Introduction: Sex and Socialism in East German Cinema

Kyle Frackman and Faye Stewart

In July 2015, a group of scholars including faculty, students, and professionals from outside academia met for the eighth biennial East German Summer Film Institute. Facilitated at Smith College by the DEFA Film Library at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, this summer workshop—entitled “Sex, Gender, and Videotape: Love, Eroticism, and Romance in East Germany”—took a dedicated and comprehensive look at the ways in which these themes appeared, disappeared, and were avoided or censored in East German film and television.1 The event included public screenings of material that had not been seen in decades and works that had never been shown outside of Germany. Guiding the discussions were questions surrounding sex, gender, and sexuality in East (and West) Germany and the Eastern Bloc that some scholars had examined especially in the mid to late 2000s but that had not been posed in relation to visual media, the primary focus for this workshop. The film institute showcased East German portrayals of family life, corporeal pleasure, gendered embodiments of socialist citizenship, socialist married life, sex education, queerness, and the gendering of labor, both public and private, among many other topics.

Taking its cue from the wealth of unexplored or underexplored material introduced at and by that film institute, this volume gathers essays on a sample of televisual works produced in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) but points to the bountiful opportunities for engaging with East German texts while highlighting the need to illuminate and comprehend how sex, gender, and sexuality were implicit and explicit parts of real existierender Sozialismus (real existing socialism). Some of the films analyzed in this volume’s contributions have never before been

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examined in scholarship as far as we can tell (e.g., *Zu jeder Stunde* in John Lessard’s essay), or if so, likely only in German and less available to English-speaking audiences. In this volume’s chapters that treat works previously discussed by scholars (e.g., *Guten Morgen, du Schöne* in Evan Torner’s chapter), we find new readings, often experimenting with theoretical approaches that yield innovative interpretations.\(^2\) As a step toward addressing previous lacunae in and offering new perspectives for scholarship on the visual culture of the GDR, this volume surveys a range of depictions of gender and sexuality in East German film and television, from stereotypical and ideologically compliant understandings of femininity and homosexuality to more ambivalent constructions of androgyny, gendered agency, and queer desire. In their twelve chapters, the volume’s authors contribute to a deeper understanding not only of East Germany’s screen cultures but also of the GDR’s wider historical, political, and social contexts. Many of these contributions look beyond the GDR to transnational cinematic trends and discourses that influenced East German negotiations of gender and sexuality as well as the production and reception of East German films and television programming. Grounding our analyses in theoretical approaches informed by genre studies, feminist and queer theory, film history, cultural studies, and postcolonial theory, we aim to open up this historical material to a broad readership interested in cinema, gender and sexuality, and socialist cultures beyond the discipline of German Studies.

Writing about gender and sexuality in East Germany is not a simple undertaking. While examining this broad topic in any national context is not without difficulty, the GDR poses certain challenges to interpretation and scholarly archaeology that may be familiar to those with knowledge of repressive governmental systems like the GDR’s single-party state. On the one hand, heavy censorship and the centralization of cultural production, especially but not
exclusively in the 1950s and 1960s, posed limitations on the ways in which gender and sexuality could be represented and discussed. But on the other hand, as several of our contributions show, East German visual culture was far from monolithic or monochromatic, becoming increasingly diversified and exportable in the 1970s and 1980s. This corresponds to trends in, for example, the historiography of the GDR, where, since the late 1990s, it has become common to offer more nuanced portrayals of life in the socialist state.³

In the GDR, films and television productions came from the state-run film studio Deutsche Film Aktiengesellschaft (German Film Corporation, or DEFA). DEFA films span forty-six years (1946–1992), thus predating and also outliving the GDR itself.⁴ Throughout this period, beginning with its first film, Die Mörder sind unter uns (The Murderers Are Among Us, 1946, dir. Wolfgang Staudte), DEFA produced rich fodder for scholars of gender and sexuality.⁵ Identity, intimacy, and desire took a wide range of forms over the forty-six years of DEFA’s lifetime. Early DEFA releases such as Die Mörder sind unter uns—along with other Trümmerfilme (rubble films) like Irgendwo in Berlin (Somewhere in Berlin, 1946, dir. Gerhard Lamprecht)—offered spectators gendered visions of confronting the Nazi past and rebuilding in the postwar era, while also intervening into cross-cultural discourses, ideologies of gender, and generic conventions informed by melodramas, neo-realism, war films, and Westerns. The forms of gendered agency and desire in films of this era tended to emphasize the perspectives of male protagonists and to view female characters through what Laura Mulvey later termed a “male gaze.”⁶ Indeed, as a number of the contributions in our volume illustrate, Western theories of gender and sexuality like Mulvey’s prove useful in approaching Eastern Bloc culture as well. Later DEFA films produced in the final years of the GDR and after the opening of its borders in 1989 and German unification in 1990 subverted and queered gender and desire both implicitly

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and overtly, as evidenced in visual texts as diverse as *Coming Out* (1989, dir. Heiner Carow), the experimental short films of Helke Misselwitz of the 1980s, and the postunification productions *Der Strass* (Rhinestones, 1990, dir. Andreas Höntsch) and *Jana und Jan* (Jana and Jan, 1991, dir. Helmut Dziuba). Such visual texts both bear out and complicate our understandings of gender and queer theories, such as the work of Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick; and film theory and scholarship such as that of Bela Balázs, Gilles Deleuze, and Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino.

