

INTRODUCTION

Texts and Contexts

'When people lose touch with art, kitsch flourishes. Those who feel the need to hang pictures on their walls, but who lack any understanding of beauty and aesthetic value, just put up whatever they come across. Sometimes just because it has a fancy gilt frame.'¹ In an article published in March 1949, the popular magazine *Neue Filmwelt* advised its readers that film could, and should, play a key role in educating postwar Germans in matters of artistic taste. In the East in particular, filmmakers eagerly set about the task, and DEFA's *Künstlerfilme* – films about artists both real and imaginary – offer film historians a unique insight into the changing sociopolitical agendas of the GDR's production studio during almost every phase of its existence. As we shall see, in the late 1940s, these *Künstlerfilme* reflected the efforts of filmmakers in the East to engage with the legacy (and limitations) of German classical humanism. In the 1950s, they were mobilised to promote a concept of a united socialist Germany by portraying the GDR as the true guardian of the nation's cultural heritage and, in particular, as the embodiment of a society based on the principles of the Enlightenment. In the 1960s, they were exploited as a discursive space in which questions of modernist aesthetics and the role of art and the artist in contemporary socialist society could be debated. And during the 1970s and early 1980s, they played a key role in internationalising East German cinema by positioning it in dialogue with a series of films that had started to emerge from the art-house cinemas of both Eastern and Western Europe from the late 1960s onwards.

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In this study of DEFA's *Künstlerfilme*, the terms 'art' (*Kunst*) and 'artist' (*Künstler*) have a wider than usual resonance and embrace not only painting and the visual/plastic arts, but also drama, literature and music.² Many of the performers, sculptors and painters featured in the films discussed below such as Agnes Sailer in *Roman einer jungen Ehe* [*Story of a Young Couple*, 1952] or Herbert Kemmel in *Der nackte Mann auf dem Sportplatz* [*The Naked Man on the Playing Field*, 1974] are imaginary figures, although in some cases – Hans and Elisabeth Wieland in *Ehe im Schatten* [*Marriage in the Shadows*, 1947] are obvious examples – these fictional characters are modelled on well-known historical referents. By the same token, some of the films that are ostensibly 'about' canonical artist-figures such as Barlach, Goya and Beethoven – *Der verlorene Engel* [*The Lost Angel*, 1966/71], *Goya* (1971) and *Beethoven – Tage aus einem Leben* [*Beethoven – Days from a Life*, 1976] – are not straightforward biographies in any conventional sense of the term and, in most cases, treat the central protagonist as a fictionalised construct and as a springboard for an extended discussion of aesthetics and the role of art in socialist society. Alongside the feature films selected for close analysis, my study also draws on newsreels produced for *Der Augenzeuge* as well as conventional documentaries, two genres that played a key role in the GDR's distinctive contribution to the construction of a new canon of socialist art. This reworking of cultural history took essentially two forms: first, a rediscovery of those prewar artists whose work had been marginalised or forgotten because of its oppositional character; and, second, a critical analysis of bourgeois culture that sought to expose its shortcomings as a model for new and progressive works of art in a future socialist society.

Examples of *Künstlerfilme* can, of course, be found in all national cinemas, and the desire of national governments to promote concepts of heritage and cultural identity has, for many decades now, been a key factor in securing funding for independent film production in a range of European countries. In the New German Cinema of the Federal Republic, the large number of films featuring literary authors and adaptations of their work made in the 1970s and early 1980s can, at least in part, be explained in terms of such funding models. However, as the very difficulty of rendering the term *Künstlerfilm* ('artist-film') adequately in English suggests, whether released in the East or the West, these films were seldom simply biopics of individual artists, but engaged with wider ranging questions of artistic creativity and the place of art in contemporary society. Moreover, although most of the films focus on one particular aspect of the arts, in almost all cases, the scope of reference is not confined to one particular genre, but embraces the arts

generally. Indeed, the cinematic genre of the *Künstlerfilm* has a number of obvious affinities with the Romantic *Künstlernovelle*, a self-reflective literary genre in which, albeit almost 150 years earlier, the role of art and the imagination within an increasingly utilitarian social reality was hotly debated. The rise of this literary genre can be seen as a response to an over-emphasis on the rationality of the Enlightenment, and to the attempt on the part of bourgeois society to marginalise art as a mode of cognition in its own right. Like the *Künstlernovellen* of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the *Künstlerfilme* of the postwar period also function as a discursive space in which not only questions of aesthetics, but also human subjectivity (as embodied in the form of the creative artist) could be debated. In the context of the GDR, the revival of interest in Romantic subjectivities across a wide range of art forms during the 1970s and early 1980s was part of a general critique of instrumental reason and the related concept of 'real existing socialism' that many saw as responsible for the alienation of the individual and the marginalisation of art in mainstream East German society.

Precisely because of their internationalist subject matter and often wide-ranging historical perspective, East German *Künstlerfilme* became hotly contested spaces in which filmmakers looked beyond the GDR and debated the impact of contemporary cultural policy on the reception of the prewar cultural heritage, and the development of new paradigms of socialist art in postwar Europe. While increasingly the humanist legacy of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century German art and literature came to be challenged by the 'Sovietisation' of DEFA during the early 1950s (and the corresponding rise of socialist realism), during the 1960s and 1970s many East German directors turned to the Classical and Romantic periods of European art in an attempt to mobilise alternative concepts of realism and thereby open up GDR filmmaking to contemporary developments in new wave cinema (in both Eastern and Western Europe). As I shall argue, it is precisely DEFA's attempt to revisualise existing political agendas in terms of a new concept of modernist aesthetics that makes DEFA's distinctive contribution to the socialist imaginary not simply a local issue specific to the GDR, but part of a wider transnational phenomenon.

The Socialist Imaginary

In writing a cultural history of the DEFA *Künstlerfilm* – a genre that has received little or no scholarly attention to date – my aim is to explore

the way in which the genre changed and developed over the course of the history of the GDR. As we shall see, these films were shaped not only by shifts in cultural policy, but also by transformations in the genre that took place not just in the Federal Republic, but also in Eastern and Western Europe. In addition, my study considers the contribution made by these films to what, drawing on the work of Charles Taylor, I shall term the socialist imaginary.³ In his pioneering work *Modern Social Imaginaries*, Taylor uses the concept of the social imaginary to refer to 'the ways people "imagine" their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations'.⁴ While Taylor's book focuses primarily on the social imaginary in the context of Western capitalist nations, it nonetheless lends itself to analysis of those states in the postwar period that saw themselves as offering an different interpretation of modernity in the context of socialism. However, what makes the concept of the *imaginary* so helpful in the context of a discussion of East German culture generally, and cinema in particular, is the way in which it offers an alternative to approaches rooted in social/socialist *theory*. There was, of course, almost no area of East German society that was not subjected to an analysis based on Marxist-Leninist theory; however, as Taylor notes, social *theory* is, more often than not the preserve of a minority group of experts, whereas the social *imaginary* is something shared by much larger groups of people. Accordingly, I shall use the term 'socialist imaginary' to focus on the way in which ordinary people 'imagine' socialist society and seek to articulate this not in theoretical documents, but rather in terms of a set of images, stories, legends and other cultural products, including, above all, film. As I shall argue, at various junctures in the history of prewar and postwar cinema, shifting paradigms in the fields of art and aesthetics impacted upon the socialist imaginary in the GDR, and the role of the DEFA *Künstlerfilm* in both mediating and articulating such transformations is the subject of this study.

