‘THE EAST GERMAN FILM *COMING OUT* (1989) AS MELANCHOLIC
REFLECTION AND HOPEFUL PROJECTION’

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ABSTRACTS

This essay argues that the East German film *Coming Out* (1989) achieves a dual objective: to reflect a version of the current living conditions for gay citizens of the GDR and to project the possibility of an enlightened future in which they, and other outsiders, do not face discrimination because of their difference. Director Heiner Carow’s *Coming Out*, the first feature film about homosexuality in the GDR, premiered the day the Berlin Wall fell and came after a long and complicated history of gay rights and activism in East Germany. Despite decriminalization in 1968, the position of lesbians and gay men in the GDR was an ambivalent and contradictory one. Through narrative and cinematographic means, the film refers to gay history as well as dissonance between socialist society and individualism, while also presenting an affirmative message for positive change and development.

Dieser Aufsatz beschäftigt sich mit dem Film *Coming Out* (1989) und versucht darzulegen, auf welche Weise der Film ein Doppelziel erreicht: eine Version des Alltags der homosexuellen Bürger der DDR widerzuspiegeln und sich eine aufgeklärte Zukunft vorzustellen, in der diese Bürger nicht benachteiligt werden. Regisseur Heiner Carows *Coming Out* war der erste Spielfilm über Homosexualität in der DDR und wurde an dem Tag uraufgeführt, an dem die Berliner Mauer fiel. Der Film wurde erst nach einem langen Kampf um homosexuelle Rechte in der DDR möglich. Obwohl das Schwulengesetz §175

1968 abgeschafft wurde, war die Situation ostdeutscher Lesben und Schwulen voller Ambivalenz und Widerspruch. Durch die Erzählung und Kinematografie bezieht sich der Film auf homosexuelle Geschichte und deutet sowohl auf die Dissonanz zwischen der sozialistischen Gesellschaft und dem Individualismus als auch auf eine positive Botschaft des gesellschaftlichen Fortgangs.

On 9 November 1989, something momentous took place in the German Democratic Republic (GDR, East Germany).¹ It was a milestone for the socialist nation and continues to live on in discussions of the social and cultural history of Germany. At this point, anyone acquainted with central European history and cultural, especially with that of Germany, would expect to hear about the fall of the Berlin Wall, clearly an important historical event that happened on 9 November, and definitely one with significant and far-reaching results. But the other landmark happening of that day was the premiere of a film in the Kino International on Karl-Marx-Allee in East Berlin: director Heiner Carow's feature film *Coming Out*.

While it was not internationally noteworthy at the time, or only on a miniscule scale compared to the other event of that day, the film's release was the result of a long struggle on the part of Carow (1929-1997), one of East Germany's most popular and celebrated filmmakers. The idea for the film had been in Carow's mind for several years prior to the actual planning, which began in earnest in 1987, and filming, which took place largely in 1988.² In what follows, I will argue that *Coming Out* has two main objectives in both narrative and cinematography: one of melancholic reflection and one

of hopeful projection or aspiration. This ground-breaking film depicts the contemporary, present-day (though certainly not universal) reality for gay people living in the GDR at the time of its creation, while also being uniquely situated in what would become the *Wende* era to illustrate late-GDR concerns about and possibly hopes for the future. A long-anticipated and eagerly awaited piece of cinematic history and an overdue instance of representation of an East German minority, *Coming Out* encapsulates parts of (East German) gayness in ways that remain quite revealing.

Coming Out tells the story of Philipp Klahrmann (played by Matthias Freihof), a handsome, young teacher coming to terms with his homosexuality after long resisting it. Even Philipp's last name, the unusual spelling of 'Klahr', is a clue that he could be concealing something. Philipp gets into a relationship with fellow teacher Tanja (Dagmar Manzel), which later results in Tanja's getting pregnant. Philipp is surprised when he meets a friend of Tanja's, Jacob (Axel Wandtke), who had also been Philipp's classmate and likely lover in their youth. This unexpected reunion unleashes Philipp's doubts. He meets Matthias (Dirk Kummer), a younger man with whom he falls in love and whom he seems to admire for his confident certainty in his identity. Philipp remains terrified by the prospect of being a gay teacher. In the end, Philipp fails both potential partners, leaving him alone but apparently with more security and confidence by the end of the film. Before discussing specific scenes, I will first describe the social and historical context that led to *Coming Out*'s production and release.

SOCIAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The early 1980s were a somewhat turbulent time for civil rights in East Germany, but especially with respect to the rights of lesbian and gay citizens. It is not clear how much the events in the early 1980s, or earlier gay history for that matter, may have inspired or influenced Carow's plans for what would become *Coming Out*, but they run parallel to the development of one of the most important and visible films—at least in retrospect—in the East German cinematic legacy. Beyond the work of the director and those closely involved with the making of the film, the completion and release of *Coming Out* represented a victory for the East German homosexual community, but especially for gay men because of the focus of the film's story and for historical reasons—and contextual circumstances specific to East Germany. At the time of the film's release, same-sex (male-male) sexual acts had been legal for twenty-one years among men aged eighteen or above; same-sex acts involving those under eighteen had been legal for less than a year since the age of consent for gay relationships had changed. Despite their legality (for these different time periods, and with different considerations respectively for lesbians and gay men), the GDR was not a paradise for homosexual citizens. Indeed, as Josie McLellan has written, these legal moves by the state amounted to 'failed liberalisation'.³ The situation on paper was different from the day-to-day reality.

The discord between the nation's stated mission and principles, on the one hand, and its actions, on the other, remains a puzzling aspect of the GDR's cultural legacy with which scholars have to contend. In theory, the GDR context would have seemed to be welcoming to lesbian and gay citizens because of socialism's professed acceptance and integration of all citizens and, eventually, as a result of decriminalization.⁴ Lesbians were by default ignored in the law and most writing on the subject, but male homosexual

relationships were decriminalized in 1968, which brought East German law closer to the less restrictive legislation in Poland and Czechoslovakia. This could give the impression that gay men were free to live their lives and express themselves; it turns out that the truth was far more complicated. Olaf Brühl, who lived in the GDR, described it: ‘von der vielbeschworenen ‘kuschelwärme’ und ‘nachbarschaftshilfe’ in unserem *dorf*, der DDR, haben manche aus meinem damaligen umfeld und ich nur herzlich wenig mitgekriegt. die schwulen waren feige und die familien intolerant. die erste bürgerpflicht hieß *unauffälligkeit*’ (original spelling and italics).⁵ The GDR can be called a society of conforming to the mean, part of which was exhibiting and following the patterns of monogamous, reproductive heterosexuality. Deviations from the norm could be subject to surveillance and suspicion in ways that, though usually not violent, resembled persecution and intimidation under the Nazis.⁶