How reliable and ideologically compliant were East German filmmakers, writers, and other artists and the works they produced? A challenge that has bedeviled studies of DEFA has been what to make of these artifacts of the GDR. Citing Barton Byg, Seán Allan and Sebastian Heiduschke note in their recent DEFA volume that, in scholarship on East German films, these works have been “primarily valued as evidence for the history of the German Democratic Republic.” From this perspective, DEFA works come to resemble oral history testimonies, illustrating how it “really was.” Allan and Heiduschke observe that a contrasting position, that DEFA films were purely propaganda, inflected scholarship on these works for decades, despite the myriad other factors influencing the production, dissemination, and reception of cultural and artistic texts in East Germany. As recent scholarship has shown, a complicated relationship exists between “reality,” propaganda, and cinematic depictions of life in the GDR that appears even more complex when one takes into account social history, evolving party ideology, changing audiences and competing markets, and individual filmmakers’ own working conditions. Moreover, by the 1970s at the latest, East German spectators had grown accustomed to reading between the lines for social critique in films and television programming, meaning that today’s scholars must grapple with a proliferation of possible meanings for any single visual text.
Further, the disjunctions between East Germans’ public and private lives add another layer of complexity to interpretations of visual presentation and representation of reality in various media.\textsuperscript{10}

As the volume’s chapters illustrate, there is a wealth of East German cultural works waiting to be interpreted and reinterpreted. An element of analyzing works from the GDR is the recognition they had to conform to elaborate plans for production and were subject to censorship or alteration both pre- and post-production with the cultural authorities of the SED.\textsuperscript{11} Additionally, the repressive arm of the Stasi (short for Ministerium für Staatssicherheit, or Ministry for State Security), established in 1951, monitored potential threats or dissidents, including a number of the directors whose works are examined in this volume. One particularly powerful example of the effects of repression on visual culture in the GDR was the Eleventh Plenum of the Central Committee of the SED of 1965, in the wake of which numerous films were cut or altogether banned, many of which were not released until after the fall of the Wall in 1989 and reunification in 1990.\textsuperscript{12} Censorship, surveillance, and pressures to conform and toe the party line were part of life in the GDR, and they undoubtedly influenced the ways in which gender and sexuality came to expression in its visual cultures. They also limited the ways in which love, marriage, gender roles, and family life could be mobilized to critique dominant ideologies or to express social dissatisfaction, even at times when the SED and its cultural authorities encouraged writers, filmmakers, and artists to engage with real-existing socialism by exploring the everyday joys and pains of GDR citizens.

Themes of DEFA productions were diverse, ranging from the communist hero Ernst Thälmann to classic fairy tales, often oscillating during various thaws and freezes in cultural policy frequently influenced by events and policies in the Soviet Union. In the 1940s and 1950s
DEFA produced a number of films within a (socialist) realist idiom, sometimes limiting the films’ appeal to wider audiences as cinemagoers became accustomed to a steady diet of similar settings and narratives. Variations on the realist aesthetic helped to produce several films that remain topics of discussion for our subject area: for example, *Frauenschicksale* (Destinies of Women, 1952, dir. Slatan Dudow), which follows the lives of four women (and a womanizer) in divided Berlin, and *Berlin – Ecke Schönhauser* (Berlin – Schönhauser Corner, 1957, dir. Gerhard Klein), a study of teenaged angst and rebellion. Following the closing of East German borders and the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961, filmmakers—perhaps paradoxically in an age of paranoid security—experimented with material and form. Some, like the jazz-accompanied *Monolog für einen Taxifahrer* (Monolog for a Taxi Driver, 1962, dir. Günter Stahnke), a meditation on socialist society and family, were banned for going too far. At the Eleventh Plenum in December 1965, writers, artists, and works of all kinds were the object of attacks and criticism, including from soon-to-be head of state Erich Honecker. Even after the caesura of the 1965 plenary, films managed to deliver complicated narratives about love, marriage, and transforming gender roles, as we see in *Lots Weib* (Lot’s Wife, 1965, dir. Egon Günther), *Spur der Steine* (Trace of Stones, 1966, dir. Frank Beyer), or *Das siebente Jahr* (The Seventh Year, 1968, dir. Frank Vogel), though their efforts often met censorship or outright bans, as in the case of the first two. Honecker’s ascension, however, did lead to his famous “no taboos” speech of December 1971, which seemed to herald a more liberal climate for artistic production and public discourse in general.

This transition of leadership and the ensuing liberalization of cultural expression produced increasingly diverse and complex filmic depictions of gender and sexuality in the 1970s. Honecker’s administration encouraged artists to focus on everyday life in East Germany
and citizens’ experiences of real existierender Sozialismus, leading to the proliferation of film genres such as the Alltagsfilm (film about everyday life) and the Frauenfilm (women’s film).

