

1997

Special Topics: The East German Cinema, Crossing German Borders: PostWar, PostWall, PostCommunist

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SYLLABI

Barton Byg
University of Massachusetts, Amherst

**Special Topics: The East German Cinema,
Crossing German Borders: PostWar, PostWall, PostCommunist**

Spring 1997

Description:

From the very first German film made after World War II, Staudte's *The Murderers are Among Us*, to the final cultural gestures of the vanishing German Democratic Republic in 1990, the films produced in the DEFA-Studios (formerly UFA) in Babelsberg played a fascinating and contradictory role. They tried with varying success to walk a tightrope between addressing the aspirations of the public and complying with the Stalinist prescriptions of the Socialist State. In the process they produced remarkable films: powerful anti-fascist films, treatments of everyday, working class life; investigations of conflicts between individual and society in Socialism; links to traditions of the avant-garde 1920s, the Neo-Realists and to the New Waves in Italy, France, and other Socialist countries.

Spring 1997 brings a unique opportunity to study a broad spectrum of East German films and their historical context, with the help of a collection being brought this year to the University's "DEFA Film Library." Films from all periods of the GDR will be represented, including many works available nowhere else outside Germany. The course will emphasize the anti-fascist tradition; the depiction of Jews in East German Cinema; the GDR as the repressed national "Other" in West German cinema (e.g. Sander's *Redupers* and Wenders' *Kings of the Road*); the connection to avant-garde, new wave, and documentary traditions. Authors emphasized will be Wolfgang Staudte, Frank Beyer, Konrad Wolf, Helke Misselwitz and Christa Wolf (as scriptwriter).

In the future, thanks to an agreement recently approved by the German government, UMass will serve as an academic partner to the cultural organizations holding world rights to this body of film history and will house a major archive and study center dedicated to the subject.

Conducted in English. Open to graduate students and advanced undergraduates.

Course materials:

Screenings

Reading packet

After the Wall: East Meets West in the New Berlin, by John Borneman. Basic Books, 1991.

A thin, loose-leaf folder for journal

Requirements:

participation in viewing, reading and discussion

regular, short film responses and journal entries

one presentation on an additional work (*Referat*)

final paper: 10-15 pages for undergraduates; 15-20 for graduates

Topics for discussion and/or student reports or papers:

Questions of national identity/cultural heritage (*Erbe-Debatte*)

The depiction of the Jews in East German cinema

Depictions of Nazism and anti-fascism, East and West

The relationship of artists/intellectuals to power

The "Bitterfelder Weg"

The GDR as the repressed national “Other” in West German cinema
(e.g. Sander’s *Redupers* and Wenders’s *Kings of the Road*)
Cold war depictions of the GDR and the Wall
(e.g. Disney’s *Escape to Freedom*; *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*)
Literary adaptations, e.g. *Goya*, *Lotte in Weimar*, *Addio piccola mia* (Büchner)
Comparison of literature and film
(by Christa Wolf, Ulrich Plenzdorf, Wolfgang Kohlhaase, Günther Rücker, Helga Schütz)
Comparison of styles:
UFA films of the 30s and 40s
Soviet Socialist Realism
Italian neo-realism
Avant-garde, new wave, and documentary traditions
Depictions of the events leading to the opening of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and since German unification
(comparison East and West)
Depictions of East Germany and Easterners since 1989
Depictions of women in GDR society
(*Sabine Wulff*, *Solo Sunny*, *Winter adé*, etc.,
or *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* and its Western feminist critics)
Wolfgang Staudte’s West German films and *Der Untertan*
The banned films of 1965
Heiner Carow’s *Die Russen kommen* as a parallel to *Ich war 19*
Long-Term Documentary: *Lebensläufe* (Cf. Michael Apted’s *7-Ups to 35-Ups*)
The films of Kurt Maetzig
Return from exile as theme in GDR film and literature

Screening/reading/writing schedule (sources of readings follow):