The concept of the social/socialist imaginary is, of course, closely related to Benedict Anderson's concept of the nation as an 'imagined community'.⁵ Following the collapse of Nazi Germany, the GDR looked to the concept of the political nation or *Staatsnation* in which the members of that nation inhabit a given geographical territory and subscribe to a shared ideology in order to legitimise itself in the eyes of the postwar community of nations. The Federal Republic, by contrast, embraced the essentially nineteenth-century notion of a *Kulturnation*, a

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concept that Marc Silberman has defined as ‘meaning variously a cultured nation and a nation unified through its cultural achievements’.⁶ In part, the concept of the *Kulturnation* was designed as a means of presenting the postwar division of Germany as a provisional set of arrangements while at the same time holding out for the possibility of reunification at some point in the future. It was not until 1974 and the endorsement of a revised version of the East German constitution by the ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED) that the GDR redefined itself as ‘a socialist state’ that was complete in itself and not part of any larger entity.

The issue of national identity lay at the heart of many of the early *Künstlerfilme* in the 1950s as the GDR strove for political recognition, and both it and the Federal Republic claimed to be the true guardian of the prewar cultural legacy embodied in such figures as Goethe, Beethoven, Dürer, Cranach and Riemenschneider. Nonetheless, as Hans Joachim Meurer has emphasised in his important study *Cinema and National Identity in a Divided Germany 1979–1989: The Split Screen*, we should not allow attempts by some scholars to maintain the internal coherence of film cultures within the two states to obscure the fact that ‘national cinemas are not confined, but hybrid and in interaction with multiple external influences’.⁷ Increasingly scholarship has demonstrated that such networks of influence were not simply confined to the film cultures of the two postwar German states, but extended to other European states and indeed to the traditions of both Soviet cinema and Hollywood. Just as films like Horst Seemann’s *Beethoven – Tage aus einem Leben* challenged the concept of the daemonic artist that we find in both prewar and postwar *Künstlerfilme* from Germany and the United States, so too, films such as Konrad Wolf’s *Goya* (1971) and *Der nackte Mann auf dem Sportplatz* (1974) can be seen as works in dialogue with Soviet *Künstlerfilme* such as Andrey Tarkovsky’s *Andrei Rublev* (1969/71) and Giorgi Shengelaia’s *Pirosmani* (1968). Accordingly, part of what this study of DEFA *Künstlerfilme* sets out to demonstrate is that precisely because of their transnational subject matter, they cannot be contained within an essentialised notion of national cinema.

Ruptures and Continuities: Prewar and Postwar Debates

‘Realism’, as Raymond Williams notes, ‘is a difficult word’,⁸ and throughout DEFA’s existence, the question of how the studio should engage with

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contrasting concepts of realism was one that was intensively explored over several decades in a range of *Künstlerfilme*. These debates (which embraced almost all fields of artistic activity in the GDR) pre-dated the founding of the state in 1949 and, in many cases, their origins can be traced back to the early years of the Soviet Union, where the question of what it meant to be a progressive political artist was being posed with increasing urgency. Two debates in particular were of particular importance in the formulation of cultural policy in the fledgling GDR: first, the discussions surrounding the place of formalist aesthetics in the development of a canon of socialist art and literature that took place around 1916/17 and that resulted in the dominance of a dogmatic notion of socialist realism in the Soviet Union during the early 1930s; and, second, the so-called 'Expressionism Debate' conducted in exile during the late 1930s by, amongst others, the Marxist theoreticians Ernst Bloch, Georg Lukács, Hanns Eisler, Bertolt Brecht and Walter Benjamin, in which the political implications of avant-garde modernist aesthetics were hotly contested. In stark contrast to their Western counterparts, during the early part of the postwar period, few East German cultural theorists sought to endorse a view of art as an essentially autonomous phenomenon, and instead regarded the very concept of transcendent art as a bourgeois fiction designed to conceal the historically contingent aspect of all artistic activity. Nonetheless, the aesthetic debates that took place between 1945 and 1949 and during the founding decade of the GDR's existence revolved around often pronounced differences in opinion regarding the relationship between ideology, form and content, and how, even within the context of Marxist aesthetics, the term 'realism' should be defined. As Williams argues, realism has usually been understood as connoting the very opposite of the nineteenth-century Romantics' fascination with mythical and imaginary objects. Nonetheless, as theorists and practitioners like Brecht were quick to point out, a rejection of Romanticism did not simply entail embracing the surface realism of naturalist aesthetics, but meant adopting an approach that sought to analyse the social and political forces underpinning the material reality of the world we inhabit.

The origins of this debate date back to Russia during the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, where the merits of two contrasting aesthetic responses (both of which were key to the development of cultural policy in the socialist states set up in the second half of the twentieth century to the challenge of modernity) were being weighed up. On the one hand, there was the avant-garde approach associated with the literary and visual creations of Vladimir Mayakovsky, the Russian Futurists,

and the members of Bogdanov's *Proletkult*, in which an emphasis on formal invention and the necessity of a radical break with past traditions were paramount; on the other hand, there was the insistence on a more conventional concept of socialist realism that drew on the legacy of nineteenth-century bourgeois realist fiction, while at the same time reframing this aesthetic in accordance with a conviction that all forms of artistic production were determined by class conflict and economic forces. Critics of a more formalist persuasion, such as Viktor Shklovsky, attempted to respond to the contemporary drive towards scientific positivism and the corresponding exclusion of phenomena that were not directly observable. Accordingly, he and other members of the Society for the Study of Poetic Language (OPOYAZ) sought to focus exclusively on the formal properties of a given work of art – notably syntax and metre – and to exclude discussion of supposedly 'external' factors, such as the psychology of the author and considerations of a historical or political kind. In positing literature as an essentially autonomous entity, the aim was to establish a scientific approach to the study of literature that would identify and define the formal qualities of 'literary / poetic language' as opposed to 'ordinary language'. For Shklovsky and his associates, the key quality of the former estrangement (*ostraneye*) and the disruption of routine modes of perception. Not surprisingly, however, because the avant-garde literary forms they prized broke so radically with conventional discursive forms (and as a result were often impenetrably obscure) both the Formalists' approach to criticism and the products of Russian Futurism they championed were condemned in some quarters as elitist.

Shklovsky's claim that, as he put it, 'art was always free of life, and its colour never reflected the colour of the flag which waved over the fortress of the city', together with his insistence on the need to exclude psychological and sociohistorical factors and to focus instead primarily on the formal qualities of a work of art, stemmed from a desire to break with nineteenth-century models of literary and artistic criticism. Indeed, it is striking that although Trotsky, in his classic study *Literature and Revolution* (1924), goes out of his way to acknowledge Shklovsky's achievements in establishing a more scientific approach to the analysis of works of art, he nonetheless highlights the failure to engage adequately with sociohistorical factors as a fatal flaw in such approaches. In particular, Trotsky rejects any notion of the autonomy of art and, in particular, the notion that form determines content. Instead, he suggests that, for all the apparent differences in their approach, both 'pure art' and 'tendentious art' are sociohistorical phenomena, and that each

should be seen as a different type of response to essentially the same underlying historical forces. 'Tendentiousness', Trotsky argues, 'was the banner of the intelligentsia which sought contact with the people', while so-called 'pure art' was 'the banner of the rising bourgeoisie'.⁹ While he concedes that a work of art should, in the first instance, be judged by what he refers to as 'the laws of art', he is nonetheless quite convinced that 'Marxism alone can explain why and how a given tendency in art has originated in a given period of history'.¹⁰ Accordingly, as his description of the Formalist school as 'an abortive idealism applied to the questions of art' suggests, the notion of art as an autonomous sphere of activity is essentially misguided and indeed itself a bourgeois fiction.¹¹ This view of formalism was to resonate throughout many of the cultural debates in the GDR during the 1950s.