With the turn away from ideology and politics came the embrace of emotions and female subjectivity through nuanced explorations of the possibilities and limitations of gender equality versus women’s real-lived experiences as workers, lovers, wives, and mothers in the GDR.16 Numerous productions unflinchingly addressed the discrepancy between women’s public and private emancipation, as in the marital drama Bis daß der Tod euch scheidet (Until Death Do Us Part, 1979, dir. Heiner Carow). Though these so-called “women’s films” unmistakably laid heavier stress on gender roles, their focus on relationships and individual fulfillment shows continuity with the themes of the films of the 1960s about contemporary society. However, those of the 1970s increasingly brought to the fore romance, sex, and family dynamics, with frank discussions of themes such as contraception in the documentary Sie (She, 1970, dir. Gitta Nickel) and youth sexuality in the teenage drama Sieben Sommersprossen (Seven Freckles, 1978, dir. Hermann Zschoche). But there were also limitations to the extent of cultural liberalization under the Honecker-led SED, and some films addressing the complexities of female labor and desire, such as Die Taube auf dem Dach (The Dove on the Roof, 1973, dir. Iris Gusner), were deemed too unrealistic or negative for public viewing.17 This banned debut film by Gusner is also a powerful example of the challenges faced by women directors, who became more visible in the last two decades of the GDR, in gaining a foothold in the male-dominated DEFA studios.18

The last full decade of the GDR, the 1980s, saw the release of many films that have remained popular, including among scholars, and are now in a canon of DEFA films. These include the banned film Jadup und Boel (Jadup and Boel, 1981/88, dir. Rainer Simon), the late examination of the role of religion in the GDR, Einer trage des anderen Last (Bear Ye One
Another’s Burden, 1988, dir. Lothar Warneke), and the first East German feature film to focus on homosexuality, *Coming Out*. Notably, the availability of western media, for example via broadcast television, must also have played a role in changing cinemagoing appetites in East Germany.¹⁹ Beyond these titles, many other films offer viewers and scholars the chance to examine gender and sexual themes. *Sabine Kleist, 7 Jahre* (Sabine Kleist, Age 7, 1982, dir. Helmut Dziuba) highlights the experience of a young girl wandering in the city.²⁰ The road movie *Ete und Ali* (Ete and Ali, 1984, dir. Peter Kahane) explores the friendship between two men recently out of the army, while *Die Frau und der Fremde* (The Woman and the Stranger, 1984, dir. Rainer Simon) tells the story of two German soldiers in World War I, Karl and Richard, and the unusual circumstances of their love triangle with Richard’s wife, Anna.

With the fall of the Wall on November 9, 1989, and the unification of Germany with the absorption of the former GDR territories into the FRG on October 3, 1990, the end of DEFA cinema was in the offing. DEFA filmmakers and the company’s infrastructure quickly faced competition with more western media. The artists and their audiences were in a peculiar position: “Now that DEFA’s directors had a free hand to produce whatever films they wanted, there was no longer an audience who wished to see them, a problem that was exacerbated in . . . 1991 by the privatisation of the cinemas.”²¹ The last works begun in the DEFA studios were finally released in 1994.²² Also in these final years we can find works that present our anthology’s themes. *Letztes Jahr Titanic* (Last Year Titanic, 1990, dir. Andreas Voigt) documents in interviews the twilight of the GDR; shot from December 1989 to December 1990, the film presents Renate, among others, who tells of rape and exploitation. A critical view of GDR society and reflections on the future are embodied by a teenage couple and their unborn child in *Jana und Jan*—also noteworthy for a more overt depiction of youth sexuality and queer desires.
We see more diversity and reflections on the effects of “foreign” subjects in a postunification East German environment in *Herzsprung* (1992, dir. Helke Misselwitz).

A brief synopsis of gender and sexuality in East German visual culture necessarily fails to capture the complexity and diversity of GDR citizens’ experiences as they are reflected in film and television, while also leaving out some forms of media that are analyzed in the chapters in this volume, such as amateur and experimental filmmaking. As Josie McLellan has observed in her study *Love in the Time of Communism: Intimacy and Sexuality in the GDR*, one can find deep contradictions between East Germans’ memories of the GDR and most conventional understandings of authoritarian regimes. A challenge faced by gender studies scholarship on the GDR is that the SED’s messages about gender and sexuality were hardly unified, nor did they correspond directly to the realities of many citizens’ lives. While the SED supported—indeed, decreed—the emancipation of women in the workplace, it also promoted its vision of the liberation of all workers, regardless of gender, as a socialist brotherhood that was implicitly masculine and that relied on women’s domestic labor. Andrea Rinke has argued that, because of the official line that gender equality had already been achieved, an “explicitly feminist approach to film-making,” for example, was not required or necessarily desired. However, as Jennifer Creech points out in her study *Mothers, Comrades, and Outcasts in East German Women’s Films*, cinema offered a space for GDR artists and audiences alike to explore and play with gender, sexuality, pleasure, and power. Creech asserts that popular East German genres such as the *Alltagsfilm* not only reveal contradictions between public life and social expectations on the one hand, and private life and dreams on the other hand, but in so doing constituted an alternative public sphere. Thus, even in a single-party state with censorship and ideological control over artistic production, visual culture was fertile ground for exploring matters of
personal desire and fulfilment while questioning or even resisting official discourses that celebrated labor as inherently emancipatory.

In the realm of sexuality, the SED sought to project an image of East German moral health in the forms of monogamous heterosexual marriage and childbearing. However, the shortage of housing and pervasiveness of young marriage led to high rates of divorce and single parenting, while liberal abortion laws and the availability of oral contraceptives gave women reproductive choices. And, despite the decriminalization of homosexuality in 1968 and the shared belief among gays and lesbians that homosexual emancipation was in line with socialist ideology, queer desires remained largely invisible in East Germany until the late 1980s, what McLellan has called “failed liberalisation.”27 Such tensions between socialist doctrines and real-lived experiences found their way into many of the DEFA films mentioned above and analyzed in this volume. But much work remains to be done in this area, as DEFA’s almost half-century lifetime, 1946 to 1992, saw the production of some 750 films and many more television productions, the vast majority of which remain undiscussed in this book. These years witnessed rapid changes in the entertainment industry, its relationship to ideology, and its preferred subjects, which mirrored changes both within the GDR and globally. Thus the meanings and values surrounding notions of sex and gender shifted and transformed over time, as the various chapters in this book demonstrate.