The first important period for gay rights in East Germany spans from the end of the Second World War to 1968. Following the war, the German states had to decide which parts of the prior German legal code, including those altered by the Nazis, they would bring into their new national laws. Much must be elided here due to space, because the legal and social developments are so complex.⁷ The Nazi government intensified the law applying to (male) homosexual conduct (§175), making prosecution much more likely.⁸ With wording that also made the infractions easier to prosecute, the new version of the law with its added sections (§175a and §175b) addressed the use of coercion as well as age differences (with the age of consent at twenty-one), among other elements. It was this revised, intensified version of the anti-homosexual law that the GDR brought into its law codes. The East German courts upheld the law. Based in part on an

understanding of the law as a protective measure that shielded younger men, the Kammergericht Berlin (the highest regional court) advised that it helped to avoid deleterious influences from older homosexual men. The latter were commonly understood to engage in seduction of the former, leading them into an inappropriate lifestyle and a lifetime of unhappiness—not to mention criminally deviant behaviour. The court's 1950 ruling, in which it found precedent for homophobic laws and used that as justification, stated that §175 and §175a did not possess Nazi content and could remain.⁹ Partly because of the legal reality, which likely reflected widely held beliefs among the populace, and also because of the prudish morality that reigned in the GDR, most homosexuals kept their orientations to themselves or disclosed them only to a small trusted circle.¹⁰

The seduction hypothesis that underlies the Kammergericht ruling survived despite numerous scientific challenges.¹¹ While it had no doubt existed prior to 1935, the fantastical theory that homosexual men were capable of using seduction either to change the sexual orientation of heterosexual young people or to sexually take advantage of them made its way into law for the first time under the Nazis. There had been discussion in the years of the Weimar Republic whether a change to the law might be necessary to address the seduction of youth. Instead, the Communist Party resisted these efforts, listening to the latest contemporary science, which posited that sexuality was the expression of one's constitution, not the effect of someone's will. This was part of the compelling argument legal scholar Karl-Heinz Schöneburg made in his expert report, one of three, that accompanied Carow's script in the DEFA Studios, which I discuss below.¹²

Thus, the idea of ‘seduction’ hung around, perpetuated itself, and refused to go away. Jennifer V. Evans has argued that ‘like Nazis in the mid-1930s, GDR leaders in the 1950s marshaled homophobia to project a sense of normalcy during moments of intense sociopolitical modernization and change to rid themselves of dissenters within the leadership’.¹³ In their acquiescence to the legal status quo from the Nazis, the GDR party deviated from their communist counterparts in the Weimar Republic. The perceived threat to young people, especially impressionable adolescents, was only exacerbated by the devastation of the Second World War. Violence, bombings, hunger, crime, the dissolution of the social fabric, and other perils of wartime Germany engendered anxieties about mass immorality and depravity. The concerns about homosexuality were, not surprisingly, bound up with ideas about gender, raising questions about the legitimacy of various forms of masculinity and how those would or could be integrated into the emerging postwar society and its concomitant realities (e.g., economic rebuilding, reconstruction, denazification).

In the cultural and social developments of the 1970s artists and younger East Germans professed their desires for greater possibilities of individual expression. These affirmations were problematic to the state, because they could be seen most importantly as a rejection of vital socialist principles in favour of Western-style culture and capitalist tendencies.¹⁴ Katrin Sieg has argued that sexual discourses within East Germany were the product of ‘three interrelated discursive complexes dating back to the early part of [the twentieth] century on homosexuality, sexual radicalism, and socialism’.¹⁵ Sieg makes the clarifying observation that sexuality served as a crucial point of abrasion at which the contradictions within socialism, especially but not limited to the GDR’s ‘real existing’

socialism, were uniquely apparent. In Sieg's words, 'Sexuality became a central site for the articulation of a critique of a 'real existant' socialism, [...] a site from which the gap between revolutionary theory and praxis became painfully visible.'¹⁶

In the 1970s, East German lesbian and gay activists made some limited headway in asserting their existence in public. Josie McLellan observes that the term *Öffentlichkeit* appears in many of the memoirs and accounts of this time.¹⁷ Since any public discussion of homosexuality had been completely out of the question, assimilation and inconspicuousness, as Brühl opined above, were the prerequisites for queer existence. Without public acknowledgment and awareness, activists thought, lesbians' and gay men's living conditions and acceptance would never change. Members of the Homosexuelle Interessengemeinschaft Berlin (HIB), a group founded after a 1973 West German television broadcast of Rosa von Praunheim's film *Nicht der Homosexuelle ist pervers, sondern die Situation, in der er lebt* (1971) and now recognized as the first gay rights organization in the GDR, organized social gatherings as well as public activism, like wreath-laying at concentration camp sites. The HIB was later snuffed out by the Stasi.

After the brief and limited gains in visibility of the activists of the 1970s, queer East Germans came onto the scene in the 1980s in ways they had not before. The GDR had slowly become slightly more permissive, but the taboos still persisted. Queer activists and those wanting to discuss these issues found a place in the Protestant Church, specifically in discussion or working groups where 'free' (or less-monitored) speech existed. Stasi operatives eventually infiltrated these groups, too. When these groups

became more of a political problem for the state, official and secular alternatives for these ‘clubs’ were allowed.

It took until 1988 for homosexuality to be the topic of a GDR film; this was the short documentary *Die andere Liebe* (1988, dir. Helmut Kießling and Axel Otten). By the time this film arrived, work was already underway on *Coming Out*. The production of the former involved much debate behind the scenes at all levels of the official GDR hierarchy, both in the state-run film studios and in the health ministry. The filmmakers walked a strange tightrope, trying to manage the prudish expectations of the state, the realities of queer life in the GDR, and a protectionist impulse to avoid stereotypes.¹⁸ *Die andere Liebe* features interviews with lesbian and gay East Germans, who describe their lives in the GDR and their experiences coming out and finding relationships. There are also interviews with parents in which it is clear that the idea of seduction of young people remained a persistent myth. The discussions taking place in the background of these films’ production also illustrate the differing constituencies that the films were trying to reach and satisfy. One is also left with the impression that the GDR state apparatus, even in the late 1980s as it had done before, had moved in a different direction from a growing consensus among the public with respect to aspects of social liberalism.

Letters to the editor and opinion pieces in newspapers and magazines attest to the questions that many people still had throughout the 1970s and 1980s and up to the time of *Coming Out*’s release.¹⁹ Indeed, concerns about seduction continued to surround discussions of decriminalization and homosexuality in German society even after the fall of the Wall, as Germans debated reunification.²⁰ This is another reason that Carow’s film *Coming Out* was so daring. The remarkable choice by Carow and scriptwriter Wolfram

Witt to make Philipp Klahrmann a teacher adds rhetorical and emotional impact to the film.

