

INTRODUCTION

Re-imagining East German Cinema

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For many scholars, the term DEFA has become a byword for the national cinema of the German Democratic Republic (GDR); yet conceptualizing film historiography in such terms raises almost as many issues as it resolves, and is particularly complex in the case of the GDR because of its changing status as a geopolitical and cultural-political entity during the period 1949–1990. The founding of the DEFA studio (on 17 May 1946 it was granted a licence for film production) pre-dates the founding of the GDR itself by almost two-and-a-half years; and the liquidation of the company (on 9 August 1994 the name DEFA was expunged from the official register of German companies) occurred almost four years after the state's collapse. The studio's name is also deceptive; at one level the acronym DEFA (Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft) invokes memories of its illustrious precursor, UFA (Universum Film Aktiengesellschaft), the prewar production company that had occupied the same site in Potsdam-Babelsberg; yet, in theory at least, the aims of the two organizations could hardly have been more different. Finally, even the designation of the DEFA studio as a so-called 'Aktiengesellschaft' (usually glossed as 'joint stock company') is misleading; for the term is to be understood not in terms of free-market capitalism, but rather in the sense of a 'Soviet joint stock company' – an economic model developed by the Soviets in order to facilitate the transfer of reparations from Germany to the USSR at the end of World War II.

It is perhaps understandable that some of the first publications on DEFA to appear after the *Wende* tended to see East German cinema predominantly in isolation from other Eastern European cinemas and to approach it as a national cinema (albeit one of a small nation) in its own right.¹ Although DEFA produced over 600 feature films in addition to a large number of animation films, films for children, and documentaries, relatively few of these films were known outside the GDR and the Eastern Bloc. On the one hand, regarded as largely free from the

constraints of a capitalist market economy, film production and consumption in the GDR was seen by many (incorrectly as it turned out) as having no real relationship to the traditions of popular cinema in the West and in Hollywood. On the other hand, DEFA's collectivist approach to filmmaking – a practice embodied, above all in its system of artistic ensembles (or *Künstlerische Arbeitsgruppen*) – seemed fundamentally at odds with the more individualistic auteurist approach underpinning the study of arthouse movements such as the New German Cinema in the Federal Republic. Finally, even before the Wende, the cinema of the GDR had, for the most part, been consigned to a scholarly no-man's land and treated in isolation from other cinemas.² Almost always excluded from surveys of 'German' national cinema and the cinema of Western Europe,³ it rarely features in studies devoted to the study of Eastern European film largely because of an assumption that the GDR's pivotal position in a divided Europe meant that its filmmakers were subject to a more radical censorship than their counterparts in Poland and Czechoslovakia.⁴

With the collapse of the GDR, and the end of the Cold War, many of these assumptions have been challenged as DEFA's output has reached new audiences. First, the Wende provided an historic opportunity for the screening of a number of films that had been banned in the wake of the Eleventh Plenum in 1965/66; and the subsequent wave of so-called *Ostalgie* (nostalgia for the GDR) in the early 1990s prompted regular screenings of DEFA films by the two regional television networks RBB (Rundfunk Berlin-Brandenburg) and MDR (Mitteldeutscher Rundfunk) most closely associated with the GDR. The availability of the films themselves in DVD format, together with the accessibility of archive material on almost every aspect of East German film production, has proved that DEFA was not the propaganda machine many assumed it must have been, and, as a result, a more differentiated picture of film culture in the GDR has emerged over the last decade. Now that the study of East German cinema is no longer quite the marginal activity it once was, the past decade or so has seen a proliferation of diverse historiographical approaches to the film culture of the GDR.⁵ These different approaches have, in turn, given rise to the following research questions that underpin the overall agenda of the present volume. First, to what extent can DEFA be regarded as a national cinema in its own right? Second, given the involvement of DEFA's employees in both prewar and post-Wende cinema, how far can East German cinema be regarded as a homogeneous entity that is coterminous with the existence of the GDR itself? Third, to what extent is film culture in the GDR (considered both in terms of production and

consumption) a transnational phenomenon that is bound up not only with the cinema of the Federal Republic, but also with other (non-German) cinemas? Fourth, what is the role of popular/genre cinema in East German film culture and how does it assimilate the traditions (both socialist and nonsocialist) on which it draws? Fifth, given the existence of independent studios (such as Studio H&S) and underground filmmakers working alongside mainstream television in the GDR, is it misleading to see East German cinema simply as synonymous with DEFA? (What forms does media convergence take in the GDR?) Finally, is it possible to speak of a 'DEFA style', and does DEFA have what might be termed 'an afterlife'?

