Bridging Contradictions: Socialist Actresses and Star Culture in East Germany

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Bridging Contradictions: Socialist Actresses and Star Culture in East Germany

A Dissertation Presented

By

VICTORIA I. RIZO LENSJHN

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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German and Scandinavian Studies Languages, Literatures and Cultures
Bridging Contradictions: Socialist Actresses and Star Culture in East Germany

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DEDICATION

To Gary, for endless patience and support, and to Ralphie and Daisy, my loyal canine companions, my “co-authors” (they put in just as many hours as I did), and especially Daisy, my muse.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A project such as this spans years from beginning to end, and I have benefitted from the help of many people and institutions along the way. I am happy to have the opportunity to thank them here because their support made it all possible. First, I would like to thank my dissertation committee chair, Barton Byg, who encouraged me to pursue the topic, asked many critical questions, met with me often (even once a week during intensive writing periods!), and read numerous drafts of the manuscript. I would also like to thank my committee members, Skyler Arndt-Briggs and Jon Berndt Olsen, for their generosity of time and support, their careful reading of the manuscript, and the immensely helpful feedback they gave me as I made revisions and refined my arguments.

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Additionally, I would like to thank the institutions that made this project possible. I pursued graduate study at the University of Massachusetts Amherst because I wanted to do my graduate work with Barton Byg, Founding Director of the DEFA Film Library (DFL), and to work with DFL itself. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to do both. The experiences I had as a student, researcher, and employee of the library have had a deep and lasting impact on who I am as a professional. For this project, my research began at DFL, and the institution offered me support I have relied on for the duration. Thank you to Skyler Arndt-Briggs, Executive Director of DFL, for being my boss, my mentor, and my friend. I would especially like to thank Hiltrud Schultz, Production Manager, for her endless knowledge of DEFA and the generosity of her time over the years as a person of contact, an expert in this field, a colleague, and a friend.

I owe a debt of gratitude to several other institutions as well. Thank you to the DAAD (German Academic Exchange) for the financial support that allowed me to do invaluable archival research in Berlin and Potsdam, Germany as a DAAD Research Fellow. Thanks also goes to the Max Kade Foundation and the Graduate School at the University of Massachusetts Amherst for further financial support that made follow-up trips to the archives possible, and which helped me carve out some very precious writing time from what is always a demanding and sometimes fragmented schedule in academia. Thank you also to the Five College Women’s Studies Research Center (FCWSRC) in South Hadley, Massachusetts, where I spent two years as a Research Fellow, benefitting from having an office and private writing space, and the support and feedback of two groups of amazing feminist scholars from across the disciplines. Thank you especially to
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Rizo, both of whom I had to say good-bye to during my time as a PhD student. They were my unwavering support, and they always took time to ask questions, to help in any way they could, and to support my decisions, even when I made the confounding decision to pursue graduate study in (East) German culture. I miss them every day and I hope I have made them very proud. I am grateful to my step-mom, Maria Luisa Rizo, for her love and support, and to my mother-in-law, Claudia Grace, who spent this last academic year with us to help alleviate everyday responsibilities while I wrapped this project up. I am so glad to share my joy and success with my husband, Gary Lenshyn, who interrupted his own career to first move with me to Freiburg, Germany, and then to Massachusetts to start this adventure. He always knew if I needed a protein shake, a bar of chocolate, or just a pot of coffee to get through the day. But mostly, I am grateful to him for always believing I could do it and encouraging me to keep going and to get it done.

Finally, I have had two very faithful canine companions during all of this, Ralphie and Daisy. They have stayed up nights with me, watched over me adoringly, and in a way nobody else could, forced me to step away regularly to go for a walk, stretch my legs (and theirs), and clear my head. They helped with stress, self-doubt, and anxiety, and in the way dogs depend on their humans, always reminded me I needed to take care of those around me, too. But they have always, always brought me the utmost joy.

