of workers at an oil refinery in Schwedt an der Oder.[14] Gass' largely unflattering portrait of workers in one of the more remote industrial outposts of the GDR – the workers clearly prefer the temptations of the local bar over the opportunities for self-development provided by the plant's lending library – unleashed a vigorous debate about the concept of realism underpinning the film. While the East German weekly *Sonntag* condemned the film, the *Nationalzeitung* praised it as a precursor of the new direction for documentary production at DEFA.[15] However, it was the foreign press – the French journal *Cinéma* described the film as a revival of what is usually referred to as 'cinéma vérité' – that sought to situate *Feierabend* within broader developments in contemporary European cinema.[16]

Industrial documentaries such Karl Gass' *Feierabend* and Jürgen Böttcher's *Ofenbauer* (*Furnace Builders*, 1962) also need to be seen in the context of the so-called 'Bitterfelder Weg' that was adopted as a cultural policy in the GDR in the late 1950s and early 1960s. In November 1958 a conference had been staged at the VEB Leuna petrochemical works located in the town of Bitterfeld entitled 'Chemie bringt Brot, Wohlstand und Schönheit' (Chemistry – A Source of Bread, Prosperity and Beauty). The conference was designed to promote the role of the polymer industry in boosting material standards of living in the GDR, but it also provided the launchpad for a new conceptualization of East German cultural life in which the SED seconded creative practitioners to industrial plants where, through their engagement with the working classes and the process of production, they would contribute through their creative work to the development of what was termed the 'allseitig sozialistische Persönlichkeit' (the all-round-socialist personality), while encouraging members of the working classes to become writers and artists themselves. At the same time, the mediation of such collectivist activity in art, literature and film would be deployed to combat accusations that the alienation of the working classes was

no less prevalent in socialist command economies that it was in Western capitalism.

While many socialist realist projects created in the spirit of the 'Bitterfelder Weg' are immediately forgettable, a number of documentarists such as Karl Gass and Jürgen Böttcher were able to bring their keen understanding of developments in European cinema – above all the emergence of cinéma vérité – to bear on documentaries filmed in industrial settings. Likewise, as Nick Hodgin (Chapter 5) notes, a similar quest for authenticity and engagement with individual members of the collective is evident in the early films of Kurt Tetzlaff, including *Im Januar 1963* (*In January 1963*). That East German documentary filmmakers were very familiar with developments in international filmmaking was largely due to the annual Leipzig Film Festival, which, over time, became one of the most important festivals of its kind. Established in 1955 as the *All-German* Leipzig Festival of Cultural and Documentary Films (*Gesamtdeutsche* Leipziger Woche für Kultur- und Dokumentarfilm – our emphasis), the festival was seen as the East German counterpart to the Mannheim Culture and Documentary Film Week in the FRG. Although it was suspended from 1957 to 1959, it resumed in 1960, and a year later was renamed the *Internationale* Leipziger Dokumentar- und Kurzfilmwoche (*International* Leipzig Documentary and Short Film Week). While the building of the Berlin Wall made it much more difficult for East German filmmakers to travel to the West after 1961, filmmakers from both East and West were able to travel to the annual festival in Leipzig and, as Caroline Moine has noted, in both 1961 and 1962, the festival was attended not only by filmmakers from the USSR, Czechoslovakia and Poland, but also by a number of delegates from the Federal Republic who defied the embargo placed on the festival by the (West) German Filmmakers Union.[17] Despite the political tensions of the 1960s, the festival provided an opportunity for DEFA's directors to gain first-hand experience of the new wave cinemas that were emerging across Europe and, above all, in France, Poland and Czechoslovakia. In particular, the presence of the French director Chris Marker and the screening of his film *Le Joli Mai* (*The Lovely Month of May*, 1963) – a documentary shot using lightweight Éclair cameras with synchronized sound – was to make a profound impression on East German filmmakers at the time. Other filmmakers associated with the stylistic approaches of cinéma vérité and/or Direct Cinema who attended the Leipzig festival included the Americans Richard Leacock, Albert Maysles and the Scot John Grierson. Given the retrospective of Dziga Vertov's work at the 1960 festival and the award of the Golden Dove to *Le Joli Mai* in 1963, it is hardly sur-

prising that, as Matthew Bauman points out (Chapter 1), the politics of cinéma vérité were vigorously debated not only at the festival, but also in the pages of the GDR's leading film periodical *Filmwissenschaftliche Mitteilungen* during the early 1960s.

What was at stake in such discussions was the very nature of cinematic realism. While some saw the methods of cinéma vérité as a form of modernism that captured the external world in all its complexity and invited the viewer to become not a passive recipient, but rather a spectator actively involved in the interpretation of that reality, others condemned it for its failure to provide an analysis couched within the supposed objectivity of a Marxist-Leninist framework. Accordingly, at the 1963 festival, Chris Marker observed that:

> [T]he essence of film is that the spectator himself participates, either with admiration or with scepticism, in what is happening on the screen. I believe that viewers . . . are becoming increasingly well-informed and conscious of the complex character of the problems of life. As a result, they no longer believe in straightforward solutions to problems, and they see the need to recognise how these problems are bound up with each other, to embrace the contradictions they give rise to, and to resist arriving at simplistic solutions.[18]

Such a view stood in marked contrast to the more orthodox Marxist approach espoused by the Soviet filmmaker Sergei Yutkevich:

> Is it sufficient just to take a camera out onto the street and film life? Is that really a form of cinematic truth? . . . Film seeks to capture the dialectical character of life as a process, because truth lies in our hands. There is one and only one truth, and it can only be revealed by means of a scientific Marxist ideology.[19]

While at one level this type of exchange can be seen as a reprise of the ongoing debate between socialist realism and a more pluralist and multivalent concept of modernism, at another it also reflects the transition during the 1960s from the more dogmatic approach of the Thorndikes, and the rise of a quite different type of realism that, in time, came to be associated first with the likes of Karl Gass and the more *nouvelle vague* style films of the rising star, Jürgen Böttcher, whose most recent film *Stars* (Figure 0.2) was singled out for special praise by Chris Marker at the 1963 festival.