This Volume

The essays collected here complement and fill in a number of gaps in existing scholarship. Through an integrated approach that connects DEFA film studies with gender and queer studies, these analyses address interlocking concerns about genre and aesthetics, citizenship and
belonging, affect and agency, and politics of representation. Each of the contributions brings together political and cultural history with close textual analyses. In order to provide a historical framework for reading and understanding the workings of gender and sexuality in East German media, the chapters follow a chronological organization according to the primary texts they analyze, from the late 1950s up through the early 1990s. We thus aim to give a coherent overview of the continuities and ruptures in DEFA’s approaches to love, sex, intimacy, and desire over the second half of the twentieth century. These contributions lay heavier emphasis on productions of the second half of the GDR’s lifetime, the 1970s and 1980s, when East German visual culture broached topics relating gender and sexuality more directly and with more nuance than in the Ulbricht era. The chapters survey a range of visual media, including television and feature films, but also amateur and experimental short films as well as documentaries.

In the collection’s first essay, John Lessard embarks upon an examination of amateur filmmaking in the GDR, specifically with a look at a little-known film produced in 1958–59 and televised in 1961: Zu jeder Stunde (At Any Moment). Lessard’s reading of the film, which was created by and starred a husband-wife pair (Frau and Dr. Straßburg), uses theoretical concepts borrowed from Jean-Luc Nancy in order to engage with the film’s staging of maternal labor, death, and the role of the patriarchal state. Lessard argues that this amateur film, which was broadcast on an amateur-film advice show on East German television, presents a complicated vision of the workings of patriarchy in the GDR. In what could initially seem to be the film’s discounting of feminine and maternal labor (in many senses of the word), Lessard actually finds a highlighting of women’s labor in on-screen visibility and behind-the-scenes invisibility. The essay places the Straßburgs’ film in the context of amateur film production as well as greater
gender discourse and cultural policy developments within the GDR, including those following
the pivotal Bitterfeld writers’ conference of 1959.

Like Lessard’s essay in its illumination of the complex interdependencies and
relationships of cinematic gender, Henning Wrage’s chapter traces the narrative and symbolic
functions of gender configurations over two decades of DEFA filmmaking through four films,
two from the 1960s and two from the 1970s: Denk bloß nicht, ich heule (Just Don’t Think I’ll
Gerhard Klein), Die Schlüssel (The Keys, 1973, dir. Egon Günther), and Das Versteck (The
Hiding Place, 1978, dir. Frank Beyer). Wrage asserts that protagonists of the 1960s follow a
model of representation by embodying solvable social conflicts that are mapped out along
generational and gendered lines, whereas those of the 1970s follow a paradigm of adumbration
in which familial and romantic tensions become metaphors for wider social conflicts that now
seem ossified and unchangeable. While, on the surface, the rising numbers of female
protagonists over this period might suggest the increasing emancipation and empowerment of
women, Wrage contends that they in fact reflect ongoing gender stereotyping, whereby female
characters lack agency and are unable to engender social change, even if they ostensibly become
stronger and more central to the plots.

Three of the films Wrage analyzes—Denk bloß nicht, ich heule, Die Schlüssel, and Das
Versteck—feature the East German actress Jutta Hoffmann, whose stardom and roles are the
subjects of Victoria Rizo Lenshyn’s and Faye Stewart’s chapters. Rizo Lenshyn’s study of
Hoffmann’s star persona in the 1960s and 1970s marries film historiography with reception
studies and close readings of interviews with Hoffmann as well as scenes from her films to
explore the interplay between normativity and resistance in socialist celebrity culture. By
examining what she calls the “dialectics of happiness,” Rizo Lenshyn characterizes Hoffmann as embodying the “all-around” socialist personality with both ordinary and extraordinary facets. In attending to Hoffmann’s gender, sexuality, race, and aloofness, Rizo Lenshyn’s essay investigates the continuities and contradictions between ideological correctness and deviance within the confines of state-run socialist media productions.

Faye Stewart focuses on Hoffmann’s lead character in Der Dritte (The Third, 1971, dir. Egon Günther) in order to argue that the film plays with tropes of invisibility in the depiction of her queer desires and attractions to both men and women. Günther’s film is a tricky one to interpret, as even the title and its translations illustrate; already in the German title because of its definite article (der), the viewer gets a clue about the ostensible (masculine) gender of the person or thing that the female protagonist will seek. In this popular film, which she calls a “homosocial romance,” Stewart finds a stream of queer longing that runs beneath the heteronormative—and more conventional—narrative surface, an aspect of the film that has remained underexplored in scholarship and even in the film’s reception. This essay, along with this volume’s chapters by Evan Torner and Kyle Frackman, illuminates neglected or ignored elements of East German queer realities.