I cannot express the depth of my gratitude for all the love, help, support, and friendship I have had throughout this process. Though sitting down and writing a dissertation can be lonely and solitary work, it is actually the work of so many people. Again, thank you.
ABSTRACT
BRIDGING CONTRADICTIONS:
SOCIALIST ACTRESSES AND STAR CULTURE IN EAST GERMANY
SEPTEMBER 2018
VICTORIA I. RIZO LENSHYN, B.A., UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA, RENO
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Ph.D., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST
Directed by: Professor Barton Byg

In this dissertation, I argue that multiple stakeholders in East Germany (GDR)—the fans, artists, and state—adapted the star phenomenon to help validate GDR socialist culture at home and abroad, and to bridge seemingly contradictory elements within the dualistic context of the global Cold War: the individual and collective, the ordinary and extraordinary, idealism and reality, the past and present, tradition and progress, East and West. As public figures, GDR stars offered audiences multiple points of identification and helped the enlarged working class navigate its new dominant social position in GDR social life. Officially, stars offered an engaging performance of the “well-rounded” socialist personality through versatility, accessibility, and the values of work, community, and strength.

I present three case studies of female actresses who achieved film, television, and theater stardom in the 1960s-70s East Germany. In the first, “Jutta Hoffmann and the Dialectics of Happiness: A Socialist Star in Close Up,” I examine Hoffmann’s image of a youthful, white European, heterosexual woman as depicting a one-dimensional femininity. As a Brechtian actress, however, her dialectical performances initiated discussions among censors and fans about class conflict, sexual orientation, gender inequality, and sexual pleasure. In the second, “Angelica Domröse and the Politics of
Desire: More Than Just a Pretty Face,” I argue that her screen and stage performances bridged the fractured self, a symptom of split realities between the private and public in a society that declared an already achieved equality of the sexes and emancipation of the working class. As a sex icon, she engaged politics of desire that paralleled real-life desires for personal fulfillment, love, and health. In the third, “The People’s Actress and Comedienne Agnes Kraus: ‘An Original Berliner with Heart and Soul,’” I argue that Kraus’s stardom problematized intersecting social issues like the housing shortage, abortion, racial prejudices, gender disparities, and generational differences. Kraus broached difficult topics through a rather simplified comedic figure shaped by a seemingly simple genre. Rather than presenting ideological or individual shortcomings, she presented problems society must always endeavor to work through together.
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<tr>
<td>BArch</td>
<td>Bundesarchiv (German Federal Archive)</td>
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<td>BE</td>
<td>Berliner Ensemble</td>
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<td>DEFA</td>
<td>Deutsche Filmaktiengesellschaft</td>
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<tr>
<td>DFF</td>
<td>Deutsches Film und Fernsehen</td>
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<tr>
<td>FRG</td>
<td>Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDR</td>
<td>German Democratic Republic (East Germany)</td>
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<tr>
<td>HFF</td>
<td>Hochschule für Film und Fernsehen</td>
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<tr>
<td>SED</td>
<td>Sozialistische Einheitspartei</td>
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CHAPTER 1
STARDOM AND SOCIALISM: AN INTRODUCTION

1.1 Female Stars and the Socialist Personality in East Germany

In 1964, the German Democratic Republic’s (GDR, or East Germany) fan magazine *Filmspiegel* asked its readers, “Haben wir keine Stars?” to which it answered, “‘Ja’ sagen die einen – ‘Nein’ die anderen.” And then it offered, “Vielleicht hängt diese Meinungsverschiedenheit allein schon mit dem Wort ‘Star’ zusammen.”1 According to film scholar Christina Gledhill’s definition in *Stars: Industry of Desire*, a star is both “a signifying element” of mass culture and an artistic performer; more specifically, however, a star is “a product of capitalism and the ideology of individualism.”2 Gledhill gravitates toward the “hegemony of Hollywood”3 and therefore captures pervasive yet limiting notions of the star concept in both the popular imagination and scholarship.