At first sight, Andrew Higson's seminal essay of 1989, 'The Concept of a National Cinema' would appear to offer a promising framework for conceptualizing DEFA as a national cinema, even though for the first two-and-a-half years of the studio's existence it was, paradoxically, a cinema in search of a nation.⁶ The difficulties of re-establishing a national cinema in Germany immediately after World War II are reflected in the very different cultural politics operating in the Soviet and American Zones of Occupation. While the understanding shown by Soviet Cultural Officers such as Alexander Dymshitz and Sergei Tulpanov pointed to a greater willingness to allow the involvement of German returnees in the development of the film industry in the East, the Americans' desire to reap the financial rewards of screening Hollywood films banned during the Third Reich was a considerable obstacle to the development of a new film industry in the West. The East's determination to stake its claim as the true guardian of Germany's cultural heritage is evident as early as the First German Film Congress of 6–9 June 1947 (an event organized under the auspices of the left-wing Cultural League for the Democratic Renewal of Germany that was designed to persuade German filmmakers to support the newly established DEFA studio). Alfred Lindemann's opening address, 'The Situation of German Cinema', highlighted the ways in which the entertainment cinema of the 1930s and 1940s had been transformed into a propaganda tool by the Nazis, and underlined the key role of cinema in the process of postwar political re-education.⁷ Five years later, the message disseminated to delegates at the second film conference, of 17–18 September 1952, was even more clear-cut; in stark contrast to the GDR, which could boast its own independent film industry, the neighbouring Federal Republic was, it was claimed, merely a 'film colony' and a victim of American cultural imperialism.⁸

Seen from this perspective, one way of reading the constant attacks on so-called 'cosmopolitan tendencies' in art, literature and film during the early 1950s is

to interpret them as a rearguard action designed to preserve the integrity of the GDR's concept of a national (German) culture. Yet the difficulties DEFA experienced in persuading ordinary East German citizens to embrace its own version of a national film culture based on socialist realism, underlines just how problematic that concept itself was. Conceived (at least in theory) in opposition to both Hollywood's model of commercial film production and the entertainment features served up by UFA's prewar *Traumfabrik*, DEFA's productions of the early 1950s rejected cinematic modernism and, by and large, eschewed popular entertainment in favour of an approach that was often overly didactic. The inevitable result was a steady decline in ticket sales during the 1950s. Ultimately, the only way DEFA could counter the lure of those cinemas showing popular Hollywood films just across the border in the West, was to develop its own forms of popular/genre cinema, produce more films about young people in the contemporary GDR, and to cultivate its own system of stars, or *Publikumslieblinge* (audience darlings) as they were known. Finally, during the 1970s and 1980s – a period when increasing numbers of East Germans were able to access West German television relatively easily – these strategies were supplemented by the regular import of carefully selected popular films from the West.⁹ At various points in the history of the studio all of these practices were singled out for criticism by dogmatic cultural theorists; nonetheless, the fact remains that, even in the earliest years of its existence, DEFA could not seal itself off altogether from external influences and had no choice but to engage with viewer expectations generated by an increasingly global film industry.

The arguments for regarding DEFA as a national cinema in its own right are grounded, above all, in the studio's role in promoting an alternative German national identity based on a concept of antifascism, and its contribution to the self-legitimization of the GDR. Not surprisingly, a number of the studio's most prestigious productions focused on antifascist resistance during World War II and the Spanish Civil War. Even if they were not received as enthusiastically by the broader viewing public as the leaders of the ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED) might have hoped, films like Kurt Maetzig's monumental epics of the 1950s *Ernst Thälmann – Sohn seiner Klasse* [*Ernst Thälmann – Son of his Class*, 1954] and *Ernst Thälmann – Führer seiner Klasse* [*Ernst Thälmann – Leader of his Class*, 1955] were instrumental in forging a link between the fledgling state and the prewar traditions of progressive politics. In the early 1960s too, films such as Frank Vogel's *Und deine Liebe auch* [*And Your Love Too*, 1962], Heinz Thiel's *Der Kinnhaken* [*The Punch to*

the Jaw, 1962] and Konrad Wolf's *Der geteilte Himmel* [*Divided Heaven*, 1964] looked to a combination of rising East German stars (Armin Mueller-Stahl, Manfred Krug and Renate Blume) and *nouvelle vague* aesthetics in order to make the case for the GDR as the 'better' Germany during a period of crisis triggered by the building of the Berlin Wall.