Evan Torner also addresses depictions of sexuality that found little overt representation in East German culture, namely bisexual polyamory, for which he finds evidence in several productions of the 1970s and 1980s, including Der Dritte, Im Staub der Sterne (In the Dust of the Stars, 1976, dir. Gottfried Kolditz), Alle meine Mädchen (All My Girls, 1980, dir. Iris Gusner), and Winter adé (1988, dir. Helke Misselwitz). Torner reveals the rare and often encoded references to queer desires and open relationships that challenge perceptions of GDR citizens as obediently living out the ideals of monogamous heterosexual coupling that were
prevalent in the media and enforced through censorship and surveillance. Focusing on the use of confessional close-ups in the exceptional direct discussion of bisexual polyamory in “Rosi – 36” (Rosi, 36 Years Old, 1980, dir. Thomas Langhoff), an episode of the television docudrama *Guten Morgen, du Schöne* (Good Morning, Beautiful), Torner argues that such shots offer spectators visions of “volatile intimacies” that are transgressive and yet contained by technologies of surveillance that make them observable and identifiable, simultaneously titillating viewers and inviting their judgment.

Both Heidi Denzel de Tirado and Larson Powell examine East German film genres at the intersections of national and international discourses, within the contexts of socialist politics and culture, and in conversation with West German and American cinema. In her study of the Western *Blutsbrüder* (Blood Brothers, 1975, dir. Werner Wallroth), Denzel de Tirado investigates the gendered legacies of depicting white Americans and Native Americans in eastern and western cinematic traditions. Denzel de Tirado demonstrates that, while the film reiterates some negative Western tropes of Native American masculinity and femininity, it also eschews others, such as vulnerability and eroticism, thereby empowering its indigenous characters as loyal, respectful, and caring cultural mediators. Exploring the parallels between the titular blood brothers in the diegetic film narrative and the non-German actors who played these roles, Denzel de Tirado argues for the ideological and political meaning of *Blutsbrüder* as promoting socialist ideals and offering a vision of international and interracial solidarity against American consumerism and expansionism.

In a reading that links DEFA with cinematic and narrative conventions in FRG and beyond, Larson Powell analyzes *Solo Sunny* (1980, dir. Konrad Wolf) and sees it as a generic addition to the examples of women’s films and, beyond that, a work that had effects on social
and public understandings of the roles of women in the GDR. In Wolf’s film and its reception, Powell finds evidence of the GDR’s changing standards of public and private relationships, especially those involving citizenship, kinship, and gender. The film moves beyond what had been a conventional deployment of motifs of family and embodies anew, and in novel form, the GDR’s transformation into a more individual, consumerist society, and a new brand of socialism. Powell reassesses Wolf’s film at the intersections of genre theory and reception studies, viewing the film’s title character, Sunny, as resonating with Fassbinder’s Maria Braun but also as a foundling with an ambivalent relationship to community akin to that of Judith Butler’s Antigone.

The next two chapters also study connections between women and citizenship in two acclaimed women’s films from the early 1980s, both directed by Lothar Warneke. Focusing on Unser kurzes Leben (Our Short Life, 1981), Muriel Cormican’s essay interprets the film’s use of the female protagonist’s profession (architecture) as a means for analyzing GDR society as a whole. Cormican is particularly interested in how Warneke’s film illustrates the ways in which bodies’ movements in time and space, related very clearly to Unser kurzes Leben’s plot and character development, allow for an exploration of what it means to be a (gendered) citizen in a state like East Germany—one that had allegedly conquered sexism and had achieved gender equality. For architect Franziska, reality is quite different from this ideal, an ideal that she gradually renounces in Warneke’s dramatization of her story. Nonetheless, Cormican finds that the film puts Franziska in the position of an ideal member of GDR society, one who obeys, stops herself from a certain degree of success, and knows—or accepts—precisely where she is supposed to fit in that society.

Sonja Klocke’s essay examines another of Lothar Warneke’s films, the popular Die Beunruhigung (Apprehension, 1982), which follows the female protagonist’s cancer diagnosis
and love relationship. Framing her analysis, Klocke notes that the majority of discussions of the film have neglected the role played by the East German healthcare system and national discourses of illness and health in the character’s experience. Departing from this, Klocke focuses on the “symptomatic body,” which offers a vantage point from which one can deconstruct the power dynamics operating in GDR society more generally, but specifically within the physician-patient relationship and in relation to intergenerational and gender politics. Klocke argues that such a perspective grants the viewer an incisive tool with which to diagnose the hierarchical and patriarchal codes that underlay many aspects of East German life.

Turning to ignored or neglected works, Reinhild Steingröver focuses on early short films by Helke Misselwitz from the DEFA production group Kinobox from the 1980s: Bilder aus einem Familienalbum (Pictures from a Family Album, 1985), Aktfotographie: z.B. Gundula Schulze (Nude Photography: e.g. Gundula Schulze, 1983), TangoTraum (TangoDream, 1985), and Familie Marx (Marx Family, 1988). These experimental shorts provide Steingröver the opportunity to examine Misselwitz’s use of photographs and photography in ways that challenge conventional uses of such images as well as their role in constructing coherent or historical narratives. For Misselwitz, photos are not evidence but rather a means to raise questions and involve the viewer in the process of interpretation. In the director’s deployment of images and in scholarly debates about the role of photography in discourses of memory, Steingröver finds provocation to reexamine assumptions about what such images can actually accomplish in telling—and seeing—the stories of women’s lives.