This version of stardom, rooted in capitalist concepts of individualism, glamor, consumption, and scandal, was unsuitable for socialist East German society, however. By the early 1960s, the GDR press began debating the social, cultural and political potential of national star images.4 Star culture in the GDR placated audiences accustomed to a

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1 Horst W. Lukas, “Haben wir keine Stars?” *Filmspiegel*, no. 25 (1964): 6. Unless stated otherwise, all translations in this dissertation are mine. “Don’t we have any stars?” [...] “Yes,’ say some—‘No,’ say others. [...] Perhaps this difference of opinion has to do with the very word ‘Star’ itself.”
3 Ibid.
cultural scene steeped in celebrity theater and film personalities in the Weimar and the Nazi studio eras. As masters of their craft, trained under the tutelage of the socialist experiment, however, popular GDR actors were to renew the star concept for socialism, while rejecting the capitalist and fascist versions of it. The GDR thus worked to create and contain a cultural phenomenon that was in large part determined by the people—i.e., the fans—by structuring star culture through a socialist economy and inserting its own ideology into the concept, which artists, cultural officials, and audiences regularly negotiated. With women’s political and economic emancipation at the center of the GDR’s self-identity, female actors in the GDR were uniquely situated to help mediate this process.

In this dissertation, I argue that multiple stakeholders in the GDR—the fans, the artists, and the state (as represented by cultural officials, the industry, and the press)—adapted the phenomenon of the star to help validate East German socialist culture. In the process, the concept also helped bridge seemingly contradictory elements within the dualities of the global Cold War: the individual vs. the collective, the ordinary vs. the extraordinary, idealism vs. reality, the past vs. the present, tradition vs. progress, and East vs. West. Socialist star culture also responded to the ongoing presence of western cultural icons, especially when culture and people flowed relatively freely across the German-German border before the Berlin Wall was erected in 1961, but also as media continued to cross the border after the Wall was built. Furthermore, in developing and representing

itself as a nation, the GDR created a discourse for its emerging celebrity culture that was part and parcel of its attempts to promote its stars—and through them socialist culture—to audiences at home and abroad. From an official standpoint, a socialist star ultimately offered an engaging performance of the well-rounded “socialist personality,” embodying individual points of identification for socialist citizens and the ideology of the collective through the attributes of versatility, accessibility, and the values of work, community, perseverance, and strength.\(^5\)

Who were the stars who embodied the well-rounded “socialist personality”? What did this ideal socialist citizen look like and how did she behave? I will focus on female actors who achieved star status in the GDR, and by way of example, I have selected three for close study. The career of Jutta Hoffmann (b. 1941), Angelica Domröse (b. 1941), and Agnes Kraus (b. 1911-d. 1995) paralleled and contributed to the simultaneous development of an East German star culture and the ideology of the socialist personality through the 1960s and 1970s. Hoffmann and Domröse were educated in the GDR in the late 1950s–early 1960s, attending acting school at the Academy for Film and Television (HFF) in Potsdam-Babelsberg (today, “Konrad Wolf” Film University in Babelsberg) before joining Berlin theaters to further their training. Agnes Kraus was trained in

\(^5\) The “Gesetz über die Teilnahme der Jugend der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik an der Gestaltung der entwickelten sozialistischen Gesellschaft und über ihre allseitige Förderung in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik” (1974) denotes the privilege and duty of GDR youth to exercise their citizenship with full participation in socialist society, thereby gaining a well-developed socialist consciousness through education, labor, social, and cultural life. In particular, subsection V stressed the importance of the arts in supporting the East German young people’s “allseitig[e] Persönlichkeitsentwicklung” (well-rounded development of personality). See: *Verfassung der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik und Jugendgesetz* (Berlin: Staatsverlag der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 1985), 59.
Weimar Germany, working in theaters in Berlin and Munich during Nazi Germany, and moving to East Germany in the immediate postwar period, where she became a theater actress and a comedic television star.

Star discourse and gender discourses in the 1960s-70s GDR often found expression through genres concerned with everyday socialism: The Gegenwartsfilm (contemporary film) of the 1960s and the Alltagsfilm (everyday film) of the 1970s. While Agnes Kraus’s engagement with everyday socialism was channeled through comedy, Hoffmann and Domröse assumed different female types within the subgenre of the Frauenfilm (women’s film). As Erika Richter has explained, the unique genre of the “women’s film” in East Germany does not necessarily denote films made by women or even films for women. It was different from its counterpart in the capitalist West because of female emancipation in the socialist East. Indeed, women in the GDR experienced legal and economic parity above and beyond that of their western counterparts; but the mindset persisted that tied women to domestic and reproductive responsibilities while marginalizing other aspects of personal development such as sexual pleasure, desire, companionship, and personal dreams.