1. *The Promise* (Margarethe von Trotta, 1995)
Reading: Borneman (1-56); Byg, “German Unification”
2. *Nikolai Church* (Frank Beyer, 1995)
Reading: Borneman (57-129); Craig, “The Germans”
3. *Quiet Land* (Andreas Dresen, 1992)
Reading: Borneman (129 -149); Fox
4. *Winter adé* (Helke Misselwitz, 1988)
Reading: On identity: Howard and Krisch
on documentary: Silberman and Stone.
5. *Black Box* (Tamara Trampe/Johannes Feindt, Germany 1992)
6. *Locked Up Time* (Sibylle Schönemann, 1991)
Reading: (by now, Borneman 150 – 254)
7. *I was Nineteen* (Konrad Wolf, 1968)
Reading: Byg, “DEFA and Traditions;”
Silberman, “Authenticity” and “Konrad Wolf”
8. *The Murderers Are Among Us* (Wolfgang Staudte, 1946)
Reading: Byg, “Nazism as *femme fatale*;” Feinstein, first part
9. *Sun Seekers* (Konrad Wolf, 1957/72)
Reading: Good.
10. *Traces of the Stones* (Frank Beyer, 1966)
Reading: Byg, “What might have been;” Feinstein, Ch. 6
11. *The Break* (Frank Beyer, 1988)
Reading: Leonhard
12. Special double feature of cross-cultural influences: *Hiroshima mon amour* (Alain Resnais, 1959); *Divided Heaven* (Konrad Wolf, 1964)
Reading: Byg, “History, Mourning...”

1997 Reading Packet
“Crossing German Borders: PostWar, PostWall, PostCommunist

- Byg, Barton. “DEFA and the Traditions of International Cinema.” Ms. 1996.
- . “German Unification and the Cinema of the German Democratic Republic.” Ms. 1991.
- . “History, Mourning and Theories of Feminine Identity: *Der geteilte Himmel* and *Hiroshima mon amour*. Ms. [Pub. in shortened form as: “Geschichte, Trauer und weibliche Identität im Film: *Hiroshima mon amour* und *Der geteilte Himmel*. Trans. Thomas Nolden. *Zwischen gestern und morgen: Schriftstellerinnen der DDR aus amerikanischer Sicht*. Ed. Ute Brandes. Berlin: Peter Lang, 1992. 95-112.
- . “Nazism as *Femme Fatale*: Recuperations of Cinematic Masculinity in Post War Berlin.” Ms. 1997.
- . “What Might Have Been: DEFA Films of the Past and the Future of German Cinema.” *Cineaste* 17.4 (Summer 1990): 9-15.
- Craig, Gordon A. *The Germans*. New York: Meridian, 1991. 230-236.
- Feinstein, Joshua. *The Triumph of the Ordinary: Depictions of Daily Life in the East German Cinema 1956-1966*. Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1995. Excerpts.
- Fox, Thomas C. “Germanistik and GDR Studies: (Re)Reading a Censored Literature.” *Monatshefte* 85.3 (1993): 284-294.
- Good, Jennifer. “So begannen wir und wurden – Sonnensucher: Konrad Wolf’s Artistic Interpretation of GDR/USSR Relations.” Ms.
- Howard, Marc. “An East German Ethnicity? Understanding the New Division of Unified Germany.” *German Politics and Society* 13.4. (Winter 1995).
- Krisch, Henry. *The German Democratic Republic: The Search for Identity*. Boulder/London: Westview Press, 1985. 1-22, 129-145.
- Leonhard, Sigrun D. “Testing the Borders: East German Film Between Individualism and Social Commitment.” *Post New Wave Cinema in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe*, Ed. Daniel Goulding. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989. 51-101.
- Silberman, Marc. “The Authenticity of Autobiography: Konrad Wolf’s *I Was Nineteen*.” *German Cinema: Texts in Context*. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1995. 145-161+.
- . “Post-Wall Documentaries: New Images from a New Germany?” *Cinema Journal* 33.2 (Winter 1994): 22-41.
- . “Remembering History: The Filmmaker Konrad Wolf.” *New German Critique* 49 (Winter 1990): 163-191.
- Stone, Michelle. “Documentary and Subjectivity: Documentary Practice in Two Recent East German Films.” Ms. 1994.