COMING OUT AND QUEER UTOPIAN PROJECTION

Before examining the film in detail, now that I have provided some historical context for *Coming Out*, I will briefly present a theoretical underpinning of my argument about its engagement with the past, present, and future. For this, I use concepts from José Esteban Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia*, which makes a compelling case for an integration of hopeful, utopian philosophy with queer theory. Through arguing that 'Queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world', Muñoz encourages a focus on anticipatory potential as a means of theorizing (queer) futurity.²¹ In other words, as Muñoz writes, 'queerness is primarily about futurity and hope. That is to say that queerness is always on the horizon'.²² One element of Muñoz's project is to make an argument against the adoption of political pragmatism, as it leads to a surrendering of idealistic objectives in favour of what is immediately and socially palatable. In the acceptance of more easily attainable and acceptable goals, queerness forecloses opportunities to achieve elements of its idealist, utopian reason for existence.

The range of possibilities that is open to queerness, for Muñoz, can be understood through the work of Ernst Bloch (and other Marxian thinkers), especially Bloch's monumental engagement with utopia in *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*.²³ Bloch distinguished between abstract and concrete utopias. The former offered mostly ahistorical, imaginative inspiration, while the latter, because they build upon historical awareness, have greater

philosophical and political potential. As Muñoz paraphrases, ‘Concrete utopias are the realm of educated hope’.²⁴ Muñoz details aesthetic means by which cultural products convey the anticipation of what Bloch calls ‘das Noch-Nicht-Bewußte’, which is recognizable in utopian impulses that surface in art. Like Muñoz’s own theoretical project, Carow’s film examines a *present* through its deployment of elements from a *past*, in order to project a *future*. We will see this in more detail below when I analyse sequences in the film. *Coming Out* works through the protagonists’ present, links it to related moments in the past, and gestures toward the future. It is also especially my use of this theoretical approach which differentiates my interpretation of the film from other scholarship on the subject.

COMING OUT’S GENESIS AND PRODUCTION

It is against the historical backdrop I outlined above that *Coming Out* eventually came into existence and worked to make an intervention in conventional understandings of homosexuality in the GDR, likely first as an impossible wish among lesbian and gay East Germans to be represented on screen and then later as the spark of a creative idea for director Heiner Carow. Under normal circumstances the approval process for a film in the DEFA Studios was arduous and sometimes mystifying.²⁵ Considering the layers through which filmmakers had to navigate their ideas and the various parties they had to appease before approval could be obtained, it might be unsurprising that the results would be at least occasionally curious. Although everyone knew that censorship occurred, as Seán Allan has written, sometimes the denial of a film’s release, the withdrawal of permission, or the editing that was necessary prior to release could all prompt puzzlement, especially

when material seemed uncontroversial.²⁶ The approvals and release of several films on previously untouched topics in what became the final years of the GDR, including *Coming Out* on homosexuality and Karl Heinz Lotz's *Rückwärts laufen kann ich auch* about disability (1990), for example, show that the situation in the DEFA Studios had changed significantly.²⁷ Despite its legality on paper, homosexuality remained mostly a taboo in the GDR, which added complexity to the situation.

Coming Out, however, was not a normal film for which approvals might come as part of business as usual; there were a number of characteristics that would make its production more complex or at the very least extraordinary. One aspect was the director attached to the film. Heiner Carow was part of a second generation of GDR filmmakers born between 1920 and 1932, many of whom were already adults when the country was founded in 1949.²⁸ Although Carow had made prior films, his first great fame came with *Die Russen kommen* (1968/1987), which was banned and not screened for nearly twenty years. His most famous film is undeniably *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* (1973), which the DEFA-Stiftung, the organization responsible for East German film legacy, has called 'der erfolgreichste Film der DEFA-Geschichte'.²⁹ Carow's prestige increased as a member and later the vice president of the Akademie der Künste. It was this profile that made it more likely *Coming Out* would actually be produced, and the newspapers, for example, followed with interest the developments in the film's production.

By some accounts, Carow had been thinking about making a film like *Coming Out*, at least in the abstract, since the early 1980s. According to Carow, there was great opposition.³⁰ The director of the DEFA Studios from 1976 to 1989, Hans Dieter Mäde, had declared that such a film would never be made while he was still at the head of the

operation. Carow and writer Wolfram Witt carried on nonetheless, obtaining three expert reports (from a psychiatrist, a sociologist, and a legal scholar) that argued in favour of such a film, including Karl-Heinz Schöneburg's letter mentioned above. While Mäde still tried to derail the film's production, Carow sent the script directly to Kurt Hager, a member of the Politbüro and the chief ideologist of the leading Socialist Unity Party (SED), who was convinced by the attached reports' account of solidarity between communists and homosexuals in concentration camps.³¹ The other two expert reports, by Kurt Starke of the Zentralinstitut für Jugendforschung and a psychiatrist, endorsed the importance of the project. Starke argues that *Coming Out* would be important for young people, especially in an age in which HIV/AIDS is increasingly discussed in the media—though HIV/AIDS does not appear in *Coming Out*.³² Further, the isolation faced by gay people in the film works toward a socialist project of integration of all people into society through a deconstruction of stereotypes.³³ Like Schöneburg, physician and psychiatrist Maria Planitzer mentions the treatment of homosexuals under the Nazis, including their internment in concentration camps, beyond her reiteration of the medical-scientific assessment that homosexuality is not an illness or abnormality.³⁴ Mäde was gone from the studios by the time the film was complete; the new management approved the film, convincing Carow that they left the preview screening more enlightened than when they had entered.³⁵ Even in the preproduction stages, we can find evidence of the Muñozian and Blochian utopian drive. The ideal toward which both the filmmakers and the experts were striving included an educational and benevolent objective of reduced discrimination for lesbians and gay men in East Germany.

Before proceeding to a deeper discussion of the film itself, we ought to consider its cinematic context. Beyond its subject matter, was *Coming Out* unique or otherwise remarkable among the slate of films that DEFA completed and released in the final years of the GDR and immediately following its collapse? The 1980s saw a new generation of filmmakers rise to prominence in DEFA who had become disenchanted by the lack of opportunities available to them in the GDR, including the declining audiences for DEFA productions and the difficulties they faced when seeking studio approval for projects.³⁶

Nick Hodgkin has argued that the GDR's final films, those in its 'last gasp', show increasing evidence of a 'melancholic turn' and 'recourse to ruin'.³⁷ Noting Freud's differentiation between melancholy and mourning, Hodgkin writes that the films of this period often have characteristics of both: 'actual grief that accompanies bereavement (the passing of friends and family; the destruction of homes and demise of communities) as well as a conscious feeling of loss for that which never was or, rather, that which failed to be (the GDR's failure to live up to its utopian aspirations)'.³⁸ He continues, 'Those films made when the GDR was still a state that claimed a future reveal a preoccupation with certain themes and emotions—among them frustrated desires, relinquishment of principles and loss—that are constitutive of a melancholic mood.'³⁹

It is this second type, the idea of grieving, melancholy, or sadness arising from the GDR's shortcomings, that is important for a reading of *Coming Out* and also points to the film's qualities of reflection and projection. Melancholy usually refers to a kind of sadness that persists despite its not having an immediately known cause. In *Coming Out*, I argue, there is a recurring and persistent sadness that has both hidden and apparent causes. This depiction gets right to the heart of *Coming Out*'s qualities of reflective and

projective narrative. The film's title is itself an assertion of a topic that prompts reflection on the current state of gay rights in the GDR, standing also as a different kind of *Wende*, another turning point to project forward into a time and space in which the taboo topic becomes much less so, engaging the potential of a queerer future. As we have seen, lesbians and gay men in the GDR had faced extensive legal, political, and social challenges in each decade of the GDR's existence, decriminalization of male-male sexual activity in 1968 notwithstanding. The film's educational objectives do not include a didactic lecture on gay history, but they nevertheless and necessarily build upon this background as they point toward the queer future.