At the same time, these debates were a foretaste of the aesthetic conflicts that would come to a head during the infamous Eleventh Plenum of December 1965 where several feature films were banned because of their critical view of contemporary life in the GDR.

**Figure 0.2.** Jürgen Böttcher, *Stars* (1963). © DEFA-Stiftung

Films like Marker's *Le Joli Mai* and Gass' *Feierabend*, which exploited new developments in camera and sound technologies, played a pivotal role in bringing about a paradigmatic shift during what many would regard as, potentially at least, one of the richest periods of East German filmmaking: the first half of the 1960s. The Eleventh Plenum of 1965/1966 was instrumental in preventing the emergence of a distinctively East German nouvelle vague of feature film production in the second half of the decade. The banning of so many films together with the replacement of the more liberally minded studio manager Jochen Mückenberger by Franz Bruk contributed to a marked reluctance on the part of filmmakers to engage in formal experimentation and had a negative impact in terms of both the quantity and quality of DEFA's output during the final years of the Ulbricht era.

However, while DEFA's documentary production was not hit as hard as its feature films, the banning of Tetzlaff's *Es genügt nicht 18 zu sein* (*Being 18 Is Not Enough*, 1965/1989) – an uncompromisingly realistic portrait of a brigade of workers at a drilling rig in Mecklenburg – shows that even documentary cinema, with its more restricted target audiences, was not immune to the sanctions that followed in the wake of the Eleventh Plenum. Even before the fateful events of 1965, the diffi-

culties Böttcher had experienced with both *Drei von vielen* (*Three of Many*, 1961/1989) – a film that suggested that the working classes might be more interested in modernist art than the proponents of the Bitterfelder Weg had imagined – underline how sensitive the GDR's Ministry of Culture still was to narratives that deviated from more conventional socialist realist aesthetics.[20] Likewise, the controversy surrounding *Barfuß und ohne Hut* (*Barefoot and without a Hat*, 1964), another film seen as presenting a distorted image of young East Germans, merely prefigured the banning of Böttcher's nouvelle vague masterpiece, *Jahrgang '45* (*Born in '45*, 1966/1990).

While Böttcher emerged as a highly influential figure during the 1960s, the decade also saw two important, and interlinked, developments: the rise of television in the GDR and the setting up of what would be the state's only truly independent documentary production unit, the Studio H&S. Although many DEFA documentaries were screened on East German television, the relationship between DEFA and the Deutscher Fernsehfunk (DFF) in the GDR was quite different from that in the West. Whereas in the FRG television exercised a profound influence on documentary production, in the GDR, as Peter Zimmermann has noted, television and film production at the DFF and DEFA respectively were to a large extent independent of one another.[21] One of the most important figures linking East German television and DEFA was Gerhard Scheumann, who founded and moderated the television show *Prisma*, which was broadcast between 1963 and 1965 and presented a critical account of current affairs in the GDR.[22] In 1965, together with his colleague, Walter Heynowski, Scheumann turned his attention to the legacy of colonialism and the impact of US foreign policy in the Global South. Their place in the East German media landscape was ensured, following the success of *Der lachende Mann* (*The Laughing Man*, 1966), a documentary about the West German mercenary and former Wehrmacht soldier Friedrich Müller fighting in the Republic of the Congo against the leftist supporters of the former President Patrice Lumumba, who had been murdered in 1961. Now enjoying the backing of the rising political star, Erich Honecker, the DEFA-Gruppe Heynowski und Scheumann was established on 28 February 1967. Although the group still operated officially under the auspices of DEFA, it had its own budget (including access to some 300,000 West German marks), had permission to recruit the West German cameraman Peter Hellmich and was exempted from the usual requirement to have its films formally signed off by the DEFA studio management.

Following the success of the group's next project, *Piloten im Pyjama* (*Pilots in Pyjamas*, 1967) in which a series of American POWs shot down over Vietnam are subjected to intense questioning about their attitudes