Writing from the perspective of 2002, Barton Byg notes, quite rightly, that 'a fundamental inadequacy of film criticism since 1989 has been the fact that the films of the DEFA ... are primarily valued as evidence for the history of the German Democratic Republic'.¹⁰ Yet as the title of Harry Blunk's 1987 monograph *Die DDR in ihren Filmen* [*The GDR in its Feature Films*] on the representation of East German society in contemporary DEFA films suggests, this type of approach was established well before the Wende.¹¹ Despite being one of the more even-handed attempts to gain an understanding of East German society through the study of its cinema, Blunk's study suffers from a tendency to see film simply as a window onto social reality rather than as an aesthetic product in its own right. Nonetheless, it offers a more nuanced set of interpretations than those studies which, by contrast, portray East German film primarily as a propaganda tool in the service of the SED. Perhaps the most striking example of such an approach is Heinz Kersten's 1963 study *Das Filmwesen in der sowjetischen Besatzungszone Deutschlands* [*Film Culture in the Soviet Zone of Occupation*].¹² Kersten's survey, however, remains entrenched in the vicissitudes of Cold War rhetoric; not only is the GDR portrayed simply as a satellite state of the Soviet Union, but DEFA's output is analysed almost exclusively in terms of its role as anti-Western propaganda. Nonetheless, although written almost forty years later, Klaus Finke's keynote essay in a volume provocatively entitled *DEFA-Film als nationales Kulturerbe?* [*DEFA – The Cultural Legacy of a Nation?*] serves as a reminder of the enduring character of such ideologically reductive approaches to East German cinema.¹³ For Finke, East German cinema remains first and foremost a visual embodiment of the premises underpinning the dominant ideology of the SED, and as such, charts the decline of the party and the decline of the GDR generally. In the light of this, Finke argues that future generations of scholars – and the DEFA-Stiftung (DEFA-Foundation) itself – must resist the temptation to judge the works primarily in terms of their aesthetic qualities and, instead, focus primarily on the ideological context in which they were created.¹⁴ The polemical tone of Finke's approach cannot, however, conceal its limitations. It may be hard to conceptualize DEFA without reference to the ideological underpinnings of cultural politics in the GDR; yet, as documents from the DEFA

studio's production files confirm, SED policy directives were not always systematically followed, and some directors (Konrad Wolf is an obvious example) were subject to far less rigid constraints than others. Likewise, DEFA's co-productions often involved foreign partners whose own agendas were clearly at odds with those of the GDR's Ministry of Culture.¹⁵

Given the complexity of the conditions under which films were made in the GDR, it comes as no surprise that, increasingly, scholars have moved on from the study of DEFA as an isolated phenomenon and sought instead to situate East German cinema within a broader context of German–German relations. In this respect Hans Joachim Meurer's 2002 study *Cinema and National Identity in Divided Germany 1979–1989 – The Split Screen* represents something of a landmark in DEFA scholarship.¹⁶ Meurer's study probes one of the key questions for film scholars, namely what exactly is to be understood by the term 'German' in the context of postwar cinema. Following the catastrophe of World War II, the GDR defined itself as a *Staatsnation* (or 'political nation') in which the members of that nation inhabit a given territory and share a common ideology. By contrast, the Federal Republic embraced the essentially nineteenth-century notion of the *Kulturnation* (a concept which Marc Silberman has explained as 'meaning variously a cultured nation and a nation unified through its cultural achievements').¹⁷ The use of the term *Kulturnation* was designed to define German national identity in terms that transcended the political reality of the recently founded Federal Republic and the GDR, while at the same time maintaining the possibility of a unified Germany at some point in the future. However, in the revised version of its constitution of 1974 the GDR redefined itself as 'a socialist state' that was complete in itself and not part of any larger entity; and all references to reunification were removed. As a result, Meurer argues 'it is not only possible to deny the existence of one "German national cinema", but also to deny that the production of films took place within a national framework *per se*, since the two industries were shaped by strong international forces'.¹⁸ Yet the aim of Meurer's study is not to argue for a compartmentalized approach to the study of postwar German cinema, but rather to suggest that the quest to maintain the internal coherence of these two 'national cinemas' has obscured the fact that 'national cinemas are not confined, but hybrid and in interaction with multiple external influences'.¹⁹