As David Bathrick has argued in his pioneering study *The Powers of Speech*, 'the artistic avant-garde has always had little respect for entrenched authority, even when that authority claims for itself revolutionary intention'.¹² In the Soviet Union of the 1920s, it was only a matter of time before the avant-garde groupings centred around Mayakovsky, the *Proletkult* and the Left Futurists (LEF), all of which to a greater or lesser degree rejected conventional notions of realism in favour of formal experimentation, came to be condemned in the Soviet Union under Stalin's leadership and were replaced by a more normative concept of socialist realism across all the arts. Stalin's so-called 'left-turn' of 1929 and his attempt to unite the masses behind a process of industrialisation led to a growing intolerance of modernist aesthetics and cultural innovation. As cultural policy shifted towards an endorsement of nineteenth-century bourgeois realism (embodied in the works of, above all, Tolstoy, Balzac and Thomas Mann), the modernist aesthetics of Joyce and Kafka increasingly fell out of favour. This shift away from a concept of literature in which language and form were primary to a concept of realism in which writers succeeded to a greater or lesser extent in capturing the sociohistorical forces underpinning that reality reached its logical conclusion with Andrei Zhdanov's 'Definition of Socialist Realism' at the 1934 Congress of Soviet Writers:

Comrade Stalin has called our writers engineers of human souls. What does this mean? . . . In the first place, it means knowing life so as to be able to depict it truthfully in works of art, not to depict it in a dead, scholastic way, not simply as 'objective reality', but to depict reality in its revolutionary development.

In addition to this, the truthfulness and historical correctness of the artistic portrayal should be combined with the ideological remolding and

education of the toiling people in the spirit of socialism. This method in *belles lettres* and literary criticism is what we call the method of socialist realism.¹³

Despite its name, socialist realism was anything but realistic; essentially, it was an idealist aesthetic underpinned by a simplistic system of ethics and a correspondingly reductive approach to character psychology. Negative depictions of the proletariat and representations of psychological complexity were both seen as incompatible with a utopian narrative of historical progress, in which positive socialist heroes led the working classes to a future in which class conflict would finally be overcome.

One of the largest foreign delegations to attend the Congress of 1934 was made up of exiled German communists, and it is no coincidence that in Zhdanov's dismissal of those traditional forms of Romanticism that, in his view, 'depicted a non-existent life and non-existent heroes' and led the reader 'away from the antagonisms and oppression of real life into a world of the impossible, into a world of utopian dreams', we can catch a glimpse of the anti-Romantic thrust that became so pronounced in aesthetic debates of the 1950s in the GDR.¹⁴ What Zhdanov's new doctrine of socialist realism (or 'revolutionary Romanticism' as he sometimes referred to it) entailed in practice was the idealisation of proletarian figures coupled with a teleological narrative culminating in the triumph of socialism; as we shall see, this reductive concept of realism in which art and literature are seen simply as determined by a materialist concept of history was one to which DEFA would periodically return at various moments of crisis during its history.

The Expressionism Debate

Much of the hostility to modernist aesthetics during the first decade of the GDR's existence can be traced back to the legacy of the Expressionism Debate of the late 1930s. Part of the reason for this was the involvement of Alfred Kurella, who from 1955 to 1957 was director of the Leipzig Literaturinstitut before becoming head of the Kulturkommission on the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party (SED), where he played a key role in shaping cultural policy during the 1950s. Although Kurella was a vociferous critic of modernist aesthetics from the late 1930s onwards, he had originally been trained as a graphic artist at Munich's Kunstgewerbeschule, a school for applied arts, and as a young artist

his own style had been heavily influenced by Expressionism. However, following his denunciation during the Stalinist purges of 1934/35 and the crucial loss of support from his immediate superior, the Comintern leader Georgi Dimitrov, Kurella sought to rehabilitate himself by distancing himself from his earlier avant-garde compositions and enthusiastically embracing Stalinist cultural policy. As David Bathrick has noted, the impact of historical developments in the post-1933 period on the likes of Kurella and his intellectual mentor Georg Lukács can hardly be overstated and, in common with a number of exiled theorists, both needed a platform from which they could articulate their opposition to Hitler and Nazi Germany, even if this meant embracing the aesthetic theories associated with Stalinist political dogma.¹⁵

To do justice to the detail of this complex and wide-ranging debate that unfolded in the pages of the exile journal *Das Wort* during the late 1930s would require a volume in its own right; in what follows, I shall focus on those aspects of the Expressionism Debate that were of particular importance for the development of the postwar *Künstlerfilm* between the mid 1940s and the mid 1950s.¹⁶ Although the start of the debate proper more or less coincided with the exhibition of a large number of expressionist paintings and sculptures at the 1937 Munich exhibition *Entartete Kunst* [Degenerate Art], it is important to remember that the exchanges that took place were not confined to literature and painting, but also embraced drama, music and film. Indeed, very often the term 'Expressionism' was used in a loose sense to refer to a wide range of avant-garde works of art produced during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Accordingly, the debate was much more than just a debate about expressionist art; it was a debate about modernism generally and, in particular, the relationship between progressive left-wing politics and avant-garde art and literature. As increasing numbers of quasi-expressionist paintings and sculptures (many of them banned by the Nazi regime) came to be put on display in Germany in the late 1940s, it was almost inevitable that arguments from the late 1930s about the relationship between formalist and realist aesthetics would be revisited in the context of the culture wars of the postwar period.

German expressionism was born from an antipathy towards the bourgeois character of Wilhemian art and society in Imperial Germany, and peaked around the time of the First World War. For some, the apocalyptic fantasies of violence produced by these artists and writers (in many cases fuelled by an enthusiasm for Nietzsche's philosophy) reflected a desire for a complete break with the bourgeois

traditions of the past. However, both Kurella and Lukács argued that it was precisely the irrationalist aspects of expressionist art and writing that rendered it compatible with fascist ideology. In his seminal essay of 1934, 'Größe und Verfall des Expressionismus' ['Expressionism: Its Significance and Decline'], Lukács set out a comprehensive critique of Expressionism on the basis that it was symptomatic of a more general failure on the part of Wilhemian intellectuals to arrive at an objective analysis of the connections between ideology, politics and economics:

As an opposition from a confused anarchistic and bohemian standpoint, Expressionism was naturally more or less vigorously directed against the political right . . . But however honest the subjective intention behind this may well have been in many cases, the abstract distortion of basic questions, and especially the abstract 'anti-middle-classness' was a tendency that, precisely because it separated the critique of middle-classness from both the economic understanding of the capitalist system and from adherence to the liberation struggle of the proletariat, could easily collapse into its opposite extreme: into a critique of 'middle-classness' from the right, the same demagogic critique of capitalism to which fascism later owed at least part of its mass basis.¹⁷

Four years later in 1938, Alfred Kurella (writing under the pseudonym Bernhard Ziegler) was to rekindle the flames of this debate in the Moscow-based journal *Das Wort* with the publication of his essay 'Nun ist dies Erbe zuende' ['Putting the Legacy of the Past Behind Us']. In it he cites the case of the lyrical expressionist poet and Nazi sympathiser Gottfried Benn as evidence that German fascism was an intellectual offshoot of Expressionism.¹⁸ In place of formalism and a subjective aesthetic that he saw as elitist, fragmentary and irrational, Kurella argues instead for a reaffirmation of the aesthetic principles underpinning classical art and a greater emphasis on what he clearly regarded as the fundamental basic criteria of all true art, namely its accessibility (*Volkstümlichkeit*) and proximity to the concerns of ordinary people (*Volksnähe*).