to the conflict, the unit was allowed, quite exceptionally in the GDR, to operate as a completely autonomous production unit under the name Studio H&S from 1969 to 1982. Not only could most of the team travel freely outside of the GDR, but they were also allowed to retain the foreign currency generated by sales to capitalist countries and, as a result, could purchase sophisticated editing equipment from the United States and Western Europe with which they could generate further income.[23] However, as Priscilla Layne also notes (Chapter 11) in her study of Black abjection in *Kommando 52* (1965), the films of Studio H&S are never quite what they seem. Despite their exotic settings, both *Kommando 52* and *Piloten im Pyjama* are as much about the German-German problem and the covert role of the FRG in the Global Cold War as they are about the situation in Africa and Vietnam specifically. Even so, to dismiss these films as simply propaganda is to fail to do justice to their complex aesthetics. In revealing the constructed artificiality of the onscreen image, there is an obvious relationship between their work and that of Peter Voigt, who, although employed by Studio H&S, was effectively allowed to work independently at the headquarters of Studio H&S in Berlin's Kronenstraße. Voigt was a multitalented documentarist who had worked at the Berliner Ensemble with Bertolt Brecht in the early 1950s and whose particular expertise lay in the integration of still photographs into documentary films. Like the films of Studio H&S, Voigt's documentary work in both film and other media privileges form over content and is as much about how to decode the images on display as it is about the images themselves. As Seán Allan notes (Chapter 6), it is the mobilization of the Brechtian concept of the *gestus* that makes not only Voigt's work but also the work of the Studio H&S generally so much more complex than just conventional works of propaganda. These elements of self-reflexivity are also evident in the cycles of films about the Pinochet coup in Chile and the Vietnam War that were released by Studio H&S during the 1970s. As Martin Brady (Chapter 9) demonstrates in his chapter on Studio H&S's so-called Cambodia Trilogy of the 1980s, a close reading of the films reveals the ways in which Heynowski and Scheumann foreground the cinematic apparatus as an integral part of political analysis and thereby contribute to a cinematic tradition of self-reflexivity.

## Winds of Change in the Wake of the Eleventh Plenum

Discussions at DEFA following the Eleventh Plenum prompted further changes to the organizational structure of DEFA documentary production, including the establishment in 1967 of an independent studio,

the DEFA-Gruppe 67, under the leadership of Andrew Thorndike who reported directly to the Ministry of Culture. At the same time, an additional collective, KAG Gass, was established as a quasi-autonomous production unit with its own studio, editing and duplication facilities under the leadership of Karl Gass. In response to a palpable climate of societal and political disquiet in the GDR following the Prague Spring in 1968, a greater centralization of documentary filmmaking took place in 1969 with a view to ensuring a greater consistency between the DEFA studio's output and the political messaging of the SED. As a result, the Studio für populärwissenschaftliche Filme and the Studio für Wochenschau und Dokumentarfilme were combined into a new structure, the DEFA-Studio für Kurzfilme (short films), which comprised nine KAGs, including the former KAG Auslandsinformation (foreign information) – now renamed Camera DDR – together with the addition in 1971 of the production of a hybrid unit, defa futurum, covering both documentary and fictional film.

The replacement of Walter Ulbricht by Erich Honecker as First Secretary of the SED's Central Committee on 19 June 1971 is often regarded as ushering in a new phase of liberalization in East German cultural policy, a development that was consolidated by the formal recognition of the GDR by the Federal Republic in June 1973. However, the expatriation of the singer/songwriter Wolf Biermann in November 1976 following his criticism of the GDR at a concert in Cologne showed how short-lived such cultural thaws could be. Although several important writers, artists and performers left the GDR in the wake of the Biermann affair, as Eduard Schreiber notes, the impact on the (restructured) DEFA-Studio für Dokumentarfilme was minimal, because to abandon the GDR was also to abandon the infrastructure, technical support and security of employment that made for such favourable conditions for documentary filmmakers at DEFA.[24]

Alongside the more hard-hitting productions emerging from Studio H&S that engaged with the Cold War in its transnational context, many filmmakers at DEFA – especially Gitta Nickel, Volker Koepp and Jürgen Böttcher – exploited improvements in camera and sound technology that enabled them to observe everyday life in the GDR and to do so relatively unobtrusively. Increasingly, these investigations of everyday life were approached from the perspective of the GDR's female workforce who often had to combine the demands of the workplace with the demands of childcare and family life. Some of the most interesting examples of this tendency include Böttcher's *Wäscherinnen* (*Laundresses,* 1972), Nickel's *Wir von ESDA* (*Working for ESDA*, 1976), and Koepp's series

of films about female workers in Wittstock, *Mädchen in Wittstock* (*Girls in Wittstock*, 1975) and *Wieder in Wittstock* (*Wittstock Once Again*, 1976). A more extensive – and historically grounded – panorama of East German life is to be found in the so-called 'Langzeit-Dokumentarfilme' (long-term documentaries) produced by Barbara and Winfried Junge about a group of children born in 1954/1955 and living in the village of Golzow in the Oderbruch region.[25] The origins of the project can be traced back to 1961 – some three years earlier than Michael Apted's television series *Seven Up!* (1964) in the United Kingdom – and Junge's film *Wenn ich erst zur Schule geh'* (*When I Go to School*). Remarkably, the series survived the reunification of Germany in 1990 and it was not until 2007 that it was finally brought to a close. As Nora Alter has observed, the Golzow films are much more than just an account of life in a provincial East German village; they also reflect the developments in documentary filmmaking in the GDR from the 1960s through its demise and beyond.[26]