COMING OUT'S DEPICTION OF EAST GERMAN GAYNESS

In this section I will analyse four selected scenes in the film, presented chronologically as in the film's narrative, and their relationship to this reflective or projective idea. The scenes I have chosen come at points spread throughout the film, showing the continuity of this idea in *Coming Out*. These moments in the film paint a somewhat ambivalent picture; that is, except for the first sequence I discuss here (the beginning of the film), the film's outlook is not especially bleak and dour. The film does, however, communicate an air of uncertainty, as it shows members of East Berlin's gay community in a separate, parallel world and subject to fears of not belonging and of professional and personal retribution. The film's message, including its title, alludes to a more enlightened, queer future in which outsiders and others are appreciated for their differences as a part of their belonging. This was a revolutionary concept in socialist East

Germany, where individuality and identity politics could be highly controversial, if not contrary to the socialist project.

One of the film's most striking scenes, and one that could easily have set it on the path toward melodrama, comes the opening five minutes. Preceding the title sequence, which presents 'COMING OUT' over a shot of Trabant traffic passing through an intersection on a dreary, grey day, the opening sequence features several shots that track an ambulance moving through Berlin streets on New Year's Eve. The ambulance's wailing siren is a counterpoint to the booming fireworks, which frequently light up the dark sky. A young man, who we later learn is Matthias (Dirk Kummer), is wheeled on a gurney down a hallway in the Charité hospital, tracked by the camera. A cut takes us into a treatment room, where medical staff are seeing to a groggy Matthias. Under harsh fluorescent lighting, a female physician speaks to Matthias: 'Herr Seifert! Sagen Sie es mir! Wann haben Sie das eingenommen?' With this, the viewer begins to learn what kind of tragedy might be unfolding. In a medium shot, the doctor continues to talk loudly to Matthias, roughly shaking his head, slapping his cheeks, and trying to get him to focus on responding to her, before she and the nurses prepare him for a stomach pumping. The doctor inserts the long pumping tube down Matthias's throat, while she and a nurse shrilly and repeatedly shout 'Schlucken! Schlucken! Schön schlucken! Das Atmen nicht vergessen!' The doctor aptly describes the viewer's experience when she says to Matthias, 'Jetzt ist es ein bisschen unangenehm', while nurses pour fluid down the tube into his stomach. With tears streaming down his face, Matthias coughs and involuntarily fights against the tube in his throat. For the last minute of the sequence, the film cuts to a stationary shot of Matthias on a gurney and alone in a long hallway. A flickering

fluorescent light makes the shot even more isolating and bleak. The doctor enters the scene and repeatedly asks Matthias why he did it. Sobbing, Matthias responds with ‘Ich bin... Ich bin schwul. Ich bin homosexuell.’ In close-up, the doctor caresses his face and responds, ‘Matthias, nicht weinen deswegen.’ A cut to the stream of Trabants and the title card (with a copyright message for the GDR) works as an establishing shot, adding more specificity to the generic quality of the New Year’s Eve shots, locating everything that has just occurred, including the predicament of being gay and its possible consequences, in East Germany.

The scene is also often remarked on in contemporary reviews of the film, which is evidence for the power this material has had and still delivers. It communicates the isolation of the Matthias character well, even before the viewer knows who that character is. The lone ambulance winding its way through a celebratory Berlin—a setting that unknowingly and coincidentally foreshadowed what would happen the evening of the film’s premiere and a year later with Germany’s reunification—situates the tragedy and misfortune of the ambulance’s occupant against the ironic backdrop of the jubilation for a new beginning, in this case with the New Year. Once this sequence had been included in the latest versions of the screenplay, the film’s script strongly emphasizes this stark contrast between the two overlapping worlds of this first part of the sequence: the ambulance versus the fireworks, laughing, and partying.⁴⁰ In the hospital, the graphic depiction of the medical treatment, including stomach pumping, followed by Matthias’s revelation of his reason for attempting suicide, delivers a jarring entry into the film. The viewer receives some emotional relief in the next sequence, which begins with the traffic, when we first encounter the film’s main character, Philipp, heading out on his bicycle.

Thus the film establishes the environments of some of the main characters as well as the beginnings of their mental and emotional states. The sequence that introduces Matthias and the suicide attempt's aftermath, as the opening of the film, posits these as fundamental to the world of the film's characters and also ignites the viewer's emotional reactions, evoking sympathy and sadness for Matthias.

The sequence is intense, but it does not become excessive, overly sentimental, or melodramatic. This was not the first time suicide was thematised in East German film.⁴¹ Indeed, Heiner Carow had included an attempted suicide in one of his earlier films (*Das Leben beginnt*, 1959). This harrowing sequence in *Coming Out* is extraordinary, however, because it was the first depiction of a suicide attempt's aftermath in such realistic detail and the first linked with homosexuality. Although suicide (i.e., surviving a failed attempt) was not illegal in the GDR, it was nonetheless controversial. Sonja E. Klocke has written that 'suicide attempts . . . were condemned on moral grounds precisely because they allegedly pointed to an individual's disinclination to adjust and therefore expressed a pessimism incompatible with the fundamental political concerns of socialism.'⁴² The scene in the treatment room avoids melodramatic excess partly through an approach that imitates direct cinema: lacking non-diegetic sound and music, these shots are observational and almost documentarian in nature. Without the hallmarks of melodrama (e.g., musical score, spectacular plot devices), what Peter Brooks called the 'desire to express *all*' (emphasis added), Carow's approach succeeds in presenting and humanizing what was an otherwise largely unacknowledged reality: the outcast and dejected position of many queer East Germans.⁴³ This latter message is also controversial, because it shows that gay men (and lesbians, by extension) are not accepted in the GDR.