Meurer's concept of the 'split screen' has proved extremely influential in promoting a more all-encompassing approach to the study of postwar German cinema, not least because it moves beyond textual readings of key works and

engages with a much wider range of issues including not only production, but also distribution and exhibition. However, just as film studies has moved towards a more integrated model of film culture in East and West, so too there has also been a corresponding reassessment of the relationship between the pre- and postwar traditions of German filmmaking and, in particular, DEFA's relationship to UFA. As David Bathrick has pointed out, DEFA's much heralded desire to make films that had nothing in common with the entertainment films produced by UFA in the prewar era was a task that was much easier said than done.²⁰ One of the problems with which the new studio was immediately confronted was that, in the early years, a large proportion of its directors, producers and camera operators had previously worked for either UFA or Terra.²¹ Artur Pohl, Arthur Maria Rabenalt and Wolfgang Schleif were just some of the better known employees who had been active in the film industry during the Third Reich. As a result, it is hardly surprising that many of DEFA's early feature films (Kurt Maetzig's *Ehe im Schatten* [*Marriage in the Shadows*, 1947] is an obvious example) have the look and feel of UFA productions of the 1940s. This cannot, however, be adequately explained purely in terms of an overlap of personnel. Detlef Kannapin identifies a number of additional factors that contributed to the extended legacy of the 'UFA-style' in East German film production.²² These include a reluctance on the part of East German film theorists to engage with the visual language of Nazi cinema,²³ and a desire on the part of the SED to deflect attention away from the aesthetics of totalitarian film and onto the traditions of proletarian filmmaking in the Weimar Republic instead. In addition, some sixteen unfinished UFA productions from the years 1943–1945 were completed and premiered in the Soviet Zone of Occupation primarily to raise capital for the struggling film industry.²⁴ At the same time, a surprisingly high number of films made during the 1930s and 1940s – including films such as Luis Trenker's *Der Berg ruft* [*The Mountain Calls*, 1937] and Werner Singler and Herbert Selpin's (anti-British) *Titanic* (1943) – were screened in cinemas in the GDR, often attracting large audiences.²⁵ All of this goes some way to explaining why the visual habits not only of filmmakers but, more importantly, of cinema-goers in the East were so resistant to change, and why the realization of a cinematic 'zero hour' in the East proved to be far more difficult than originally envisaged.

The studies by Meurer, Kannapin and Bathrick all underline the difficulties of approaching the study of East German cinema in terms of a narrow conception of national cinemas. The enduring legacy of UFA in the postwar period, too, highlights the problem of seeing DEFA in isolation from the cinematic traditions that

preceded it. By the same token, recent scholarship has focused increasingly on the transnational dimension of East German cinema. As a result, a number of studies have taken their cue from Katie Trumpener's exhortation to explore the ways in which DEFA engages with the cinemas of Eastern Europe.²⁶ Throughout its history, DEFA engaged in a number of co-productions with Eastern partners, and the international film festival at Karlovy Vary in Czechoslovakia was a key date for the studio's production schedule. But it would be wrong to think of DEFA purely in terms of its relations with other film producing nations in the Eastern Bloc. The DEFA Studio for Newsreels and Documentary Features together with Studio H&S (a quasi-independent organization set up by the documentarists Walter Heynowski and Gerhard Scheumann) made a crucial contribution to the internationalization of DEFA's output. On the one hand, documentaries about Chile and Vietnam played a key role in strengthening the political links with those countries which, in defiance of the Federal Republic's 'Hallstein doctrine', were prepared to enter into diplomatic relations with the GDR; and on the other, the screening of these documentaries in the GDR itself gave East German viewers a sense that their nation was an active player on the wider global stage.