Many of the films produced in the final decade of the GDR's existence are, as Nick Hodgin has observed, infused with a sense of Romantic melancholy that manifests itself in particular in films such as Peter Rocha's *Hochwaldmärchen* (*High Forest Fairy Tale*, 1987) and *Schmerzen der Lausitz* (*The Pain of Lusatia*, 1990) that focus on the destruction of the natural world by the brown coal mining industry in the GDR. 'Where images of machinery in DEFA's documentary films once connoted progress, the GDR's self-sufficiency or proud industrial character, in Rocha's film they are indiscriminate, ominous, dwarfing the people who operate them'.[27] As Seán Allan notes (Chapter 6), a similar sense of melancholy regarding the future of the East German cultural sphere is also evident in a film such as Peter Voigt's *Dämmerung –Ostberliner Bohème der 50er Jahre* (*Dusk*, 1993). Seen from this perspective, it is perhaps unsurprising that the new generation of filmmakers – especially the emerging female talents Helke Misselwitz, Petra Tschörtner and Gabriele Denecke – should turn their attention to the experiences of those who, by virtue of their gender, age or disability, had been consigned to the margins of socialist society. Misselwitz's *Winter Adé* (1989) and Tschörtner's *Unsere alten Tage* (*In Our Old Age,* 1989) present the viewer with a range of vignettes covering the lives of individuals who would otherwise remain hidden from view. Yet, as Jennifer Creech argues (Chapter 7), it is precisely through the mobilization of such marginalized figures that the work of these two female directors is imbued with a profound sense of authenticity. Following the collapse of the GDR in 1989, further marginalized groups – notably those Germans from East Prussia had had been displaced following the end of the Second World

War – started to emerge in the wake of discussions about where exactly the boundaries of a new unified Germany should be drawn. As Jason Doerre demonstrates in his discussions of the work of Volker Koepp and Andreas Voigt (Chapter 16), the complex relationship of the presence of the past in post-unification German culture became a prominent – and enduring – theme for many documentary filmmakers working in the post-Wende period.

## Studio Structures: The Final Phase

By 1973, all the KAGs had been stripped of their autonomy and converted into so-called Production Groups (Produktionsgruppen [PG]), which, in 1975, had fallen under the remit of the recently renamed DEFA-Studio für Dokumentarfilme (a name that would be retained even after unification and privatization). For the first time, a newly formed PG Kinderfilm (children's film) oversaw films aimed at children and teenagers, and over the next decade and a half, the number of PGs grew to a total of eighteen distributed across three studio locations in Potsdam-Babelsberg, Kleinmachnow and Berlin (Kronenstraße), along with the group defa futurum that was located in the Berlin studios alongside the production facilities for the puppet animation show *Unser Sandmännchen* (*The Sandman*), which had been screened on East German television since 1959 and was hugely popular with audiences in both the GDR and the FRG.

On 18 December 1980, DEFA ended production of *Der Augenzeuge* – at that time the world's longest-running newsreel – and, in order to maintain the relationship with the International News Reel Association INA, replaced it the following year with a new current affairs programme *Kinobox* produced by a dedicated unit, the PG defa kinobox. As Reinhild Steingröver (Chapter 3) notes, this production unit attracted some of the outstanding talents in the GDR's final generation of filmmakers. In 1983, further changes took place in DEFA's organizational when Studio H&S was stripped of its autonomous status, reintegrated into the DEFA-Studio für Dokumentarfilme, and renamed PG Kronenstraße (after the street in which it was located). Nonetheless, even after 1983, many still referred to as Gruppe H&S or Werkstatt H&S in recognition of its historical origins. Four years later in 1987, a new group PG Video was added to the DEFA-Studio für Dokumentarfilme after video technology was adopted with a view to facilitating the production of advertising films.

Despite the constant restructuring and renaming of production units, most remained under the leadership of the same (male) individu-

als who often remained in their positions for more than a decade. This left few opportunities for younger generations of directors and producers or female employees to take on responsibilities and/or initiate change. In 1988, a group of young DEFA filmmakers drafted a manifesto to be read and discussed at the Fifth Congress of the Verband der Film- und Fernsehschaffenden der DDR (Association of Film and Television Workers of the GDR).[28] Although the rapidly changing political landscape in the GDR meant that this discussion never took place, the Studio für Dokumentarfilme decided to form the short-lived PG 117 Nachwuchs (Young Generation). When the political changes eventually led to German unification in 1990, the studio briefly changed into a limited liability corporation. DEFA folded for good in 1998, after the Kirch media group had purchased portions of it in 1992 and liquidated it over the course of the next six years, while other parts became the companies DOKFILM, Park Studios, Ö Film, Cintec and Thomas Wilkening Film Production. A key factor in hastening the demise of the DEFA-Studio für Dokumentarfilme was the fact that, for a number of reasons, it lacked the latest technology that was available at comparable studios in Central and Western Europe, and as a result was unable to transform itself into a profitable corporation as judged by the prevailing standards. As a result, West German and other international investors often showed little interest in maintaining film production or modernizing outdated equipment and facilities, and focused on the acquisition of the valuable real estate instead.

## Technology and Exhibition

Changes in approach and documentary style have always been closely linked to developments in technology, and limited supplies of convertible currency meant that the cost – and restricted availability – of high-quality film stock and advanced camera technology was a constant issue for the DEFA-Studio für Dokumentarfilme. When DEFA created the various KAGs in 1952, those shooting newsreel and documentary footage received larger ARRIFLEX 35 cameras and the smaller, more portable Debrie cameras left over from the (prewar) inventory of UFA. They also had access to state-of-the-art Swiss-manufactured NAGRA audio recorders, West German Sennheiser microphones, Osram lights and various high-spec lenses. However, limited access to hard currency and Western markets following the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961 made it increasingly challenging to obtain replacement parts. It is strik-

ing that when discussing the obstacles he faced in making the documentary *Stars* (1963), Jürgen Böttcher cited both the noisiness of the Arriflex cameras at his disposal and the lack of high-quality recording equipment.[29] Moreover as his cameraman Christian Lehmann noted in an interview with the film historian Caroline Moine, filmmakers working for East German television had greater access to better equipment than those whose work was targeted at cinema audiences.[30] Despite obligations to trade technology with other Comecon nations, the difficulties in accessing advanced technologies led to the establishment of repair facilities at each of the DEFA studios. There, technicians became experts in adapting, modifying and compounding whatever technologies they had at their disposal. This expertise expanded into sound technology as well, and the DEFA Studio für Dokumentarfilme piloted magnetic sound recording technology for all DEFA studios and eventually introduced 4-channel recording as early as 1956.