In his essay on another largely ignored film, Kyle Frackman exposes the ways in which a trailblazing short documentary film about homosexuality in East Germany, Die andere Liebe (The Other Love, 1988, dir. Helmut Kißling and Axel Otten), manages affects of shame, as well
as disgust, pity, and fear, in order to reduce its viewers’ discomfort and to evoke sympathy and acceptance. Frackman traces pre-production discussions among the filmmakers and their collaborators and consultants to reveal that their rationales for excluding effeminate gay men and HIV/AIDS, apparently motivated by a well-meaning desire to engage enlightened respect, in fact lay bare the persistence of age-old stereotypes about gay men. By supplementing his analysis of these directorial choices with a consideration of the film’s reception and contextualizing this within wider discourses about homosexuality at the end of the twentieth century in East Germany and beyond, Frackman mobilizes affect studies to assert that the omissions—but also the inclusions, for instance, of tropes of seduction, melancholia, and normalcy—in Kißling and Otten’s film about “love” paint a picture of enduring prejudice and the paralysis of gay rights and recognition in the late GDR.

In the final essay of the volume, the focus moves to a post-Wall film. Reading Der Strass (Rhinestones, 1990, dir. Andreas Höntsch) as a gendered spectacle, Jennifer Creech and Sebastian Heiduschke argue that, by politicizing the sexualized female body, this postunification film critiques prevailing visual regimes of the GDR. They thus interpret one of the film’s main characters, a mysterious female dancer and contortionist with two personas, as a “metonymy of the GDR,” representing both the old, now obsolete state, and the new possibilities opened up by the fall of the Wall. Mobilizing Laura Mulvey’s notion of the gendered cinematic gaze together with Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino’s concept of a Third Cinema, Heiduschke and Creech advance an interpretation of Der Strass as critiquing the fetishization of feminine sexuality and participating in the tropes of cinema of liberation.

Future Directions for Research
This volume brings the insights of feminist and queer theory to the study of film, asking new questions about well-known DEFA works and analyzing previously underexplored cinematic and televisual texts. We believe the essays collected here will make an incisive intervention in DEFA studies, marrying close readings with theoretical engagement and contextual knowledge, but as we have seen in the recent growth in queer scholarship on the GDR, there is much more to be said theoretically. The sustained interest in GDR film and television and the complementary public release of new titles by the DEFA-Stiftung, PROGRESS Filmverleih, ICESTORM Entertainment GmbH, and the DEFA Film Library also mean that more scholarship will be forthcoming. Assembling this anthology, like participating in the summer workshop that originally inspired it, has allowed us to glimpse where some analyses of GDR media may be headed, or at least where there are certain gaps or opportunities for further exploration.

We anticipate that future studies will showcase the contributions of women to East German visual culture. The complexities and contradictions of real-lived femininity in the GDR have proven to be fecund ground for analysis, as the essays in this anthology show. But the work of female directors, both inside and outside the DEFA studios, remains an underexplored area—even in our own anthology. Indeed, though many of our contributors focus on female actors or women’s roles in various films, only two of the twelve chapters in this volume address women’s directorial contributions to the rich East German cinematic tradition. Lessard, who emphasizes the marginalization of the female partner in the Straßburg directorial duo’s work on Zu jeder Stunde, reveals a number of the challenges women faced in gaining recognition for their artistic contributions—although this comes across as unsurprising within the historical context of the late 1950s and early 1960s, when the film was made and broadcast. Lessard’s archival work helps to excavate the untold history of women’s work behind the
camera, and it is likely that similar archival endeavors will be necessary in order to identify other as yet unrecognized or uncredited women who collaborated with men in the production of amateur or professional films. Shifting the focus to the late GDR in the 1980s, Steingröver’s essay provides a very different perspective on women’s directorial work by investigating the feminist short films of perhaps the best known East German female filmmaker, Helke Misselwitz. Other well known DEFA female directors such as Iris Gusner and Evelyn Schmidt are mentioned in this anthology in passing, although chapters do reflect critically on the gendering and gendered nature of filmmaking (Creech and Heiduschke’s study of Der Strass), the gender dynamics of East German cinema stardom (Rizo Lenshyn’s essay on Jutta Hoffmann), and the cinematic engagement with the role of gender in other professions (Cormican’s analysis of Unser kurzes Leben).

Another opportunity for growth in DEFA scholarship is in the area of masculinity studies. It is natural for much feminist-inspired, gender-related research to investigate the ways in which patriarchy and its attendant institutionalized gender and sexual expectations affect the lives and experiences of women. DEFA and GDR studies would benefit from more examinations of the ways in which masculine gender expectations, social roles, and sexual behaviors were different from or similar to the experiences of men and boys in the FRG and in the rest of the Eastern Bloc. The work is being done, but can be augmented. Anke Pinkert has published insightful scholarship that plumbs the dimensions of despair and violence in men’s reactions to World War II, showing how DEFA films have a link to the GDR’s postwar recovery, particularly with respect to gender. In her work on visual culture, images, and photography in the GDR, Josie McLellan has also observed trends and changes in gendered representation of subjects, a queering of representation—a kind of interpretation that could be productive for further
explorations of other aspects of East German daily life. Indeed, as Pinkert’s work attests, scholarship does exist on the nature of postwar and postfascist masculinity in both the FRG and the GDR, especially as they relate to war trauma, guilt, and nation-building. There is, however, less research on the critical construction of maleness and the effects of East German women’s emancipation on East German men. Films as diverse in genre and theme as Monolog für einen Taxifahrer, Ete und Ali, Insel der Schwäne (Swan Island, 1983, dir. Herrmann Zschoche), and Leipzig im Herbst (Leipzig in the Fall, 1989, dir. Gerd Kroske and Andreas Voigt) offer complex constructions of masculinity that merit scholarly attention. Even ostensibly women-centered dramas like Frauenschicksale and documentaries like Winter adé could serve as rich material for exploring the conflicting ways in which men are portrayed and the messages that the sometimes one-dimensional male characters convey.