While it was almost inevitable that the relations between DEFA and other socialist nations in both the developed and developing world would become increasingly important for scholars of East German film, the increased emphasis now placed on popular and genre cinema (and the impact of Hollywood) is perhaps more unexpected. DEFA's children's films, and its contribution to the fairy-tale genre in particular, are perhaps its most enduring legacy in the post-Wende era.²⁷ In the case of science fiction, the studio's experiments can be seen as an attempt to embrace a popular genre that was already well established in the Soviet Union and other Eastern Bloc nations. But the impact of classic science fiction productions from the West, such as Stanley Kubrick's 1968 production *2001. A Space Odyssey* and the US television series *Star Trek*, cannot be ignored either.²⁸ More remarkable still is the East German appropriation of the American genre of the Western in the highly popular series of so-called *Indianerfilme* that were released between 1965 and 1983. Yet in so doing, DEFA tapped into an existing tradition of popular German literature (the novels of Karl May) and combined this with its own distinctive take on Hollywood's cowboys.²⁹ Last but not least, the 'popular/genre turn' in DEFA scholarship has also been accompanied by a range of studies exploring the ways in which East German film culture has developed its own take on the discourse of stardom – both in film production and in popular

magazines such as *Filmspiegel*, *Film für alle*, and *Film und Fernsehen dabei* that were designed to stimulate audience interest.³⁰

The fact that DEFA is no longer seen simply as an isolated national cinema is, to a large extent, a reflection of the globalization of DEFA scholarship itself. Since the Wende, scholarly interest in East German cinema has expanded rapidly. This is due, at least in part, to the opening up of archives that allowed insight into the workings of the GDR film industry, and to the emergence of a wide range of research agendas both in and beyond Germany. These contrasting agendas highlight an interesting dichotomy as far as approaches to DEFA are concerned, something that Brigitta Wagner sees as reflecting an ‘unbiased appreciation of the work of filmmakers from the former GDR in the United States and elsewhere abroad in comparison to the reception of DEFA films in the unified Federal Republic of Germany’.³¹ Although Wagner’s assessment of contemporary DEFA scholarship is perhaps too polarizing, her commentary serves nonetheless as a reminder of the importance of global scholarship in stimulating what is now a multifold interest in East German cinema. By providing a more nuanced complement to the (often lukewarm) appreciation of DEFA in Germany, scholars in Austria, Australia, Japan, the UK, the United States and other locations have opened up innovative avenues of research that, in turn, have led to new discoveries and, generally speaking, promoted a more balanced view.

Since 1993, a research centre and film archive dedicated to the study of GDR film has existed in the United States. Housed at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, the DEFA Film Library was founded with the twofold mission of preserving the collection of 16mm and 35mm film prints obtained from the defunct GDR embassy in New York, and establishing a physical location for the continuous research into DEFA at a time when East German studies seemed in danger of becoming obsolete.³² Over the years to follow, the DEFA Film Library expanded its collection with film prints from the US–GDR Friendship Committee and a substantial collection of film journals and research material on film culture in the GDR. Since 2002, the film prints have been stored in the climate-controlled library depository, which (somewhat ironically) is housed in a Cold War bunker located underground in the Holyoke Range in Massachusetts. The DEFA Film Library also took on the distribution of English-subtitled DEFA films on DVD from Icestorm International in 2001 and the subtitling of films, in 2003, to serve the predominantly academic North American market. In addition to curating travelling film programs, hosting annual visitors and staging the biannual film institutes, it has

made a major contribution to the development of DEFA studies in a transnational context. Its collaboration with the Museum of Modern Art in New York for the film retrospective *Rebels with a Cause: The Cinema of East Germany* in 2005 attracted international attention, and the release of the *Wendeflicks* series in Los Angeles in 2009 triggered the rediscovery and release of some of the last DEFA films in Germany.

While DEFA films have a predominantly academic following outside Germany, the situation in Germany itself is very different. There, in addition to scholarly engagement, a commodification of East German cinema has taken place that has resulted in an ever-growing interest in the films produced in Potsdam-Babelsberg.³³ Founded in 1999, the DEFA-Stiftung became the legal successor to DEFA itself,³⁴ and took administrative control of the rights to the films.³⁵ The heated legal battle between the DEFA-Stiftung, film distributors, and other stakeholders regarding the licensing and distribution contracts for DEFA films in 2011 underlines just how hot a commodity East German cinema had become within the German film market.³⁶ The revenue stream from the sale of DEFA video cassettes, DVDs, and Blu-rays was so substantial that the home video distributor Icestorm, a start-up founded in 1998 to sell DEFA films on VHS (and later DVD), was able to purchase the distribution company Progress that held the distribution rights for TV and cinemas, and to launch a video-on-demand portal, Icestorm TV, that allows the streaming of DEFA films via the world wide web. As far as German audiences are concerned, there is little to suggest that this enthusiasm for, and interest in, GDR films is on the wane.