However, by far the most impressive development was Georg Maidorn's invention of an East German 70 mm camera in 1964, the so-called DEFA-Reflex or 70 Reflex, which made the GDR only the third nation after the Soviet Union and the United States to have access to such technology.[31] However, the DEFA-Studio für Dokumentarfilme was only able to produce three 70 mm documentaries – Werner Bergmann's experimental *DEFA 70* (1967) and Annelie and Andrew Thorndike's films *Du bist min – Ein deutsches Tagebuch* (*You Are Mine – A German Diary*, 1969) and *Wladimir Iljitsch Uljanow Lenin* (1970) – before 70 mm film production became too expensive and was abandoned. Studio standards for film material were the 35 mm format for documentaries and newsreels and 16 mm film for educational and training films, both of which were manufactured in the state-owned Filmfabrik Wolfen under the historic Agfa brand. It was renamed in 1964 as ORWO (Original Wolfen) to settle a legal dispute with the West German Agfa company. The first DEFA documentaries were still shot on combustible nitrate film stock. For 16 mm films, the studio imported expensive raw material for acetate film to avoid dangerous fires in schools and factories that were still a possibility with nitrate film. While colour film stock was rare and not on a par with the international standard set by Kodak's Eastman Colour stock, Kurt Maetzig and Feodor Pappe had permission to film *Immer Bereit* (*Always Prepared*) about the first Free German Youth's Deutschlandtreffen in colour as early as 1950. The limitations of the colour film stock at their disposal coupled with the much greater availability of the East German ORWO NP 55 black-and-white film stock (universally regarded as a top-quality product) goes some way towards explaining

why many DEFA documentary filmmakers still filmed in black and white right up until the 1980s.

Over the forty years or so of DEFA's existence, ingenuity and innovation prevailed and made it possible for the DEFA-Studio für Dokumentarfilme in its various iterations to produce well over 4,000 films that were viewed by domestic and international audiences in both East and West. During the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s, documentaries would often be screened in film clubs, in regular cinemas and in so-called Zeitkinos (cinemas in close proximity to railway stations) that specialized in the screening of 60-minute shows consisting of 'zeitnahe' (recent) documentaries and newsreels.[32] Starting in 1952, the East German railway company Deutsche Reichsbahn operated multiple carriages (Kinowagen) with facilities for screening films[33] and, in addition, dozens of trucks were equipped with mobile projector units to take documentaries to spectators who lived too far from the nearest movie theatre.[34] Although the modes of screening changed – especially with the availability of television from 1952 – over the decades of the GDR's existence, the SED ensured that access to DEFA newsreels and documentaries was both easy and affordable for all its citizens.

## Documenting Socialism

Given the DEFA studio's prolific output and the large number of filmmakers who worked outside the auspices of the mainstream studio, it is scarcely possible to do justice to the phenomenon of East German documentary in a volume of this size. Many of the individual filmmakers and production studios such as Studio H&S referenced in the volume could easily be the subject of a monograph in their own right. Likewise, the production of Super 8 film – a crossover phenomenon that embraces not only activist documentary but also home movies with their more intimate forms of personal memory – merely underlines what a complex and diverse field the production of nonfictional film in the GDR was. Accordingly, our volume seeks to reflect that complexity by offering a range of different approaches to the analysis of East German documentary cinema. However, no study of this kind exists in a vacuum, and in constructing this volume we have sought to build on the comprehensive overview presented in Günter Jordan and Ralph Schenk's landmark volume of 1996 *Schwarzweiß und Farbe. DEFA-Dokumentarfilme 1946–92*, and on the detailed analysis of the sociopolitical context of the early years provided in 1994 by Christiane Mückenberger and Günter Jordan, *'Sie sehen selbst, Sie*

*hören selbst. . . .' Eine Geschichte der DEFA von ihren Anfängen bis 1949*. It is also striking that, perhaps mindful of the need to preserve the memories of an ageing generation, these well-established studies have been supplemented either by compilations of interviews with key figures – such as the volume *Das Prinzip Neugier. DEFA-Dokumentarfilme erzählen* (2012), edited by Ingrid Poss, Christiane Mückenberger and Anne Richter – or by volumes containing multiple contributions by former practitioners at DEFA, such as Peter Zimmermann's landmark volumes *Deutschlandbilder Ost. Dokumentarfilme der DEFA von der Nachkriegszeit bis zur Wiedervereinigung* (1995) and the more recent *Dokumentarfilm in Deutschland. Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (2022).