Another topic that will undoubtedly be the focus of future research is sexual violence—including rape, domestic abuse, incest, and child molestation. During the 2015 East German Summer Film Institute that sowed the seeds for this project, one breakout group discussed the paucity of discussions or depictions of domestic violence in the GDR. This is unlikely to point to an absence of such problems in socialist East Germany so much as to an avoidance or censoring of such topics in public forums. But with documentation showing high rates of alcoholism, divorce, and abortion, it would be surprising if there were no concomitant presence of domestic violence, sexual abuse, and suicide. While there are certainly hints of such social problems in late GDR works with the rape or attempted rape scenarios in Solo Sunny and Unser kurzes Leben which Larson Powell and Muriel Cormican discuss in their essays in this volume, as well as the spousal abuse in Bis daß der Tod euch scheidet, such representations appear to be the exception rather than the norm. The challenge for researchers interested in such topics is locating evidence
of their existence in a state where gender equality had purportedly been achieved and suggestions
to the contrary were repressed, as well as where reported data must usually be viewed with
skepticism. Research projects on sexual violence are likely to entail not only archival work and
in-depth sleuthing, but also decoding on behalf of the researcher.

Similar efforts are required to excavate the lived experiences of sexual minorities in the
GDR. The queer dimensions of East Germany remain among the least examined in academic and
non-academic work. The criminalization and persecution of sexual minorities, prohibition of
homosexual gatherings, and persistence of homophobia pushed queer desires and practices far
into the closet, where they remained invisible in public life and visual culture for most of East
Germany’s lifetime. Reading for their presence often involves reading against the grain, looking
for what remains unsaid or unseen, and engaging in archival research and ethnographic work.
Creech notes that, due to the “social taboos surrounding homosexuality in the GDR, it is
impossible to point to an explicitly gay or lesbian aesthetic in DEFA films.” A growing body of
scholarship, including the work of Jennifer Evans, Kyle Frackman, and Katrin Sieg, has
investigated the experiences and depictions of male homosexuality in the GDR, and the focus on
gay men makes sense in light of the visibility of the gay movement in the 1970s and especially
the 1980s as well as the male-centred legal prohibition of sexual activity. Interestingly, recent
Ringo Rösener and Markus Stein) and Out in Ost-Berlin: Lesben und Schwule in der DDR (Out
in East Berlin: Lesbians and Gay Men in the GDR, 2013, dir. Jochen Hick and Andreas
Strohfeldt)—have focused on telling the story of gay life in the GDR. These works still tend to
emphasize men’s experiences. Much less has been done on lesbian and bisexual desires.
Featuring a study of Gusner’s Alle meine Mädchen in conversation with Adrienne Rich’s notion
of the “lesbian continuum,” Creech’s book on GDR women’s films is notable for bringing together a production that appears to emphasize heterosexual coupling with feminist and queer methodologies for the purpose of excavating homosocial intimacy and female pleasure. An earlier documentary made in the wake of reunification takes a differently artistic approach and focuses exclusively on lesbian women—viel zu viel verschwiegen (We Held Too Much Back, 1992, dir. Anette von Zitzewitz and Chris Karstädt)—but has yet to be analyzed in depth by scholars.

More research is also needed on a wider range of gendered and sexual embodiments and practices beyond homosexuality. As Evan Torner’s chapter on bisexual polyamory in this volume shows, there are other facets of human gender and sexuality that are not captured by reductive heterosexual-homosexual and male-female binaries and that remain unexplored in GDR scholarship. An understanding of sexuality as fluid and mutable also underlies our choice of the word “queer” in describing desires and practices that are not explicitly or exclusively heterosexual. Such approaches can also be applied to constructions of gender, which, as Jennifer Creech and Sebastian Heiduschke reveal in their chapter, were shaped by changing scopic regimes that shifted the valences of embodied sexual power and agency. Muriel Cormican’s essay on ambivalent sexism further demonstrates how androgyny was to a certain extent necessary for women who strove to embody socialist ideals and deploys an analysis of gender fluidity to reveal how the empowerment of the female protagonist in Unser kurzes Leben also comes at the price of self-effacement. Torner’s and Cormican’s work here points to the possibilities for a better understanding of how gender and sexuality may have been experienced in East Germany when we look beyond normative, binary identity categories. Other gender embodiments and sexual practices that merit scholarly interest include transgender and
nonbinary gender embodiments, identifications, and experiences, as well as intersex, and asexuality, which have received little attention in the context of GDR culture and society.\textsuperscript{38} As Charlotte von Mahlsdorf’s memoir \textit{Ich bin meine eigene Frau} (I Am My Own Woman, 1992) and archival records indicate, transvestite and transgender identities did exist in the GDR, even if they are not commonly seen in its cultural texts.\textsuperscript{39} Of course, though these phenomena have received growing scholarly attention in other national contexts in recent years, scholars interested in these subjects may find it challenging to trace the existence of these identities and embodiments in East German visual culture, due to the lack of freedom of expression or a free market. Much archival work and oral history work will likely be necessary in order to research such topics.