Not surprisingly, the reductive positions of Lukács and Kurella and their dismissal of an entire generation of writers and artists as precursors of fascism came under sustained attack from other left-wing exiles such as Ernst Bloch, Hanns Eisler and the theatre director Gustav von Wangenheim,¹⁹ all of whom embraced a more differentiated concept of Marxist aesthetics. In his defence of modernism, Bloch accused Lukács of failing to analyse any specific works of art in detail (especially from the fields of painting and music) and of focusing almost

exclusively on what he regarded as the unrepresentative genres of late expressionist poetry and drama. In a similar vein, Bloch argued in his essay 'Discussing Expressionism' that Hitler's hostility to the work of so many expressionist painters hardly appeared to bear out the truth of Ziegler's claim that 'Expressionism leads to fascism'.²⁰ In addition, Bloch defended Expressionism on the grounds that it was a legitimate response to the immediate crisis of the First World War, which simply made use of the aesthetic tools at its disposal and that, precisely because of its iconoclastic character, could be seen as paving the way for new, revolutionary approach to art. What matters, he argued, is that '[Expressionism] undermined the schematic routines and academism to which the "values of art" had been reduced. Instead of eternal "formal analyses" of art, it directed attention to human beings and their substance, in their quest for the most authentic expression possible'.²¹ Moreover, for all the pleasure the Expressionists took in supposedly barbaric art, their ultimate goal was humane. Last but not least, in response to the charge of elitism, Bloch notes that the Expressionists went back to popular art, and that the difficulty in understanding their work could be explained by the fact that many contemporary observers lacked both 'the intuitive grasp typical of people deformed by education' and 'the open-mindedness which is indispensable for the appreciation of new art'.²²

As the tenor of the debate suggests, what was at stake was not simply the alleged shortcomings of the subjective aesthetic of Expressionism, but also questions of cultural heritage and the relationship of the past to future aesthetic developments. On the one hand, there were those such as Lukács and Kurella who dismissed the avant-garde character of modernist art and literature as a misguided experiment that, far from articulating a genuinely revolutionary position, remained trapped within an abstract version of humanism that, as with all bourgeois art, merely reproduced the problems it was attempting to resolve. On the other hand, there were those like Bloch and Brecht who argued for the necessity of artistic experimentation and recognised that the value of an iconoclastic avant-garde movement such as Expressionism lay precisely in its capacity to sweep away obsolete aesthetic forms and usher in the new. What united Lukács' opponents was their rejection of a narrowly defined concept of (socialist) realism, and their belief that art and culture were not simply determined by the prevailing conditions of production. Accordingly, the emphasis shifted increasingly to the role of art and artistic production. In his essay of 1934, 'Der Autor als Produzent' ['The Author as Producer'], Walter Benjamin suggested:

'Rather than asking, "What is the attitude of a work to the relations of production of its time?" I would like to ask, "What is its position in them?"'²³ Above all, Benjamin's approach heralded a move away from the conventional dichotomy of form and content, and towards a consideration of the place of art within the wider context of production generally. Seen from this perspective, realism was not something to be captured in terms of a fixed system of inflexible rules and principles as Lukács had maintained; instead, realism, as Bertolt Brecht would also argue, needed to be reconceptualised as a dynamic concept that was itself subject to change over time.

Although Brecht's responses to Lukács were composed during the late 1930s, they were not published until 1968. What they reveal, however, is Brecht's disdain for the notion that the great European realist writers of the nineteenth century could serve as models for twentieth-century writers and artists. As Brecht pointed out in his essay of 1938, 'Die Expressionismusdebatte' ['The Expressionism Debate'], there was something profoundly self-contradictory about Lukács' attack on formalist aesthetics:

[H]olding onto the old conventional forms, when confronted by the constantly new demands of the constantly changing social environment is also formalism.

...

Turning realism into a formal issue, linking it with one, only one form (and an old form at that) means: sterilising it. Realist writing is not a formal issue. All formal features that prevent us from getting to the bottom of social causality must go; all formal features that help us get to the bottom of social causality must be welcomed.²⁴

Although Brecht was well aware of the limitations of certain factions of the expressionist avant garde, he recognised nonetheless that it was not possible merely to revert to the solutions of the past, and sought instead to characterise artistic creativity in terms of an empirical process of trial and error. Accordingly, in his essay 'Über den formalistischen Charakter der Realismustheorie' ['On the Formalistic Character of the Theory of Realism'], he notes:

In art there is the fact of failure, and the fact of partial success. Our metaphysicians must understand this. Works of art can fail so easily; it is so difficult for them to succeed . . . For me, Expressionism is not merely 'an embarrassing business', not merely a deviation . . . Realists who are willing to learn and look for the practical side of things could learn a great deal from it.²⁵

However, Brecht's most important contribution to the debate is his rejection of a simplistic dichotomy between form and content or between 'formalism' and 'contentism'. For, as he argues, the construction of a work of art is always bound up with considerations of form and it is too simplistic to use the term 'formalism' as a means of referring to anything that rendered a work of art unrealistic. Moreover, it is obvious that there are many works that did not elevate form over social content and yet could not be said to correspond to reality. Accordingly, like realism the accessibility of a work of art for the broad masses, its 'Volkstümlichkeit', is not something that can be defined simply in terms of certain predetermined formal criteria. What really matters, as he argues in his essay of 1938, 'Volkstümlichkeit und Realismus' ['Popularity and Realism'] is 'to compare the depiction of life in a work of art with the life itself that is being depicted, instead of comparing it with another depiction'.²⁶

Artistic Re-education

Kurella's contributions to the Expressionism Debate of the late 1930s and his subsequent position of influence in the GDR underline the extent to which postwar German cultural policy – especially that of the GDR – was already being formulated in exile. In 1943, the Nationalkomitee Freies Deutschland (NKFD) was set up in the Soviet Union with the communist writer, Erich Weinert, as its president; the group comprised not only future political leaders of the GDR such as Walter Ulbricht and Wilhelm Pieck, but also key figures from the arts, including Friedrich Wolf and Johannes R. Becher. It is hard to say just how advanced plans were at this stage for the Stalinisation of German culture that eventually took place in the GDR during the early 1950s, but it is important to remember that, following the end of the Second World War, the Soviet Union had a more tolerant attitude towards cultural policy in Germany precisely because of the need to sustain the four-power agreement that it saw as essential to the overriding goal of bringing about unification, demilitarisation and a German state that was at least politically neutral.²⁷

Such consensus as there was among the Allies revolved primarily around the need to combat the legacy of German fascism by means of a thorough overhaul of the German educational system and the close monitoring of all forms of mass media. In one of the earliest American Information Control documents of 18 July 1945, the report's author

reflected on the rapid renaissance of cultural life in the occupied capital, adding that:

The present state of film, theatre and music activities in BERLIN is the result of a very definite Russian policy which has been vigorously implemented since the fall of the city, and also of certain characteristics of German cultural life which are typical for BERLIN. As for Russian policy, it has as its basis an almost fanatical reverence for art and artists, coupled with the belief that artistic creation is intrinsically good, and an urgent need of human beings in times of uncertainty and suffering.²⁸

The report bears witness to the intensity of the Soviet Union's efforts to shape the direction of cultural policy and the arts in postwar Germany, an undertaking in which the two Russian cultural officers Alexander Dymshitz and Sergei Tulpanov (both of whom spoke German and had an in-depth understanding of European culture) and the establishment on 27 July 1945 of the Deutsche Zentralverwaltung für Volksbildung (DVV) under Paul Wandel's leadership played key roles. In addition, on 25 June 1946, the Soviet Military Administration (SMAD) had licenced the Kulturbund zur demokratischen Erneuerung Deutschlands with the explicit aim of re-educating Germans by means of the 'rediscovery and active promotion of those national traditions in which freedom and humanist values are genuinely enshrined';²⁹ these aims were encapsulated in a performance of classical works by Tchaikovsky and Beethoven (*Egmont*) given by the recently revived Berlin Philharmonic at a ceremony in the Haus des Berliner Rundfunks on 3 July with the intention of introducing the Kulturbund to a wider public.³⁰ Although the Kulturbund's influence was most pronounced in the Soviet-controlled areas, at least to begin with, it aspired to be an organisation spanning the whole of occupied Berlin, and in 1946 at least, the universalist categories of its rhetoric (and the corresponding lack of any explicit reference to socialist realism) was clearly designed to appeal to writers, artists and musicians on both sides of the political divide.³¹ Indeed, it was not until November 1947 that the Kulturbund came to be seen as too overtly ideological by the Western Allies, who subsequently prohibited its activities in their sectors of the city.³²