In German-language scholarship, recent in-depth studies of the filmmakers Joris Ivens[35] and Volker Koepp[36] have underlined the importance of both for an understanding of both the early phase of DEFA documentary and its afterlife. Likewise, Rüdiger Steinmetz and Tilo Prase's monograph of 2002 on *Dokumentarfilm zwischen Beweis und Pamphlet. Heynowski & Scheumann und Gruppe Katins* on Studio H&S might be seen as the first step towards a more nuanced understanding of Heynowski and Scheumann's films that have too often been dismissed as nothing more than simplistic propaganda. While English-language scholarship has been reliant on a series of disparate articles and chapters covering a rage of filmmakers and topics,[37] the recent translation and publication in 2018 of Caroline Moine's monograph *Screened Encounters: The Leipzig Documentary Film Festival, 1955–1990* provides a wealth of detail on what was perhaps the most important event in the calendar of the DEFA-Studio für Dokumentarfilme. Last but not least, Nora M. Alter's *Projecting History: German Nonfiction Cinema 1967–2000* (2002) represents a rare attempt to situate East German documentary filmmaking alongside its West German counterpart.[38]

As a number of the contributions volume reveal, East German documentary was a transnational undertaking that, even in its earliest phase, drew on the talents of foreign filmmakers such as Joop Huisken and Joris Ivens. Even in the darkest periods of the Cold War, the networking opportunities provided by the Leipzig Documentary Film Festival ensured that it remained in constant dialogue with filmmakers from both East and West (including the United States). Indeed, as the very title of Hermann Herlinghaus' anthology *Dokumentaristen der Welt in den Kämpfen unserer Zeit* (*Global Documentary Film and the Struggles of Our Time*, 1982) underlines, East German filmmakers clearly saw themselves and their work in the context of a progressive global movement that embraced figures such as Paul Rotha, Mikhail Romm, Patricio Guzmán, Lionel Ngakane, Chris Marker and Richard Leacock. We have dis-

cussed elsewhere the dangers of approaching East German film history in terms of a narrow conception of national cinemas,[39] and while it is impossible to disassociate the individuals and topics from the immediate political context in which they operated, almost all of the chapters in the volume – Sebastian Heiduschke's reading of DEFA documentaries through the lens of African Cinema (Chapter 10) is but one example – remind us that to see DEFA as the cinema of a small nation is to ignore its richness and complexity. Moreover, as Andy Räder points out in his discussion of Sorbian documentary (see Chapter 8), the GDR was anything but a homogenous political entity.

However we choose to define DEFA, one thing is certain, namely that the studio consistently sought to position itself as Other in respect to mainstream commercial filmmaking and the type of fare served up by Hollywood. In the sphere of documentary filmmaking, this created a relationship of affinity with those filmmakers from other parts of the world who, by virtue of focusing on documentary (rather than feature filmmaking), found themselves consigned to the margins of their own film industries. This sense of alterity is particularly evident in the ways in which DEFA documentaries sought to position the GDR as Other in respect to its near neighbour, the Federal Republic. While this sense of political alterity comes across clearly in the statements and testimonies of those former employees recorded in the collections from the 1990s, our attempt to reimagine DEFA documentary some thirty to forty years later reveals the presence of several blind spots in respect of race, gender and sexuality. In many ways these blind spots, which are hardly confined to East German cinema, suggest that DEFA had rather more in common with other national cinemas than would appear to be the case at first sight. Kyle Frackman's queer re-reading (Chapter 14) of the film *In Sachen H. und acht anderer* (*In the Matter of H. and Eight Others*, 1972) exposes contradictions in the East German government's handling of sexualities that did not conform to conventional heterosexual models. By the same token, Tom Smith's analysis (Chapter 13) of the representation of female soldiers in short documentaries produced by – and for – the Nationale Volksarmee (National People's Army [NVA]) shows how these films oscillate between constantly problematizing and reinforcing binary gender norms in ways that challenge conventional concepts of masculinity and reveal the gender binary to be under increasing pressure in the GDR. At the same time, both Frackman and Smith's chapter point to alternative forms of film production that could not always be easily aligned with state socialism in the GDR.

The fascination – and challenge – of DEFA documentaries is that often the ostensible subject of a given film was simply a pretext to discuss

the Cold War and the situation of the GDR in respect of the FRG within that framework. As Priscilla Layne (Chapter 11) notes, at one level discussions of Black abjection appear to present a progressive view of postcolonial politics, but at another this trope is instrumentalized in ways that are clearly designed to highlight the progressive political credentials of the GDR itself. Nonetheless, it is important not to fall into the trap of dismissing East German documentary as simply crude propaganda. Even the Studio H&S, often condemned by scholars as nothing more than an anti-FRG agitprop unit, has started to attract greater scholarly attention as critics have become more attuned to the elements of self-reflexivity that are evident in their films. Likewise, many will object that filmmakers like Annelie and Andrew Thorndike, Karl Gass, Peter Voigt, Gerhard Scheumann and Walter Heynowski presented partisan ideology in the guise of supposedly objective historical narratives. However, such a view downplays not only the aesthetic complexity (and self-reflexivity) of a number of these films, but also the highly politicised context of the Cold War in which the filmmakers operated, as well as their personal biographies and first-hand experiences of the legacy of German fascism. By contrast, those willing to engage with East German documentary – both mainstream and marginal – on its own terms will discover a rich and provocative collection of films that, if anything, underlines just how interconnected filmmakers in the GDR were with postwar developments in global cinema.

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*German Cinema: DEFA and Film History* (2013 in English, 2019 in a Japanese edition), *Re-imagining DEFA: East German Cinema in its National and Transnational Contexts* (co-edited with Seán Allan, 2016), as well as essays in *Camera Obscura*, *Feminist German Studies*, *German Studies Review*, *Monatshefte* and various edited collections.