We hope this volume will stimulate further discussion about sex, gender, and sexuality in the rich artistic and cultural life of East Germany. Analyses of sex and socialism, understood as intertwined systems of production and control, can provide abundant new insights into GDR history and society. The recent publication of scholarly works that are bound to become indispensable references in these areas, even in the short time since we began work on this anthology, points to the growing interest in investigating the nuances of \textit{real existierender Sozialismus} through the lenses of desire and embodied experiences.\textsuperscript{40} Indeed, such interest also indicates that the GDR remains an object of attraction and fascination to today’s researchers. If, as Thomas Brussig famously declared in his 2007 article “Aber der Sex war schöner” (But the Sex Was Better), there really was something special about sex in East Germany, then this subject will remain fertile ground for research for years to come.\textsuperscript{41}
1 For more information on the Summer Film Institute, including the program of the public film festival and a list of films, see the DEFA Film Library’s page at http://ecommerce.umass.edu/defa/sfi/6596.


3 Much of the debate about the GDR has been related to how to classify it, especially as a political entity. How one understands Herrschaft (domination) will naturally affect how one theorizes possibilities within and underneath it. For a discussion of the theoretical implications of studying everyday life under systems of domination, see Alf Lüdtke, ed., Herrschaft als soziale Praxis: historische und sozialanthropologische Studien (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991). The nomenclature for such systems has changed, for example by moving away from “totalitarianism,” as scholars have grappled with questions of just how “participatory” East German society actually was. As in other areas, possible responses to this will vary depending upon whether one assesses, for instance, archival sources or oral history narratives. Konrad Jarausch was a prominent and early advocate of moving beyond “uniformity,” the idea that the GDR (i.e., the SED) was all-powerful, calling it a “welfare dictatorship.” See Konrad H. Jarausch, “Beyond Uniformity: The Challenge of Historicizing the GDR,” in Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR, ed. Konrad H. Jarausch, trans. Eve Duffy (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), 3–14, as well as that volume’s other chapters. For later historiographic developments, see, for example, Mary Fulbrook, The People’s State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005); Fulbrook


8 Allan and Heiduschke, “Re-imagining,” 5–6. For more on post-1990 assessments of DEFA, see Marc Silberman and Henning Wrage, “Introduction. DEFA at the Crossroads: Remapping the Terrain,” in *DEFA at the Crossroads of East German and International Film Culture: A Companion*, ed. Marc Silberman and Henning Wrage (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), especially 9–

9 John Griffith Urang has discussed this phenomenon in relation to East German literature. Urang argues that, because of the state’s infrastructure for surveillance and censorship, texts could become joint creations: “In the system of censorship and self-censorship that ensured the state’s control of public discourse, all published texts were, to a degree, palimpsests” (170). Urang quotes author Brigitte Burmeister, who describes the mode of reading and writing as “conspiratorial,” very different from the kind of cultural production that takes place free of state intervention and control (171). John Griffith Urang, *Legal Tender: Love and Legitimacy in the East German Cultural Imagination* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010), 170–71. See also Brigitte Burmeister, *Anders, oder vom Aufenthalt in der Fremde* (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1988). For more on literary censorship, see the standard Simone Barck, Martina Langermann, and Siegfried Lokatis, eds., ‘Jedes Buch ein Abenteuer’: Zensur-System und literarische Öffentlichkeit in der DDR bis Ende der sechziger Jahre (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1998).


11 On the approval process for film productions, see Heiduschke, *East German Cinema*, 26–27.


14 For an examination of one of this period’s most controversial banned films in which a love affair leads to questions about the administration of justice in the GDR, see Stefan Soldovieri, “Censorship and the Law: The Case of Das Kaninchen bin ich (I am the Rabbit),” in DEFA: East German Cinema, ed. Seán Allan and John Sandford, 146–63.


17 Heiduschke, East German Cinema, 16.

18 Women filmmakers in other socialist Eastern Bloc states also struggled against institutionalized sexism and marginalization; see Dina Iordanova, Cinema of the Other Europe:
Even today, the work of female directors in East Germany remains an underexplored area. Jennifer L. Creech’s book *Mothers, Comrades, and Outcasts in East German Women’s Films* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016) is one of the few scholarly ventures that explores as many films directed by women as by men.


21 Allan, “Historical Overview,” 19.


Rinke, “From Models to Misfits,” 183.


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32 See, for instance, McLellan, Love, especially 60–64 and 77–81.

33 In a discussion of how one might go about researching domestic abuse, for instance, Dagmar Herzog, a 2015 Summer Film Institute participant, proposed that one could start with police reports of residential noise complaints, which might serve as indirect indices of domestic violence.

34 Creech, Mothers, Comrades, and Outcasts, 156.


36 Creech, * Mothers, Comrades, and Outcasts*, 141–93.


38 For more on research done in the GDR related to intervention (and “prevention”) in gender and sexuality, see, for example, Florian G. Mildenberger, “Socialist Eugenics and Homosexuality in the GDR: The Case of Günter Dörner,” in *After The History of Sexuality: German Genealogies with and beyond Foucault*, ed. Scott Spector, Helmut Puff, and Dagmar Herzog (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012), 216–30. Sonja Klocke examines research on transgender and intersex, including early work done in the GDR; see Klocke, *Inscription and Rebellion: Illness and the Symptomatic Body in East German Literature* (Rochester, NY:


40 See, for instance, Creech, *Mothers, Comrades, and Outcasts*; and Allan and Heiduschke, eds., *Re-imagining*.