The Kulturbund's attempt to align existing notions of classical humanism with a new concept of German national identity would become a key aspect of cultural policy in the GDR during the state's founding years. Even before the founding of the GDR in 1949, the enduring legacy of the Expressionism Debate of the 1930s was apparent in its rejection of high modernism and a return to the pre-1933 culture

of the Weimar Republic. Writing in the organisation's journal *Aufbau* in 1945, the then President of the Kulturbund, Johannes R. Becher, argued that 'To look back to the past would be to return to a state of affairs where . . . intellectual exhaustion and the tolerance of reactionary and evil activities had made Hitler's rise to power possible.'³³ Likewise, Becher's opening address, with its characterisation of Nazi ideology as a form of crude nihilism and his appeal for a renewal of faith in the values of objective truth and Enlightenment rationality, could not help but evoke memories of the debates of the late 1930s:

We acknowledge the existence of genuinely objective truths such as are to be found in both the natural world and in human society. We demand a stable system of meaning and values as well as logical thinking . . . We recall Goethe's observation that in human affairs all periods of decline have been marked by a tendency to subjectivism, whereas all periods of renewal and regeneration have been grounded in a shared belief in truth and objectivity.³⁴

Becher's reference to Goethe amounted to an appeal not only for a revival of the values of German classical humanism in postwar art and literature, but, in addition, a new concept of politics based on the ethical underpinnings of this traditional concept of aesthetics:

From now on the rich legacy of German classical humanism, and that of the working class movement and its importance for the political and ethical attitudes of our nation needs to be articulated in a way that is unambiguous, compelling and illuminating. Our traditions of classical humanism have never been followed by a concept of politics grounded in the same. On the contrary, politically speaking, we have always acted in a manner that is diametrically opposed to the best aspects of our traditions and we have never succeeded in finding the correct political form in which to express our most outstanding achievements in the cultural sphere. We have to find a way out of the unresolvable conflict of intellect and power.³⁵

Viewed from the Kulturbund's perspective, the catastrophe of German fascism could be explained in terms of a contradiction between 'Geist' and 'Macht', and it was this failing of earlier generations that was to be made good through a renewal of German classical humanism in the postwar era. Indeed, in the writer Bernhard Kellermann's remark that the role of the Kulturbund would be to act as 'the spiritual and cultural parliament of our country',³⁶ there is more than just an echo of Friedrich Schiller's notion of the stage as a moral forum. Nonetheless, although the Kulturbund's vision was clearly rooted in a particular interpretation of canonical eighteenth-century German literature, it was one that,

in shaping the future direction of postwar German cultural policy, sought to embrace all forms of artistic activity.

The underlying aims of the Kulturbund were also echoed in the programming of *Der Augenzeuge*, the newsreel produced in the Soviet Occupation Zone, which almost always included at least one feature on the arts. Many of these features focused on attempts to revive Germany's classical heritage and the return of exiles who were in some way associated with that humanist legacy. In February 1946, *Der Augenzeuge* carried a feature on the first meeting of the Zentrale Kulturtagung of the communist (KPD) party, during which the GDR's first president in waiting, Wilhelm Pieck, offered the assembled delegates a guarantee of freedom of expression, but only on the condition that those who enjoyed 'the freedom to take up research, teaching, and artistic creativity should not abuse their position by doing anything that might lead to a revival of fascism . . . and thereby sabotaging democracy'.³⁷ Subsequent editions of *Der Augenzeuge* in 1946 included features on the manufacture of prints by Albrecht Dürer in the Berliner Staatsdruckerei (1946, No. 5), on the reopening of the Lucas Cranach house in Gotha (1946, No. 7) and on the exhibition of paintings at the 1. *Deutsche Kunstausstellung* in the Zeughaus on Unter den Linden (1946, No. 8). Despite focusing primarily on events taking place in the Soviet Occupation Zone, reports from the Western sectors such as that on young performers at the Schauspielschule in Berlin-Dahlem (1946, No. 6) were also designed to highlight pockets of 'progressive' activity taking place across the whole of Berlin.

Once established, the Kulturbund quickly attempted to broaden its sphere of influence by setting up a number of subgroups overseeing different aspects of the arts. The Kommission Musik was founded in 1946 under the leadership of the composer Heinz Thiessen, and many of its members, including the critic Hans Heinz Stückenschmidt and the composers Max Butting and Paul Höffer, were closely associated with the promotion of the New Music. In addition, the concerts it organised (many of them held at the Club der Kulturschaffenden in the Soviet sector) featured not only works by the members of the Kommission, but also by other celebrated modernist composers such as Bartók, Eisler and Hindemith.³⁸ In the Western zones of occupation, American jazz had been propagated (albeit indirectly) via radio stations designed to cater for military personnel, and in 1946, the American Information Control Division (ICD) started to challenge the dominance of European and German musical traditions by promoting concerts featuring modernist works by the likes of American composers such as Aaron

Copland and Samuel Barber. One consequence of these policies, as Elizabeth Janik has noted, was that 'little difference existed between the kinds of contemporary music performed by the city's Eastern and Western ensembles in 1946–7'.³⁹ To a certain extent, the New Music's emphasis on formal experimentation meant that, like abstract expressionist painting, it too could be promoted as an 'absolute art' that, at least in the eyes of some, would be capable of transcending political ideology. However, it was only a matter of time before the Kommission Musik's enthusiasm for formalist experimentation and 'pure aesthetics' came into conflict with the desire of the leaders of the Kulturbund for a more politically engaged type of music, and with the prohibition of the Kulturbund's activities in the West from November 1947 onwards and the collapse of the Allied Four-Power Administration of Berlin the following year, the utopian vision of a people united by a transcendent notion of New Music all but disappeared from view.

Following the establishment of the Kommission Musik in 1946, the Kulturbund set up a similar body for the visual and plastic arts, the Kommission Bildender Kunst. Its members included not only the art historian Will Grohmann, but also a number of artists such as Max Pechstein, Oskar Nehrlinger and Georg Tappert, whose reputations had been established in the prewar period and whose plans for future exhibitions included artists, many of whose works might be described as expressionist in the wider sense of the term. In May 1945, the first major exhibition, the *1. Deutsche Kunstausstellung* in the Zeughaus on Unter den Linden, was organised under the auspices of the Deutsche Zentralverwaltung für Volksbildung and featured works that, for the most part, had been created in the mid 1930s. While the Soviets wasted no time in opening a number of galleries in the East, in the Western sectors of Berlin, the French sought to exploit the high esteem in which artists and sculptors such as George Braque, Pablo Picasso, August Rodin and Constantin Brancusi were held, and staged three major exhibitions of French art between 1946 and 1947. However, the most important event to be staged in 1946 was arguably the *Allgemeine Deutsche Kunstausstellung* in Dresden that took place from 25 August to 29 October. As the opening statement in the exhibition catalogue by Präsident h.c. Friedrichs underlines, art was already coming to be seen as a key component in the preservation of German unity at this critical historical juncture:

All of us are delighted that the works on display at this exhibition have been submitted not only by artists working in the Soviet zone, but from

all the occupied zones in Germany. This will make it possible to have a much deeper exchange of ideas and concept, and as such, represents an important step towards a unified Germany.⁴⁰