Perhaps the most striking manifestation of a renewed and seemingly ever-expanding audience interest in DEFA is the development of a vibrant fan culture. During the existence of the GDR, cinema-goers often favoured films imported from abroad over DEFA's own productions (despite the efforts of the GDR media to cultivate its own version of stardom and fandom). Paradoxically, the collapse of the state prompted something of a rediscovery of DEFA. The East Germans' struggle for identity in the wake of reunification triggered the phenomenon of *Ostalgie*,³⁷ and with it a strong interest in DEFA films as a way of visually reliving and commemorating the GDR. These audiences were instrumental in boosting the market for DEFA films as they wrote letters to Icestorm requesting film titles for release on DVD. The launch of fan websites for DEFA cinema in general (and also for specific film genres, actors, and even individual films) soon followed. Some fans tailor film costumes for fan conventions, create jewellery, and even re-record film

music,³⁸ while others self-publish DEFA books about their favourite GDR cinema moments.³⁹

The continued production of DVDs with English subtitles, the existence of a vibrant community of fans, plus an ever-increasing volume of academic scholarship that shows little sign of abating all suggest that DEFA is enjoying an ‘afterlife’ that, in 1989, seemed scarcely imaginable. Yet just as the division between the UFA and DEFA eras – both in terms of personnel and aesthetics – has been shown to be much more blurred than appeared to be the case at first sight, so too the legacy of DEFA and its impact on post-Wende film production in the Berlin Republic throws up a range of methodological challenges for scholars. Where, for example, are we to place, aesthetically speaking, the films produced during the final phase of the studio’s existence?⁴⁰ Is it legitimate to refer to international stars such as Corinna Harfouch and Katrin Sass as ‘East German’ actresses? Does it make sense to talk about Andreas Dresen as an ‘East German’ director? And in what way could a film such as Christian Petzold’s *Barbara* (2012) be described as an ‘East German’ film? How, as Barton Byg has put it, can GDR cinema be said to ‘haunt the films of the present’?⁴¹ Following the demise of the GDR, all of these questions might be seen as variants on a single theme, namely the question of whether it is possible to identify a specific DEFA aesthetic. In an essay of 2000, Detlef Kannapin posed this very question; yet as he himself acknowledges, any attempt to reduce over forty years of film history to a single set of aesthetic principles is almost bound to fail.⁴²

Rather than treat East German cinema as essentially an isolated national phenomenon, our volume seeks to invite readers and researchers to re-imagine DEFA within a much broader notion of both German filmmaking and an increasingly global film industry. As such our volume seeks to consolidate – and go beyond – existing scholarship of the kind reflected in such important collections of essays as *DEFA International* (edited by Michael Wedel, Barton Byg et al.) and *DEFA at the Crossroads of East German and International Film Culture* (edited by Marc Silberman and Henning Wrage). Over twenty-five years have elapsed since the fall of the Berlin Wall, and during this period scholarship on DEFA has evolved very considerably. One consequence of that, however, is that we have now reached a point where that scholarship itself is ready to be subjected to a process of meta-reflection.

It is, of course, perfectly legitimate to explore the impact of East German cultural politics on the films produced by the DEFA studio – and there is still much important work to be done on this front. Nonetheless, underpinning

almost all the essays in the volume is the assumption that attempts to consider DEFA solely within the geopolitical context of the GDR itself raise almost as many issues as they resolve. Rosemary Stott's analysis of the economics of film-making in the GDR reminds us that, contrary to what many have assumed, financial considerations (and the need to keep abreast of international trends in the European import/export market) did play an important role in East German film programming, and had a profound impact on the landscape of cinema exhibition. Stefan Soldovieri's discussion of Artur Pohl's *Spielbank-Affäre* [*Casino Affair*, 1957] demonstrates how DEFA's attempts to access international markets via the production of popular entertainment features were heavily conditioned by developments in German–German politics. In a similar vein, Annette Dorgerloh's focus on set design in the films of the 1950s and early 1960s highlights the extent to which, even after the construction of the Berlin Wall, modernist design was a phenomenon that transcended the border between East and West.