## Notes

1. A notable exception in this respect is Rüdiger Steinmetz and Tilo Prase's study: *Dokumentarfilm zwischen Beweis und Pamphlet. Heynowski & Scheumann und Gruppe Katins* (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2002).
2. On Jürgen Böttcher, see, for example, Richard Kilborn, 'The Documentary Work of Jürgen Böttcher. A Retrospective', in Seán Allan and John Sandford (eds), *DEFA: East German Cinema 1946–1992* (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), pp. 267–82. On Barbara and Winfried Junge and their *Kinder von Golzow* project, see, for example, Barton Byg, 'GDR-Up: The Ideology of Universality in Long Term Documentary', *New German Critique* 80(1) (2001), 126–44.
3. Kurt Maetzig, 'Vom Wesen des Dokumentarfilms', *Theater der Zeit* 1 (1946), 24. All translations of original German sources are the authors' own unless otherwise stated.
4. Kurt Maetzig, 'Wir sind alle Augenzeugen', *Vorwärts*, 14 August 1946.
5. Christiane Mückenberger and Günter Jordan, *'Sie sehen selbst, Sie hören selbst'. Eine Geschichte der DEFA von ihren Anfängen bis 1949* (Marburg: Hitzeroth, 1994), pp. 243–45 (at p. 244).
6. For a more detailed account of the role and history of Prometheus and Weltfilm, see Bruce Murray, *Film and the German Left in the Weimar Republic. From* Caligari *to* Kuhle Wampe (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), pp. 186–224.
7. Produktion Brandt/Sonderfilm, Bericht 8.8.1947 (= BArch, DR IV 2/906/202).
8. For an encyclopaedic overview of DEFA's structures and organization, see Günter Jordan, *Film in der DDR. Daten – Fakten – Strukturen* (Potsdam: Filmmuseum Potsdam, 2009). See also the corresponding website: https://www.defa-stiftung.de/defa/geschichte/daten-und-fakten/filmwesen-der-ddr/ (retrieved 3 August 2023).
9. As Stephan Ehrig has noted, these protagonists were often referred to as 'teleological precursors'. See Stephan Ehrig, 'Deconstructing Revolutionary Traditions: Stefan Schütz's *Kohlhaas*', in Stephan Ehrig, Marcel Thomas and David Zell (eds), *The GDR Today: New Interdisciplinary Approaches to East German History, Memory and Culture* (Oxford: Lang, 2018), pp. 83–98.
10. See Seán Allan, *Screening Art: Modernism and the Socialist Imaginary in East German Cinema* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2019), pp. 60–78.

11. Otto Grotewohl, 'Die deutsche Kultur ist unteilbar', *Neues Deutschland*, 23 March 1950.
12. Following his first visit to the DEFA studio in August 1951, Ivens had been involved in a number of short-term collaborations. See Günter Jordan, *Unbekannter Ivens. Triumph, Verdammnis, Auferstehung. Joris Ivens bei der DEFA und in der DDR 1948–1949* (Berlin: Bertz + Fischer, 2018), p. 23.
13. Karl Gass notes that 'at that time I was very much in favour of the Wall, indeed I felt it should have been built much earlier as the open border was causing us huge damage'. See Karl Gass, 'Ich habe nicht umsonst gelebt', in Ingrid Poss, Christiane Mückenberger and Anne Richter (eds), *Das Prinzip Neugier. DEFA-Dokumentarfilmer erzählen* (Berlin: Neues Leben, 2012), pp. 34–57 (at p. 48). This goes some way towards explaining the political thrust behind what is probably Gass' best-known (but perhaps least representative) documentary outside the GDR, namely *Schaut auf diese Stadt* (*Look at This City*, 1962).
14. See Gass' remarks on sound recording technology: Karl Gass, 'Von der filmischen Hymne zur realistischen Dokumentation. Auf den Spuren des Bitterfelder Weges', in Peter Zimmermann (ed), *Deutschlandbilder Ost. Dokumentarfilme der DEFA von der Nachkriegszeit bis zur Wiedervereinigung* (Konstanz: UVK Medien/Ölschläger, 1995), pp. 77–108 (especially p. 92). See also Michael Biegholdt, Werner Wüste and Karl Gass, 'Unsere Arbeit an dem Dokumentarfilm *Feierabend*', *Filmwissenschaftliche Mitteilungen* 2 (1964), 264–75.
15. *Sonntag* 9/1964 and *Nationalzeitung*, 17 October 1964.
16. *Cinéma 64,* No. 85/April 1964.
17. On the early history of the festival, see Caroline Moine, *Screened Encounters: The Leipzig Documentary Film Festival, 1955–1990* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2018), pp. 43–70.
18. Protokoll der VI. Leipziger Dokumentar und Kurzfilmwoche 1963, pp. 42–43 (cited in Günter Jordan and Ralf Schenk (eds), *Schwarzweiß und Farbe. DEFA Dokumentarfilme, 1946–92* (Berlin: Jovis, 1996), p. 380)
19. Ibid.
20. For a discussion of Böttcher's *Drei von vielen*, see Allan, *Screening Art*, pp. 95–104.
21. Peter Zimmermann, 'Der Dokumentarfilm der DEFA zwischen Propaganda, Alltagsbeobachtung und subversiver Rezeption', in Zimmermann (ed.), *Deutschlandbilder Ost,* pp. 77–108 (at p. 92).
22. For a more detailed discussion of *Prisma*, see Heather L. Gumbert, *Envisioning Socialism: Television and the Cold War in the German Democratic Republic* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014), pp. 144–49.
23. A more detailed account of the founding and economic basis of the studio is presented in Rüdiger Steinmetz and Tilo Prase, pp. 45–67.
24. Eduard Schreiber, 'Zeit der verpassten Möglichkeiten, 1970 bis 1980' in Jordan and Schenk, *Schwarzweiß und Farbe*, pp. 129–79 (at p. 159).