Although there was a notable absence of almost any works by artists from the *Blaue Reiter*, Dada or Constructivist movements (all of whom had fallen out of favour in the Soviet Union), the exhibition nonetheless contained a large number of works by Weimar modernists such as Otto Dix and artists associated with the expressionist circle *Die Brücke*.⁴¹ However, it soon became clear that any attempt on the part of the Kommission Bildende Kunst to mobilise a concept of transcendent aesthetics grounded in Weimar modernism and pre-1933 art in order to foster a new sense of German unity and identity was inevitably going to come into conflict with the Kulturbund's programme of political re-education in the East. For, as Becher pointedly reminded his readers in an article published in the *Tägliche Rundschau* on 25 May 1947, the Kulturbund was not an art club, but a prominent political organisation.⁴² As a result, the Kommission Bildende Kunst was required to monitor more closely the political leanings of contemporary artists in order to identify those who would be sympathetic to a more overt politicisation of art in the years to come in which art would play a key role in the realisation of the Two-Year Plan.⁴³

Film Culture in the Soviet Occupation Zone

For German filmmakers in the immediate postwar years, the situation was of a rather different order from that with which artists working in music and the visual and plastic arts were confronted. In stark contrast to music and painting, cinema not only required extensive infrastructure, but was also heavily dependent on viewers having a command of German. At the same time, cinema was seen as a popular art that, in terms of its mass appeal, could mobilise a different type of audience than other more highbrow forms such as modernist music and abstract expressionism. Even so, discussions on the direction that postwar cinema would take in the East also bore the imprint of the Expressionism Debate of the 1930s. Although Béla Balázs had touched on the cinema of Sergei Eisenstein in his essay of 1938, 'Meyerhold and Stanislavsky', his major contribution to a consideration of cinema in the context of the ongoing debate about realist aesthetics came in the form of another essay (also published that same year in *Das Wort*)

"Screening Art: Modernist Aesthetics and the Socialist Imaginary in East German Cinema" by Seán Allan. <https://www.berghahnbooks.com/title/AllanScreening>

entitled 'Zur Kunstphilosophie des Films' ['On an Aesthetic Philosophy of Film'], in which he set out to challenge the notion that developments in film aesthetics could be explained reductively and simply in terms of developments in cinematic technology.⁴⁴ Balázs' discussion of montage and shifting perspective (two effects that had, of course, been facilitated by developments in camera technology) attempts to promote cinema as a revolutionary new form of visual culture that challenged conventional ways of seeing and signalled the beginning of a new form of spectatorship. For Balázs, cinema – 'the only art form that came into being during capitalism'⁴⁵ – was the product of a new revolutionary form of bourgeois culture in America that had the advantage of not being weighed down by tradition (and so had fewer obstacles to overcome than European art in its quest to grasp the totality of modern life). In contrast to sculpture, painting and other forms of visual art, cinema was not subject to 'eternal laws', which, despite originating in the precapitalist epoch, still dictated European standards of taste in the bourgeois era. Accordingly, what a film such as D. W. Griffiths' *Intolerance* (1916), demonstrates with its critique of imperialism, Balázs argues, is that it is not developments in technology, but new types of subject matter that prompt the discovery and creation of radically new aesthetic forms.⁴⁶ While recognising that the use of shifting and exaggerated perspectives had played an important role in the development of expressionist cinema, Balázs remained critical of the latter because of its oversubjective tendency. In its most exaggerated form, he argued, expressionism had brought about a disintegration of form and a corresponding loss of reality that was contrary to the spirit of progressive art.⁴⁷ Balázs' analysis of cinema as a revolutionary art form with its own specific aesthetic was couched in terms that made it possible to launch a critique of early expressionist cinema, while at the same time promoting the modernist techniques of classic Soviet productions such as Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925). The importance of Balázs' theoretical work for DEFA's early development is attested to not only by the publication of a collection of his essays by the GDR's Staatliches Filmarchiv in 1973, but also by his involvement in a large number of DEFA's early productions, together with a feature for *Der Augenzeuge* (1949, No. 17) to mark the occasion of his visit to the set of Slatan Dudow's *Unser Tägliche Brot* [*Our Daily Bread*, 1949].⁴⁸

There were essentially four major traditions of filmmaking against which German filmmakers had to position themselves in the immediate postwar years: first, the legacy of radical Soviet cinema as embodied in such classic works as Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925)

and *October* (1928), Alexander Dovzhenko's *Earth* (1930) and Mark Donskoy's *Gorky Trilogy* (1941); second, German expressionist cinema of the 1920s that included such films as Robert Wiene's *Das Cabinet des Dr Caligari* [*The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*, 1920] and Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927); third, proletarian cinema of the Weimar Republic during the 1930s, such as Piel Jutzi's *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück* [*Mother Krause's Journey to Happiness*, 1929] and Slatan Dudow's *Kuhle Wampe* (1932); and, finally, the more recent legacy of the UFA studio of the 1940s and, in particular, Nazi melodramas such as Rolf Hansen's *Die große Liebe* [*The Great Love*, 1942] and Wolfgang Liebeneiner's *Ich klage an* [*I Accuse*, 1940], as well as the so-called *Geniefilme* (Genius films), such as Herbert Maisch's *Friedrich Schiller – Der Triumph eines Genies* [*Friedrich Schiller – The Triumph of Genius*, 1940] and Traugott Müller's *Friedemann Bach* (1941). When the Filmaktiv was established in the autumn of 1945 by the Zentralverwaltung für Volksbildung to oversee the resumption of film production in the Soviet Occupation Zone, its members included Carl Haacker, who had worked as a set designer for the proletarian film production company Prometheus, Adolf Fischer, who had played alongside Ernst Busch in *Kuhle Wampe*, and Hans Klering, who had worked with the Soviet director Mark Donskoy. However, as we shall see, during the early years of its existence, DEFA was also heavily reliant on filmmakers who had been employed by UFA during the late 1930s and early 1940s.

At the ceremony to mark the handing over of the official production licence on 17 May 1946, the Soviet cultural officer Sergei Tulpanov sketched out his vision for the future:

DEFA faces a number of important tasks. Of these the most crucial are the struggle to restore democracy in Germany and remove all traces of fascist and militaristic ideology from the minds of every German, and the struggle to re-educate the German people . . . especially the young to a real understanding of genuine democracy and humanism, and in so doing to promote a sense of respect for other people and other nations.⁴⁹

Not surprisingly, these views on the ideological importance of film and other related art forms dovetailed perfectly with those of the Kulturbund, for whom, in the words of Becher, peace was 'the continuation of the war against fascism by other means including ideology'.⁵⁰ But while most of the filmmakers working for DEFA were ideologically committed to an antifascist agenda, there was very little consensus as to the form that such films should take, and this lack of agreement is reflected in the thematic and stylistic diversity of the films released

during the early years of the studio's existence. Although everyone seemed to agree that the model to be avoided was, as Paul Wandel had put it in 1944, the 'nightmarish vision of Ufa's factory of dreams',⁵¹ determining the direction that film production should take proved to be considerably more difficult than was first imagined.