As many of the contributors to the volume argue, films produced at the Potsdam–Babelsberg studio were not simply vehicles for SED ideology, but were deeply embedded within a wider process of transnational cultural exchange that involved filmmakers not just from the Federal Republic and the Eastern Bloc, but also from other continents. As Dennis Hanlon and Qinna Shen point out in their essays, political developments in Asia and Latin America were to shape film production in the GDR in often quite unexpected ways that we are only now just beginning to recognize and understand. Likewise, the contributions by Evan Torner and Sonja Fritzsche suggest that rethinking DEFA from the related perspectives of race, postcolonial theory and utopian thought not only opens up new readings of individual films, but also confirms the status of the GDR's science fiction films and *Indianerfilme* as important contributions to a transnational concept of genre cinema. And while few would now deny the existence of a star system in the GDR, as Seán Allan's chapter on Dean Reed underlines, there were moments when this system of stardom was inflected with a transnational aspect that simply could not be subsumed within the prevailing model of the *Publikumsliebling*.

While at one level our volume seeks to re-imagine DEFA by considering its relation to global concepts of popular cinema (and in the case of Benita Blessing's contribution, internationalist traditions of the *Kinderfilm*) it also explores the way in which filmmakers sought to democratize highbrow culture. As Larson Powell's

essay on film music (surely one of the most underexplored areas in DEFA scholarship) demonstrates, for many East German composers, cinema constituted a crucial opportunity for self-expression; and many of DEFA's soundtracks, precisely because of their complex allusions to classical and modernist traditions in European music, suggest that musicology in the GDR was a much more complex and transnational phenomenon than many have assumed. For her part, Sabine Hake, in her pioneering essay on the politics of the DEFA 'opera film', examines the ways in which media convergence in the work of Walter Felsenstein is deployed as a tool to negotiate a pathway through the intricate complex of high culture, socialist culture and mass culture.

Finally, a number of the contributions to the volume reflect on questions of temporality, and the difficulties in confining the study of DEFA to the period 1946–1992. Mariana Ivanova's essay on the legacy of the prestige agenda of 'Film Europe' and its impact on postwar film production in the East, serves as a reminder that, for all the insistence on a new start in German filmmaking in 1945, the history of pre and postwar cinema is more one of continuity than rupture. As the chapters by Nick Hodgkin, Sebastian Heiduschke and Daniela Berghahn suggest, the same is true of the (increasingly problematic) term 'German cinema' in the pre- and post-Wende periods. Hodgkin's discussion of melancholy in the field of documentary – another form of filmmaking that is all too often overlooked – is followed by two contributions that, albeit in different ways, consider the ways in which contemporary German-language cinema and documentary engage in a process of creative dialogue with DEFA's cinematic and ideological legacy. In this way, all three contributions point to an 'afterlife' of East German cinema that has yet to be fully explored. Accordingly, our volume is an invitation to re-imagine not just DEFA, but also 'post-DEFA' cinema from a transnational – and indeed transtemporal – perspective. No edited collection can claim to offer comprehensive coverage of what is an increasingly diverse and complex phenomenon; and our volume is no different in that respect. But we hope that the gaps that were always there from the outset – and those that have emerged in the course of the editing process – will serve as an inspiration for DEFA scholars in the future.

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Notes

1. See, for example, Harry Blunk and Dirk Jungnickel (eds), *Filmland DDR. Ein Reader zu Geschichte, Funktion und Wirkung der DEFA*, Cologne: Verlag für Wissenschaft und Politik, 1990; Ralf Schenk (ed), *Das zweite Leben der Filmstadt Babelsberg. DEFA-Spielfilme 1946–1992*, Berlin: Henschel, 1994; Seán Allan and John Sandford (eds), *DEFA. East German Cinema, 1946–1992*, New York, Oxford: Berghahn, 1996. All translations are our own, unless specified otherwise.
 2. See, for example, Peter W. Jansen and Wolfram Schütte (eds), *Film in der DDR*, Munich: Hanser, 1977.
 3. For three of the earliest attempts to integrate DEFA into a more general history of German national cinema see Marc Silberman, *German Cinema. Texts in Context*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995; Sabine Hake, *German National Cinema*, London, New York: Routledge, 2002; and John E. Davidson and Sabine Hake (eds), *Framing the Fifties. Cinema in a Divided Germany*, New York, Oxford: Berghahn, 2007. For a more recent study see Stephen Brockmann, *A Critical History of German Film*, Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2010.
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 39. See, for example, <http://defa-filmfreund.de/schreiben-ist-auch-arbeit/> for a list of Jens Rübner’s self-published fan books.
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 41. Barton Byg, ‘Spectral Images in the Afterlife of GDR Cinema’, in Wagner, *DEFA after East Germany*, pp. 24–50 (p. 24).
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