25. For a detailed study of the Golzow film project, see Byg, 'GDR-Up', as well as Britta Hartmann and Marian Petraitis, '". . . sich später mal als DDR-Bürger wiedersehen zu können": Vom ethnografischen zum historiografischen Modus in der dokumentarischen Langzeitstudie *Die Kinder von Golzow*', in Dominik Orth and Heinz-Peter Preusser (eds), *Mauerschau – Die DDR als Film. Beiträge zur Historisierung eines verschwundenen Staates* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), pp. 273–96.
26. Nora M. Alter, *Projecting History: German Nonfiction Cinema 1967–2000* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), pp. 195–210 (at p. 199).
27. Nick Hodgin, 'DEFA's Last Gasp: Ruins, Melancholy and the End of East German Filmmaking', in Seán Allan and Sebastian Heiduschke (eds), *Re-imagining DEFA. East German Cinema in its National and Transnational Contexts* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2016), pp. 271–91 (at p. 272).
28. For a translation and discussion of the manifesto, see Laura G. McGee, 'Revolution in the Studio? The DEFA's Fourth Generation of Film Directors and Their Reform Efforts in the Last Decade of the GDR', *Film History* 15(4) (2003), 444–64.
29. Jürgen Böttcher, 'Bemerkungen zu meinem Film *Stars*', *Filmwissenschaftliche Beiträge* 1 (1964), 1–12.
30. Cited in Moine, *Screened Encounters*, p. 94. For a discussion of the relationship between the film studio DEFA and the East German broadcaster Deutscher Fernsehfunk, see Thomas Beutelschmidt, *Kooperation oder Konkurrenz? Das Verhältnis zwischen Film und Fernsehen in der DDR* (Berlin: DEFA-Stiftung, 2009).
31. Ralf Schenk. 'Ein Hauch von Welt. Vor 30 Jahren kamen die ersten 70mm-Filme der DEFA auf die Leinwand', film-dienst 19/1997, https://www.defa-stiftung.de/defa/publikationen/artikel/191997-ein-hauch-von-welt/ (retrieved 24 July 2023).
32. Jeanpaul Goergen, 'Vorwiegend aus politischen Gründen', *Leuchtkraft. Journal der DEFA-Stiftung* 3 (2020), 131–34.
33. Jeanpaul Goergen, 'DEFA auf Schienen. Die Kinowagen der Deutschen Reichsbahn', *Leuchtkraft. Journal der DEFA-Stiftung* 2 (2019), 100–4.
34. Günter Jordan, 'Die frühen Jahre', in Jordan and Schenk, *Schwarzweiß und Farbe*, pp. 40–41.
35. Günter Jordan, *Unbekannter Ivens. Triumph, Verdamnis, Auferstehung. Joris Ivens bei der DEFA und in der DDR 1948–1989* (Berlin: Bertz + Fischer, 2018).
36. Grit Lemke (ed.), *Unter hohen Himmeln. Das Universum Volker Koepp: Gespräche und Reflexionen* (Berlin: Bertz + Fischer, 2019).
37. Key examples include, but are not limited to, Sarah Blaylock, 'Bringing the War Home to the United States and East Germany: *In the Year of the Pig* and *Pilots in Pajamas*', *Cinema Journal* 56(4) (2017), 26–50; Patricia A. Simpson, 'Allegories of Resistance. The Legacy of 1968 in GDR Visual Cultures', in Christina Gerhardt and Marco Abel (eds), *Celluloid Revolt. German Screen*

*Cultures and the Long 1968*, (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2019), pp. 201–18; Nick Hodgin, 'Alternative Realities and Authenticity in DEFA's Documentary Films', in Marc Silberman and Henning Wrage (eds), *DEFA at the Crossroads of East German and International Film Culture: A Companion* (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2014), pp. 281–304; Richard Kilborn, 'The Documentary Work of Jürgen Böttcher: A Retrospective' in Seán Allan and John Sandford (eds), *DEFA: East German Cinema, 1946–1992* (New York: Berghahn Books, 1996), pp. 267–82; Franziska Noessig, 'Artists and Artworks in the Films of Jürgen Böttcher' (unpublished PhD Thesis, Kings College London, 2019); and Lauren Cuthbert, '"Ich hatte Befehle": Multidirectional Memory and the Vietnam War in Heynowski and Scheumann's Piloten im Pyjama (1968)', *German Life and Letters* 75(4) (2022), 521–39.

38. See also Matthias Steinle, 'Visualizing the Enemy: Representations of the "Other Germany" in Documentaries Produced by the FRG and GDR in the 1950s', in John E. Davidson and Sabine Hake (eds), *Framing the Fifties: Cinema in a Divided Germany* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), pp. 120–36.
39. Seán Allan and Sebastian Heiduschke, 'Introduction: Re-imagining East German Cinema', in *Re-imagining DEFA*, pp. 1–18.

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