Several months before DEFA received its licence, a number of filmmakers, including Kurt Maetzig and Wolfgang Staudte, had already been actively engaged in the production of German-language versions of Soviet films banned during the Nazi era, including such classics as Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible* (1944). Since the production facilities at the former UFA studios in Babelsberg had been badly damaged during the latter stages of the Second World War and the legal issues surrounding ownership of the studio had not yet been resolved by the Allies, the dubbing of Soviet films was carried out in Berlin-Johannisthal at the former studios of Tobis-Filmkunst. For essentially the same reasons, the bulk of DEFA's productions in 1946 and 1947 were filmed in the Althoff studio in Babelsberg's Wilhemstraße. Although Wolfgang Staudte's *Die Mörder sind unter uns* (1946) was the first film produced by DEFA, the first to be shot on the site of the former UFA studios was Hans Müller's *1-2-3 Corona* of 1948, the first of a number of circus films that underline the importance attached to popular lowbrow art in the studio's cultural agenda. While the film was a huge success at the box office, attracting an audience of some eight million viewers, it also highlighted just some of the obstacles DEFA faced in attempting to break with the legacy of the past. For the popular appeal of *1-2-3 Corona* lay not in the film's rather laboured attempt to adapt the circus milieu to the demands of socialist ideology, but rather in its relationship to a long tradition of circus films extending back through the 1940s and beyond. Indeed, the very title of the film was clearly designed to evoke memories of Arthur Rabenalt's *Die drei Codonas* [*The Three Codonas*], an earlier circus film from 1940 and one on which Müller himself had worked as an assistant director. At the same time, the opening credits of *1-2-3 Corona* also serve as a reminder of just how difficult it was for DEFA to assemble production teams whose members were untainted by involvement in the Nazi film industry; the film's musical director was one Hans-Otto Borgmann, a figure perhaps best known for his collaboration with Hans Steinhoff on *Hitlerjunge Quex* (1933) and for composing the melody of its infamous Nazi anthem 'Und die Fahne flattert uns voran' ['Our Banner Flutters before Us'].

DEFA did enjoy certain advantages over its rivals, not least the fact that the old UFA production studios at Potsdam-Babelsberg were

located within the Soviet Occupation Zone; however, the studio was very aware that there were an increasing number of opportunities for filmmakers in the Western zones of occupied Germany and that – as in the other arts – an overtly dogmatic approach would put off the talent it wanted to attract. To a large extent, this explains the inclusive approach of the 1. *Deutscher Filmautoren-Kongress*, an event organised by the Kulturbund that took place in Berlin between 6 and 10 June 1947 and that was designed to appeal to filmmakers across the political divide. In the publication resulting from the conference, Alfred Lindemann made clear that the driving force behind the conference was ‘not propaganda but a desire to bring together East and West on the grounds that film had always been an international art form and would remain so. That’s why, even in Germany no film production group can afford to become isolated from the others’.⁵²

A rather more partisan view of the direction that film production was to take in the postwar period was provided by Kurt Maetzig in his conference address ‘Was erwartet der Film vom Autor?’ [What Does Film Production Need from Writers?]. Maetzig’s vision of the future was predicated, above all, on the rejection of ‘the cinematic illusions served up by UFA’.⁵³ However, his target was not simply confined to UFA melodramas of the 1940s, but also embraced those writers and artists whose response to the catastrophe of Hitler entailed an enduring rejection of political engagement. Citing the example of the writer Wolfdietrich Schnurre, who just months earlier had advised the new generation of aspiring writers that ‘the artist’s only true friend is solitude, and his only enemy, the masses’,⁵⁴ Maetzig warned of the dangers inherent in attempting to turn one’s back on the political challenges of the contemporary situation.⁵⁵ Accordingly, he advocated a return to a form of cinematic realism understood not as an aesthetic based on a set of normative principles, but rather as a way of representing the world in its totality. In place of the uncritical mediation of everyday life that had characterised the entertainment cinema of the Third Reich, what was required was a form of cinema in which, as he put it, ‘in addition to the characters, the social milieu is shown to be a factor in its own right’.⁵⁶ In an attempt to promote filmmaking that depicted the relationship of human beings to the totality of their social and political environment, Maetzig argued that historically speaking, all the great masterpieces of cinema had been predicated upon such a concept of realism. Accordingly, he urged the audience to look beyond the dark traditions of early Expressionism – embodied in such works by Paul Wegener as *Der Golem* [*The Golem*, 1920] and

Der Student von Prag [*The Student of Prague*, 1913] – and to draw their inspiration instead from the realism of films of Piel Jutzi in the 1930s and to reconnect with the traditions of realism embodied in such films as Mark Donskoy's *The Childhood of Maxim Gorki* (1938), David Lean's *Brief Encounter* (1945) and Roberto Rossellini's *Roma città aperta* [*Rome Open City*, 1945]. Maetzig's sketch of film history was clearly designed to reassure those in the audience who were still undecided as to where their loyalties lay that realism in the cinema was not simply the preserve of the Soviets, but was something that united all progressive filmmakers, irrespective of the political context in which they happened to work. Yet mindful of the increasingly tense political situation, he went out of his way to draw a principled distinction between a film with a political underpinning and crude works of ideological propaganda (*Tendenzfilme*), and in one final attempt to persuade those listening to throw their weight behind DEFA, he held up a promise of artistic freedom: 'No obstacles will be placed in the way of those artists who have succeeded in liberating themselves from the burden of the past.'⁵⁷

Notes

1. 'Ein Vorschlag für eine Kulturfilm-Serie', *Neue Filmwelt* 3(3) (1949), 31.
2. The preliminary work for this study was published as Seán Allan, 'Representations of Art and the Artist in East German Cinema', in Marc Silberman and Henning Wrage (eds), *DEFA at the Crossroads of East German and International Film Culture: A Companion* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), pp. 87–106.
3. Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).
4. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
5. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006).
6. Marc Silberman, 'What is German in German Cinema?', *Film History* 8 (1996), 297–315, at 297.
7. Hans Joachim Meurer, *Cinema and National Identity in a Divided Germany, 1979–1989: The Split Screen* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 2002), p. 43.
8. Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana, 1976), p. 216.
9. Leon Trotsky, 'The Formalist School of Poetry and Marxism', in David Craig (ed.), *Marxists on Literature: An Anthology* (London: Penguin, 1975), pp. 363–79, at pp. 367 and 368.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 375.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 379.
12. David Bathrick, *The Powers of Speech: The Politics of Culture in the GDR* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), p. 87.

13. Andrey Zhdanov, 'Soviet Literature: The Richest in Ideas, the Most Advanced Literature', in Maxim Gorky, Karl Radek, Nikolai Bukharin, Andrey Zhdanov et al., *Soviet Writers' Congress 1934* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1977), pp. 15–26, at p. 21. For a selection of key documents outlining the rise of socialist realism, see Hans-Jürgen Schmitt and Godehard Schramm (eds), *Sozialistische Realismuskonzeptionen. Dokumente zum 1: Allunionskongreß der Sowjetschriftsteller* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp), 1974.
14. Zhdanov, 'Soviet Literature', p. 21.
15. David Bathrick 'Moderne Kunst und Klassenkampf: Die Expressionismus-Debatte in der Exilschrift *Das Wort*', in Reinhold Grimm und Jost Hermand (eds), *Exil und innere Emigration* (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum, 1972), pp. 89–109, at p. 95.
16. For a comprehensive set of documents relating to the debate plus commentary, see Hans-Jürgen Schmitt (ed.), *Die Expressionismusdebatte: Materialien zu einer marxistischen Realismuskonzeption* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1973).
17. Georg Lukács, 'Expressionism: Its Significance and Decline', in Rodney Livingstone (ed.), *Essays on Realism: Georg Lukács*, trans. David Fernbach (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1980), pp. 76–113, at p. 87 (originally published as Georg Lukács, 'Größe und Verfall des Expressionismus', *Internationale Literatur* 1 (1934), 153–73).
18. Bernhard Ziegler [= Alfred Kurella], 'Nun ist dies Erbe zuende . . .', *Das Wort* 2(9) (1938), 42–49, at 42 (reproduced in Schmitt, *Die Expressionismusdebatte*, pp. 50–60).
19. Gustav von Wangenheim subsequently went on to become a director for DEFA. His films included *Und wieder 48* [1848 *Once Again*, 1948] and *Der Auftrag* Höglers [Högler's *Mission*, 1950].
20. Ernst Bloch, 'Discussing Expressionism', in Ronald Taylor (ed.), *Aesthetics and Politics* (London: Verso, 1980), pp. 16–27 (originally published as 'Diskussionen über Expressionismus', *Das Wort* 2(6) (1938), 103–12).
21. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
23. Walter Benjamin, 'The Author as Producer', in Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith (eds), *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, trans. by Rodney Livingstone et al., 4 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005–6), vol. 2.2 (1931–34), pp. 768–82, at p. 770 (unpublished in Benjamin's lifetime; German text in: Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schwepenhäuser (eds), *Walter Benjamin, Gesammelte Schriften*, 7 vols (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991), vol. 2, pp. 683–701).
24. Bertolt Brecht, 'The Expressionism Debate', in Tom Kuhn and Steve Giles (eds), *Brecht on Art and Politics* (London: Methuen, 2003), pp. 213–19, at p. 214 (German original: Werner Hecht, Jan Knopf, Werner Mittenzwei and Klaus-Detlef Müller (eds), *Bertolt Brecht: Große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe*, 30 vols. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988–2000), vol. 22.1, pp. 417–19).
25. Bertolt Brecht, 'On the Formalistic Character of the Theory of Realism', in Taylor, *Aesthetics and Politics*, pp. 70–76, at p. 74 (German original: 'Über den formalistischen Charakter der Realismustheorie', in *Bertolt Brecht: Große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe*, vol. 22.1, pp. 437–45).
26. Bertolt Brecht, 'Popularity and Realism', in Taylor, *Aesthetics and Politics*, pp. 79–85, at p. 85 (German original: 'Volkstümlichkeit und Realismus', in *Bertolt Brecht: Große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe*, vol. 22.1, pp. 405–15).
27. For a more detailed discussion of Soviet attitudes towards postwar Germany in this period, see Ted Hopf, *Reconstructing the Cold War: The Early Years, 1945–58* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 112.