Following the scene mentioned in the synopsis above, about one third of the way into the film, in which Philipp unexpectedly meets his former friend (and possibly lover), Jacob, who is a friend of Tanja's, Philipp's entire world is shaken. The next sequence, the second I discuss here, shows Philipp at a long table in the school's teachers' lounge with one of his colleagues, who continues to talk about the difficulties of the job while drinking coffee, although Philipp, staring forward, is clearly not listening to her. The film's script makes apparent that, by this time, Philipp has descended into a spiral of 'unbestimmte Angst', terrified that Tanja could discover something about his past.⁴⁴ He stares absently past the tracking camera, which slowly closes in on the pair from a long to a medium shot. Film composer Stefan Carow's chromatic music at this point, which had begun in the previous scene, features an agitated flute, violin, and guitar interweaving, adding a restless feeling to this transition scene. This brief tracking shot sets up the next sequence when Philipp goes to a bar, cautiously approaching the door with an open bottle of liquor in his hand. The film hints at the different world of the bar, a contrast with the one outside in which heterosexism and homophobia reign, by showing us a window past which Philipp walks. The building's external walls around the window are the typical grey and dirty off-white that have been on copious display already in the film; the window, though, is bursting with colour: hues of blue, pink, red, orange, and yellow preview the animated and vibrant world we are about to enter with Philipp. The subtle juxtaposition allows the film once more to reflect on its current environment by illustrating the seclusion of lesbians and gay men in a way resembling how queerness has often been described: hidden in plain sight or sometimes as an open secret, one effect of the liberalisation that failed with decriminalisation.

The sequence of Philipp's entry into and first experiences of this world is another crucial moment. The door of the bar bursts open, and a group of men in dresses and makeup drag Philipp into the bar. A few seconds after Philipp's forced entry, the viewer becomes Philipp through the use of a handheld camera that glides slightly shakily further into the bar. Eventually, a man on the stage greets 'einen neuen Gast', after which the camera cuts to different shots in which groups of bar-goers turn around to view the latest customer. Another cut removes the viewer from Philipp's view; instead we see him uncomfortably looking back at everyone gazing at him. A server, Achim (Michael Gwisdek), leads Philipp to an open seat at the bar, where none other than Charlotte von Mahlsdorf is tending.⁴⁵ Philipp is timid and uneasy, protesting that he was just wanting to buy some cigarettes. In a touching moment, Achim replies comfortingly, 'Du brauchst keine Angst haben. Jeder hat so angefangen. Hab Mut.' We see intercut several shots of dancing same-sex couples, most of whom are dressed in extravagant, elaborate or somehow gender-nonconforming costumes. Philipp looks around, and the camera catches small vignettes: a man in drag talks about how his partner won't help with home renovations before casually revealing in the conversation that among the bar's patrons that night are teachers, a psychologist, and a construction crane operator; Charlotte von Mahlsdorf tells her origin story of dressing in women's clothes; and Matthias sees Philipp for the first time. Amid the various cuts the camera follows characters around, eavesdropping on bits of their conversations or watching them dance. In this series of scenes, from Philipp's encounter with Jacob, to the desolate tracking shot of Philipp and his colleague, to his entry into the bar, Carow has taken the viewer once more through an exploration of past (Philipp's history with Jacob), present (Philipp's job and dismay at the

possible disclosure of his secret), and future (provisionally in the form of a separate space in which queerness roams freely). The queer realm we find in the bar links Philipp's present-day reality to a more hopeful future, for which he is bolstered by a community and in which the difficulties of the present would not carry as much weight.

This sequence is important and revealing for several reasons and develops the plot as well as the film's commentary on contemporary gay life in the GDR. First and most important, Philipp gets an initiation into this new parallel world. As foreshadowed in the prior shots on the sidewalk outside the bar, the world inside the bar is a colourful explosion of activity, costumes, music, and patrons, even bursting out into the external grey world to snap Philipp into its maw. Inside the establishment, the shots and the various conversations that the camera captures illustrate a variety of gay people, making sure to list occupations of people there. This communicates that, beyond the wildness of many patrons' clothes, the people there lead perfectly normal lives outside the GDR world beyond the door of the bar. Second, Matthias sees Philipp from afar, and the film hints that their relationship will be significant. Dressed as a version of Pierrot, the *commedia dell'arte* character who first appeared in seventeenth-century theatre, Matthias gazes fixedly at Philipp before leaving the shot and disappearing into the crowd of bar patrons. Philipp reacts violently to the affectionate greeting of another patron before falling down next to the bar. In the next sequence, Matthias and Walter (Werner Dissel) are the two people who have rescued Philipp from his drunkenness and taken him to his apartment and tucked him into bed. The allusion to the stock character Pierrot also foreshadows that the Philipp-Matthias pairing might not succeed, since Pierrot is usually a sentimental, love-sick character who suffers through unrequited love. In the case of

Coming Out, the relationship does fail, but Philipp seems to eventually realize what he has lost by the end of the film. This scene's final contribution is that the older man, Walter, who plays a crucial role in a later scene that I discuss next, appears and unsuccessfully tries to buy Philipp a drink shortly before the latter's collapse.

A clarifying and didactic moment in the film comes when Walter sits Philipp down and delivers sage words in this later scene, when Philipp is on the verge of being ejected from the bar due to his drunken, unrestrained behaviour. At first, Philipp drunkenly mistakes Walter's assistance for a pass and pushes him away. In ironic, contrasting shots a drag queen dressed in a white blouse and gingham skirt and sporting a wig with horizontally extended pigtails dances and lip-synchs Chris Doerk's spirited song 'Kariert', while bar-goers are shown singing along and enjoying the performance. Sobbing and barely able to speak through his tears, Philipp reveals the horror and grotesquery of his gayness, his terror at the prospect of being alone and lonely, and more so of being a gay teacher. Walter begins his response by offering drily, 'Es gibt Schlimmeres', while the drag performer kicks her legs up and down and dances behind him. By this point in the film, *Coming Out* has successfully shown the overbearing nature of supervision and, arguably by extension, surveillance in the form of Philipp's school administration, enough to allow us to sympathize with a justifiable fear of scrutiny and disclosure. He has experienced various forms of rejection from Tanja, his mother, the school, and Matthias. His social isolation is nearly absolute, disconnecting him from friends, family, and the state apparatus. Then, in vivid contrast, Walter describes his life as a gay man of an earlier generation, living under the Nazis, and being imprisoned in a concentration camp.

Walter's monologue illustrates a connected community as well as a grim melancholic picture of reality for the inhabitants of the world inside the bar, reflecting the present's relationship to the past as well as how this does not live up to the past's expectations of the future. The diegetic music shifts from the cheerful 'Kariert' to the hard rock 'Dynamit' by Dieter Wiesjahn. In this moment, Walter, the oldest person there, establishes his credentials as one who has suffered because of his sexuality. 'Ich habe dafür zahlen müssen, wenn ich hier sitze und Schnaps trinke und warte. Warte wie alle hier. Für einen Mann, der zulächelt. Ehrlich, liebevoll und zärtlich.' It is easy to be able to do this nowadays, he says, first implying the contrast with the time under the Nazis. He tells Philipp of his great love, Karl, and how their relationship was discovered prompting their imprisonment in solitary confinement before Walter was finally sent to a concentration camp. As Walter continues with his story, all the while downing shot after shot of schnapps, the camera cuts to various shots around the bar, showing solitary men smoking and drinking, pairs of men sitting together, their eyes wandering around. The truly didactic moment comes when Walter says he became a member of the Communist Party: 'Die Kameraden haben mich gerettet. Dann war ich Aktivist der ersten Stunde. Wir haben gearbeitet wie besessen und haben die Ausbeutung des Menschen durch die Menschen abgeschafft. Und heute ist es scheißegal, ob einer, der neben dir arbeitet, ist Jude oder sonst was. Bloß die Schwulen. Die haben wir vergessen', Walter says before he rises from the table and walks out of the shot. The music stops, with ringing guitars, dissolving into the sound of loud conversation in the bar, as we see Philipp sitting alone at the table, about twenty glasses of brandy littering the table top.