28. Henry C. Alter, 'Recommendations of Film, Theatre and Music Sub-Section (18 July 1945)' [= NA 260/390/42/16/5-6/75].
29. 'Leitsätze des Kulturbundes zur demokratischen Erneuerung Deutschlands. Beschlossen von der Gründungskundgebung des Kulturbundes zur demokratischen Erneuerung Deutschlands, 3. Juli 1945', *Aufbau* 2(7) (1945), 200–1, at 200.
30. On the resonance of this event, see Elizabeth Janik, *Recomposing German Music: Politics and Musical Tradition in Cold War Berlin* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), p. 106.
31. However, as Ulrike Goeschen notes, in a document dated 15 June 1946, an attempt was made to assemble a list of practitioners across all the arts together and to assess both their aesthetic approach and their political leaning. See Ulrike Goeschen, *Vom sozialistischen Realismus zur Kunst im Sozialismus* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2001), p. 28.
32. As Maike Steinkamp notes, the catalyst for the ban was an acrimonious dispute about censorship at the Erster Schriftstellerkongress on 8 August 1947. See Maike Steinkamp, 'The Propagandistic Role of Modern Art', in Philip Broadbent and Sabine Hake (eds), *Berlin Divided City, 1945–1989* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2010), pp. 23–33, at p. 32, n. 5. See also Anneli Hartmann and Wolfram Eggeling, 'Zum "Verbot" des Kulturbundes in West-Berlin 1947', *Deutschland Archiv* 11 (1995), 1161–70. The banning of the Kulturbund also features in an early version of the script to Kurt Maetzig's film *Roman einer jungen Ehe*. See 'Treatment' (p. 2) [= Archiv der Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Kurt-Maetzig-Archiv, 166].
33. Johannes R. Becher, 'Deutsches Bekenntnis', *Aufbau*, 1(1) (1945), 2–12, at 6.
34. Johannes R. Becher, 'Ansprache', in *Manifest des Kulturbundes zur demokratischen Erneuerung Deutschlands* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1945), pp. 32–40, at p. 37.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
37. Wilhelm Pieck and Anton Ackermann, *Unsere kulturpolitische Sendung: Reden auf der ersten Zentralen Kulturtagung der KPD vom 3. bis 5. Februar 1946* (Berlin, 1946), pp. 5 and 20.
38. See Elizabeth Janik, 'Back to the Future: New Music's Revival and Redefinition', in Broadbent and Hake, *Berlin Divided City*, pp. 34–45. As Janik notes (at p. 36), the antiformalist campaign in the Soviet Union meant that, with the exception of Shostakovich and Prokofiev, very little contemporary Soviet music was performed in the Soviet Occupation Zone during 1945 and 1946.
39. Janik, 'Back to the Future', p. 38.
40. Excerpts from the opening address are reproduced in the opening section of the catalogue *Allgemeine Deutsche Kunstausstellung, Dresden 1946* (no page numbers).
41. For a discussion of the exhibition, see Maike Steinkamp, *Das unerwünschte Erbe: Die Rezeption 'entarteter' Kunst in Kunstkritik, Ausstellungen und Museen der SBZ und frühen DDR* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2008), pp. 105–9. See also Steinkamp, 'The Propagandistic Role of Modern Art'.
42. Johannes R. Becher, 'Kulturbund', *Tägliche Rundschau*, 25 May 1947.
43. See BArch DY IV 2/906/140 (p. 33).
44. Béla Balázs, 'Zur Kunstphilosophie des Films', in Rudolf Denk (ed.), *Texte zur Poetik des Films* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1992), pp. 82–108 (originally published in *Das Wort* 3(3) (1938), 104–19).
45. *Ibid.*, p. 215.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 218.
47. *Ibid.*, pp. 224 and 225.

48. Gertraude Kühn, Manfred Lichtenstein and Eckart Jahnke (eds), *Béla Balázs: Essay, Kritik 1922–1932* (Berlin: Staatliches Filmarchiv der DDR, 1973).
49. Cited in Ralph Schenk (ed.), *Das zweite Leben der Filmstadt Babelsberg: DEFA Spielfilme 1946–1992* (Berlin: Henschel, 1994), p. 14.
50. Johannes R. Becher, 'Zu unseren Kulturaufgaben', cited in Horst Haase (ed.), *Johannes R. Becher. Leben und Werk* [Schriftsteller der Gegenwart 1], 2nd ed. (Berlin: Volk und Wissen, 1987), p. 187.
51. See Christiane Mückenberger and Günter Jordan, '*Sie sehen selbst, Sie hören selbst . . .*': *Die DEFA von ihren Anfängen bis 1949* (Marburg: Hitzeroth, 1994), p. 14. For a concise overview of the ideological issues with which DEFA was confronted during the first decade of the studio's existence see David Bathrick 'From Soviet Zone to Voksdemokratie', in Lars Karl and Pavel Skopal (eds), *Cinema in the Service of the State: Perspectives on Film Culture in the GDR and Czechoslovakia, 1945–60* (New York, Oxford: Berghahn, 2015), pp. 15–38.
52. *Der deutsche Film: Fragen, Forderungen, Aussichten. Bericht vom Ersten Film-Autoren-Kongreß 6.–9. Juni 1947 in Berlin* (Berlin: Henschel, 1947), p. 7. Lindemann's tenure as head of production at DEFA was to prove short-lived, and he left the studio for the West in 1948.
53. Kurt Maetzig, 'Was erwartet der Film vom Autor', in *Der deutsche Film*, pp. 20–33, at p. 20.
54. Wolfdietrich Schnurre, 'Kunst und Künstler. Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen eines Außenseiters', *Horizont*, 5 January 1947. Schnurre was a founding member of the Gruppe 47 that was heavily criticised in the Western zones of occupation by the United States on account of its allegedly nihilistic stance.
55. Some months later, writing in the *Deutsche Rundschau* in November 1947, Schnurre had written a polemical review of Maetzig's *Ehe im Schatten*, in which he condemned it as 'aesthetically primitive'. Wolfdietrich Schnurre, 'Film-Rundschau', *Deutsche Rundschau* 70(11) (1947), 148–52, at 149.
56. Maetzig, 'Was erwartet der Film vom Autor?', p. 23.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 33.