In this compelling scene, Walter has levelled one of the most successful forms of critique, one that embeds praise with its disapproval, a kind of criticism that was becoming more possible only in the final years of the GDR. Walter's recounting of this personal story and its relationship to struggle for equality fits well within the kind of antifascist narrative that East Germany had long considered an important part of its identity. With startling candour, Walter praises the egalitarian work of the socialist nation while partly taking it to task for its long-held contradictory and ignorant perspective on same-sex affection and relationships (and social and political organizing related to those). The East German state and its legal and surveillance apparatus first continued the criminal prohibition of male same-sex activity that had been in place before the war and then, even after decriminalization, actively pursued campaigns to control and delegitimize any attempts by lesbians and gay men to organize and gather socially or politically. Josie McLellan also finds this scene to be crucial for Philipp's existence and success within the socialist structure; for her, the connection of homosexuality to the antifascist work of the GDR reveals a new possibility for Philipp that he had not considered before.⁴⁶ Walter's monologue continues the film's project of gesturing toward a potential future while deploying elements of the past and the present.

By the end of *Coming Out*, Philipp has lost both of his relationships (with Tanja and with Matthias) and has had the enlightening exchange with Walter. In the penultimate scene, we see a confrontation between Philipp (and his gayness) on the one side and the school's authorities on the other. We join Philipp and his students in the classroom when the school's principal enters the room. She says quietly to Philipp, 'Es tut mir leid, Kollege Klahrmann. Gewisse Vorkommnisse, über die wir noch an anderer Stelle reden

müssen, zwingen uns leider dazu, mit verstärkten Hospitationen der Schulleitung, heute für Sie unvorbereitet, zu beginnen.' We do not know what the 'gewisse Vorkommnisse' are exactly, but it likely a combination of Philipp's recent unusual behaviour and his gayness. One could imagine that rumours have spread or that Tanja mentioned something to a colleague. Regardless, the principal's vague and administrative explanation make us aware of the observation that seems to have been going on all the time; they were aware, as the viewer was, of Philipp's turbulent present. The scene is uncomfortable, inhabiting a great awkward silence as the senior teachers take their place at the back of the room (after evicting some students from their chairs) to watch Philipp. Several close-up shots of students reveal their mindfulness of the discomfort in the room: they look at Philipp, to each other, and back toward the supervising teachers. There is no nondiegetic sound; we hear occasional whispers and shifting chairs, little else. Philipp sits on the edge of the teacher's table at the front of the room and gazes to his right; a point-of-view shot tracks his gaze out the window to an empty street or courtyard with buildings opposite the school window, and the camera moves slowly toward the window. Again, we see a deployment of the internal-external juxtaposition, here with an optimistic longing for the clarity of the sunny day outside. The principal is agitated and does not understand the long silence and lack of activity, saying loudly, 'Kollege Klahrmann!' The expression on Philipp's face is resolute as he seems to come to a realization. He stands, hooks his thumbs in his pants pockets and says simply, 'Ja.' This culmination, which is followed by a bookend shot of Philipp bicycling in the sun (which refers back to the earlier shots following Matthias's suicide attempt) is clearly open-ended and also open to interpretation.

In order to fully illustrate the scene's effectiveness, I will discuss what had originally been planned in the film's script.⁴⁷ Although there are elements of the scene as it had been foreseen in the latest-available version of the screenplay (like the conversation with the principal and the gaze out the window), a crucial moment of disclosure by Philipp has been left out as a result of on-set disagreement and negotiation.⁴⁸ In a monologue that follows the supervising teachers' entrance into the room, Philipp alludes to 'was mit mir in letzter Zeit gewesen ist' before actually coming out to his class and the teachers sitting at the back of the room. 'Ich habe in den letzten Monaten und Wochen begriffen, daß ich homosexuell bin. Ich habe deshalb ein Leben voll von Lügen ... [*sic*] Verstecken und ... und Angst gelebt. [...] Ich weiß, es ist ein Risiko, daß ich alles zu Ihnen sage. Aber es gibt für mich keinen Ausweg. Ich bin also schwul, wie man so sagt. Ich kann anders nicht leben und ich will es auch nicht.'⁴⁹

In this and earlier versions of the script, Philipp comes out, having feared this revelation for so long, and then continues with the class session, since the world did not come to an end. In the film version, though, Philipp's 'Ja' delivers an answer to a question that had been hanging over the film's narrative: Would Philipp resolve the tension with his identity and come to some kind of breakthrough? The scene communicates a reflection of Philipp's reality, as well as the imperative to come out that faces other nonheterosexual individuals, while aspiring toward an external, future reality in which the declaration is perhaps self-explanatory, superfluous, or unnecessary to reveal. Here, Philipp's diegetic gesture of pausing and gazing out the window and the film's own cinematographic gesture of the point-of-view shot evoke Giorgio Agamben's reference to Aby Warburg's work in art history, which he called studies of 'gesture

intended as a crystal of historical memory, the process by which it stiffened and turned into a destiny'.⁵⁰ Agamben's lyrical encapsulation of what gesture can be also leads us to an interpretation of Philipp's open-ended 'Ja', one that situates it within the trajectory of the entire film. Indeed, Philipp quietly and resolutely acknowledges what Muñoz calls the queerness on the horizon, as 'queerness is not quite here'.⁵¹

CONCLUSION

Katrin Sieg has argued that the critique which *Coming Out* had intended to level at East German society and the structures that contained queer citizens could only impotently fall into obscurity, since the state no longer existed less than a year after the film's release.⁵² For Sieg, *Coming Out* demonstrates the disjunction between an individual right to happiness and society's expectations. Part of the film's message, as Sieg sees it, is to illustrate the parallel tracks of GDR society: segments which fully accept heterosexist stereotypes and assumptions, and segments which allow for less deficient imagination of other possibilities of living. The film succeeds in linking gayness or queerness to outsiderdom, demonstrating limits of socialist tolerance and cracks in the GDR's utopian foundation. For David Brandon Dennis, *Coming Out* constitutes Heiner Carow's attempt to forge a 'third way' between socialist conformity and individualism.⁵³ These analyses of the film are accurate, but they do not reveal what I find to be the more compelling message that the film delivers. It is clear that the film can be compartmentalised or segmented in the way that Sieg and Dennis suggest, but that does not elucidate what amounts to its temporal and aspirational message and structure. In the scenes discussed here, we can see that *Coming Out* invokes elements of (East) German

gay history, especially via Walter's experience, and contemporary circumstances in order to advocate for future change for the better.

The film continues to find popularity, especially around the times of its anniversaries (and thus of the fall of the Berlin Wall), but also as part of queer and international film festivals. A recent example is *Coming Out*'s inclusion in the 2015 Kyiv International Film Festival and the invitation of Matthias Freihof to speak and serve as a festival jury member. In the case of a former East bloc state like Ukraine, the context of *Coming Out*'s production, as well as the historical background underlying the need for the film, could arguably find resonance among audience members. One of the regular utterances about the film is one of nostalgia or perhaps appreciation for how different things were for gay people in the GDR in a positive way. For some, this is a surprising element of the film's reception. In one of the many interviews surrounding the film and Wall anniversary, Freihof says, 'Heute denken viele Ost-Schwule heute melancholisch an diese kuscheligen Zeiten zurück.' The article continues, 'Doch die Ost-Berliner Schwulenszene gab sich nicht schrill oder wild. Man richtete sich in der Nische ein, blieb diskret, gesittet.'⁵⁴ This nostalgic retrospection, mimicking the wave of *Ostalgie* in the late 1990s and early 2000s, also reactivates the reflection and projection of *Coming Out*'s narrative project, the objective which I find to be crucial and neglected by critics. Through its presentation of a contemporary reality with its included retrospection and disappointment, *Coming Out* is able to deliver a widely understandable and identifiable message about the role of outsiders and difference in modern societies, despite (or perhaps sometimes because of) its idiosyncratic mixture of characters, formal style, and production history.

In this article I have argued that the landmark film has a dual message, to reflect the contemporary lives of gay people in East Germany, based as they are in the historical context described above, and to project toward an aspirational future in which gay people do not face the kind of stigmatization and pressure to conceal their identities. *Coming Out* delivers its message through both its narrative and cinematographic techniques, which point to both the dissatisfying present and a yet-to-be-determined future.

¹ I am grateful for the assistance of staff at the Schwules Museum and the Bundesarchiv in Berlin. I also thank Matthias Freihof and Dirk Kummer for speaking with me about their experiences during the filming of *Coming Out*. The article's anonymous peer reviewers offered useful feedback on the text. Part of this research was made possible by a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), which I gratefully acknowledge.

² A 1986 review of another Carow film (*So viele Träume*) reveals that the director was already at work on *Coming Out*, which was his next film. See Heinz Kersten, 'Mutter, Tochter und ein Mann: Heiner Carows neuer DEFA-Film "So viele Träume"', *Der Tagesspiegel* (Berlin, 23 November 1986), Schwules Museum, Berlin, DDR/*Coming Out*, Nr. 4.

³ Josie McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism: Intimacy and Sexuality in the GDR* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 114.

⁴ Actual circumstances are always more complicated, as is the complex historical relationship between far-left politics and sexuality. See, for example, Denis Sweet, 'The Church, the Stasi, and Socialist Integration: Three Stages of Lesbian and Gay Emancipation in the Former German Democratic Republic', in *Gay Men and the Sexual*

History of the Political Left, ed. by Gert Hekma, Harry Oosterhuis, and James Steakley (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1995), pp. 351–68; Dan Healey, ‘Homosexual Existence and Existing Socialism: New Light on the Repression of Male Homosexuality in Stalin’s Russia’, *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 8.3 (2002), 349–78; Josie McLellan, ‘State Socialist Bodies: East German Nudism from Ban to Boom’, *Journal of Modern History*, 79.1 (2007), 48–79.

⁵ Olaf Brühl, ‘Schwulsein 2000: Arschficker oder Arschkriecher? Kleines schwules Glossar eines Außenseiters’, in *Schwulsein 2000: Perspektiven im vereinigten Deutschland* (Hamburg: MännerschwarmSkript Verlag, 2001), pp. 163–206 (p. 176).

⁶ ‘Reine Erziehung – Neue Aktenfunde zeigen: Bis in die achtziger Jahre hinein schikanierten SED und Stasi Homosexuelle’, *Der Spiegel*, 24 June 1996, pp. 76–77.

⁷ For more on this immediate pre- and post-1945 history, see James D. Steakley, *The Homosexual Emancipation Movement in Germany* (Salem, NH: Ayer, 1975); Robert Beachy, *Gay Berlin: Birthplace of a Modern Identity* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014); Clayton J. Whisnant, *Queer Identities and Politics in Germany: A History, 1880–1945* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2016).

⁸ Andreas Pretzel, ‘Sonderstrafrecht gegen Homosexuelle’, in *NS-Opfer unter Vorbehalt: Homosexuelle Männer in Berlin nach 1945*, ed. by Andreas Pretzel (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2002), pp. 23–41 (p. 27).

⁹ Kammergericht Berlin, ‘Urteil vom 21. Februar 1950’, *Neue Justiz*, 4 (1950), 129–30.

¹⁰ See Günter Grau, ‘Ein Leben im Kampf gegen den Paragraphen 175: Zum Wirken des Dresdener Artzes Rudolf Klimmer 1905–1977’, in *100 Jahre Schwulenbewegung*, ed. by Manfred Herzer (Berlin: Verlag rosa Winkel, 1998), pp. 47–64; Jennifer V. Evans,

‘Decriminalization, Seduction, and “Unnatural Desire” in East Germany’, *Feminist Studies*, 36.3 (2010), 553–77; McLellan, *Love*, pp. 115–18.

¹¹ Physician and gay activist Rudolf Klimmer tried to explain this in his book that faced censorship in the GDR, forcing him to publish it in the West. See Rudolf Klimmer, *Die Homosexualität als biologisch-soziologische Zeitfrage* (Hamburg: Kriminalistik Verlag für Kriminalistische Fachliteratur, 1965). It would later be made clear in an East German sexological publication, too. See *Sexuologie*, ed. by Peter G. Hesse and Günter Tembrock, 3 vols (Leipzig: S. Hirzel Verlag, 1974), I, p. 468. Still later, see Reiner Werner, *Homosexualität: Herausforderung an Wissen und Toleranz* (Berlin: VEB Verlag Volk und Gesundheit, 1987).

¹² Karl-Heinz Schöneburg, ‘Gutachten zu dem Film-Szenarium “Coming out”’, 1988, pp. 6–7, BArch DR117/7747. (Bundesarchiv will be abbreviated as BArch.)

¹³ Evans, p. 557.

¹⁴ Katrin Sieg, ‘Sex, Subjectivity, and Socialism: Feminist Discourses in East Germany’, *Genders*, 1995, 105–33 (p. 107n12).

¹⁵ Katrin Sieg, ‘Deviance and Dissidence: Sexual Subjects of the Cold War’, in *Cruising the Performative: Interventions into the Representation of Ethnicity, Nationality, and Sexuality*, ed. Sue-Ellen Case, Susan Leigh Foster, and Philip Brett, Bloomington 1995, pp. 93–111 (p. 94).

¹⁶ Sieg, ‘Deviance and Dissidence’, p. 98.

¹⁷ McLellan, *Love*, p. 119.

¹⁸ For more on the production of *Die andere Liebe*, see Kyle Frackman, ‘Shame and Love: East German Homosexuality Goes to the Movies’, in *Gender and Sexuality in East*

German Film: Intimacy and Alienation, ed. by Kyle Frackman and Faye Stewart

(Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2018), pp. 225–48.

¹⁹ See collection in Schwules Museum, Berlin, DDR/Nr. 21.

²⁰ See Sieglinde Wolff, ‘Paragraph 175 wieder in der DDR?’, *Wochenpost*, 18 May 1990, p. 3; kotte, “‘De Maizièrè wird nicht auf stur schalten’”: Wird der Schwulenparagraph 175 StGB bei der Wiedervereinigung in der DDR wieder eingeführt oder in der BRD endlich abgeschafft?’, *taz* (Berlin, 19 May 1990), section Lokalteil Berlin, p. 17.

²¹ José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), p. 1. Here, especially, Muñoz’s theoretical genealogy includes Agamben. See Giorgio Agamben, *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

²² Muñoz, p. 11.

²³ Ernst Bloch, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, 3 vols (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1959).

²⁴ Muñoz, p. 3.

²⁵ Sebastian Heiduschke has described the typical process for approval for DEFA films. See Sebastian Heiduschke, *East German Cinema: DEFA and Film History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 26–27.

²⁶ Seán Allan, ‘DEFA: An Historical Overview’, in *DEFA: East German Cinema, 1946–1992*, ed. by Seán Allan and John Sandford (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), pp. 1–21 (p. 17). For more on DEFA censorship and filmmakers’ methods to circumvent it, see Sebastian Heiduschke, “‘Das ist die Mauer, die quer durchgeht. Dahinter liegt die Stadt

und das Glück”: DEFA Directors and their Criticism of the Berlin Wall’, *Colloquia Germanica*, 40.1 (2007), 37–50.

²⁷ Allan, p. 18.

²⁸ Allan, p. 9.

²⁹ Ines Walk, ‘Carow, Heiner’, *DEFA-Stiftung*, 2009 <[http://www.defa-stiftung.de/\(S\(n1ykzu551kyugn55xxdtnv55\)\)/carow-heiner](http://www.defa-stiftung.de/(S(n1ykzu551kyugn55xxdtnv55))/carow-heiner)> [accessed 12 February 2018].

³⁰ Henryk Goldberg, ‘Es geht um eine Haltung: Im Gespräch mit Heiner Carow’, *Filmspiegel*, February 1989, 6–7 (p. 7).

³¹ *Spur der Filme: Zeitzeugen über die DEFA*, ed. by Ingrid Poss and Peter Warnecke (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2006), p. 453.

³² HIV/AIDS was first publicly acknowledged in the GDR in 1987.

³³ Kurt Starke, ‘Gutachten zum Treatment “Coming out” Witt/Richter 3.12.87’, 1988, BArch DR117/7747.

³⁴ Maria Planitzer, ‘Gutachten zu “Coming out”’, 1988, BArch DR117/7747.

³⁵ Poss and Warnecke, p. 455.

³⁶ Allan, pp. 17–18.

³⁷ Nick Hodgin, ‘DEFA’s Last Gasp: Ruins, Melancholy and the End of East German Filmmaking’, in *Re-Imagining DEFA: East German Cinema in Its National and Transnational Contexts* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2016), pp. 271–91 (p. 274).

³⁸ Hodgin, p. 275.

³⁹ Hodgin, p. 275.

⁴⁰ “‘Coming out’ (00/0853) 1988: Verschiedene Motive in Berlin – zusätzliche Blätter zum Drehbuch’, 1988, BArch DR117/2419.

⁴¹ Earlier films that variously referred to suicide include *Der Lotterieschwede* (1958, dir. Joachim Kunert), *Das Leben beginnt* (1959, dir. Heiner Carow), *Dr. med. Sommer II* (1969, dir. Lothar Warneke), *Jakob der Lügner* (1974, dir. Frank Beyer), *Eine handvoll Hoffnung* (1977, dir. Frank Vogel), *Für Mord kein Beweis* (1978, dir. Konrad Petzold), and *Grüne Hochzeit* (1988, dir. Hermann Zschoche).

⁴² Sonja E. Klocke, *Inscription and Rebellion: Illness and the Symptomatic Body in East German Literature* (Rochester, New York: Camden House, 2015), p. 47. See also the introduction of Robert Blankenship, *Suicide in East German Literature: Fiction, Rhetoric, and the Self-Destruction of Literary Heritage* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2017), pp. 1–13.

⁴³ Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), p. 4.

⁴⁴ Wolfram Witt, “‘Coming out’ (00/0853)’, 1988, pp. 73–74, BArch DR117/2418.

⁴⁵ Charlotte von Mahlsdorf (1928–2002) was a well-known figure in (East) German gay life. She was a transvestite who founded the Gründerzeitmuseum on the outskirts of Berlin in 1960 and later participated in gay rights struggles in the GDR.

⁴⁶ Josie McLellan, ‘From Private Photography to Mass Circulation: The Queering of East German Visual Culture, 1968–1989’, *Central European History*, 48.3 (2015), 405–423 (p. 421).

⁴⁷ The material for *Coming Out*’s script had existed in writing in at least five versions, including in the form of a treatment, *Szenarium*, and a screenplay. These are available in

the Bundesarchiv (BArch DR117/7746, DR117/7060, DR117/2418, and DR117/2419) and the Schwules Museum in Berlin (Coming out – Der Film, Nr. 1).

⁴⁸ Matthias Freihof disliked the script's treatment of Philipp's mentality, including his bare revelation of who and what he is. The version that stayed in the film was the result of discussion and negotiation between Freihof, Carow, and scriptwriter Witt. Matthias Freihof, Interview by Kyle Frackman, 2017.

⁴⁹ Witt, pp. 207–8.

⁵⁰ Giorgio Agamben, 'Notes on Gesture', in *Means Without End: Notes on Politics*, trans. by Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp. 49–62 (p. 53).

⁵¹ Muñoz, p. 21.

⁵² Katrin Sieg, 'Homosexualität und Dissidenz: Zur Freiheit der Liebe in Heiner Carows *Coming Out*', in *Die imaginierte Nation: Identität, Körper und Geschlecht in DEFA-Filmen*, ed. by Bettina Mathes (Berlin: DEFA-Stiftung, 2007), pp. 284–308 (p. 284).

⁵³ David Brandon Dennis, 'Coming Out into Socialism: Heiner Carow's Third Way', in *A Companion to German Cinema*, ed. by Terri Ginsberg and Andrea Mensch (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2012), pp. 55–81 (p. 56).

⁵⁴ Steven Geyer, "'Coming Out": Die Party der Anderen', *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 6 November 2014, section Politik <<http://www.fr-online.de/politik/-coming-out--die-party-der-anderen,1472596,28967274.html>> [accessed 16 March 2015].