At the same time, women’s films placed female figures at the center of narratives to tell the story of individual struggle against an imbalanced system of power, implicitly drawing attention to classic relations between the ruling class and “ordinary” people. Thus, on one hand DEFA promoted the image of the emancipated woman, who was

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supposed to represent a “gender-neutral” position in the labor force, with whom both male and female audiences could identify because her concerns were those of the entire emancipated working class. On the other hand, the women’s films invited audiences into intimate spaces to explore the lived experience of those socialist ideals through a strong female character, using domestic settings, interior monologs exposing the protagonist’s private wishes, and camera, lighting, and editing techniques to highlight moments of emotional expression—even emotional excess. The actresses in this study brought their own unique styles to their films in the GDR, but their stardom is certainly framed by their respective genres, as they present the struggles inherent to emancipation in socialism and the actual social and individual process of becoming the ideal socialist personality.

Terms such as the socialist personality, woman, and socialist star each point to singular ideal concepts or archetypes; but Hoffmann, Domröse, and Kraus spoke to each one in very different ways as they performed generation, gender, and sexuality as components of the socialist citizen. Taken altogether the actresses offered a comprehensive depiction of the Frauenbild (image of women) in socialist East Germany. This image, as we will see, not only conveyed the ideology of the collective, but also varying political and social attitudes to the intersecting topics of gender, sexuality, nationality, race, and generation. If the function of a socialist star was to bridge contradictions in society, a female star’s fusion of those singular concepts as social ideals through her image and her performances demonstrates how she did it. On women and

9 Katrin Sieg points out that drama and protocol literature was able to “carve[e] out a female subject position that challenged the ostensibly gender-neutral concept of the socialist New Man, embodied by the worker-hero.” See Katrin Sieg, “Sex, Subjectivity, and Socialism: Feminist Discourses in East Germany,” *Genders* 22 (1995): 112.
motherhood, for example, Hoffmann’s young, sensible Margit in Der Dritte (Her Third, 1971) tries to set a role model for her daughters, while also fulfilling her own personal and sexual needs. In her iconic role as the overwrought young Paula, in Die Legende von Paul und Paula (The Legend of Paul and Paula, 1972), in contrast, Domröse effectively neglects her young children—e.g. leaving them home alone while she goes to meet Paul and sending them out alone to (fatally) cross a busy street when she and Paul fight—while chasing her own happiness. Finally, Agnes Kraus, as an older, unattached, asexual woman and without children in almost all of her roles, becomes a mother to everyone, or rather, Mutter der Nation (mother of the nation). Taken together, these actresses’ performances depict not opposing but interrelated experiences of motherhood, in which women had to balance the personal and the social—i.e., individual and collective goals for women and mothers in socialist society. These stars, thus offered performances of East German cultural and political ideology, as well as individualized and personalized embodiments of everyday experiences under socialism.

As for the Frauenbild concept, Hoffmann embodied a softer femininity, while Domröse was far more sexualized. One clear example of this is the different roles Hoffmann and Domröse were assigned in Die Nacht der Prominenten (The Night of the Celebrities, 1972-1987), an annual television event pairing GDR celebrities with members of the state circus.\(^\text{10}\) In its opening year, Hoffmann performs as an elephant

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\(^\text{10}\) This show parallels the popular West German show Stars in der Manege (1959-2008), which also aired annually and shortly before Christmas. In 1977, the American television network CBS started its own version entitled Circus of the Stars, which officially ended in 1994. This international development indicates how aware the GDR was of popular western productions, and it provides an example of how that international competition developed on a cultural level.
trainer and Domröse as a snake charmer. Hoffmann, wearing puffy clothes, herds the quietly majestic animals around the arena, while a bikini-clad Domröse controls three large snakes with a seductive dance, even stopping to kiss one of them. The example says plenty about the perceived and programmed entertainment value of these two women. Despite the contrast, both offered depictions of youth, beauty, gender, and sexuality that not only appealed to domestic audiences, but could also be exported to Western audiences at festivals and screenings. When we study these actresses together, we begin to see them falling on spectrums of womanhood and East German socialist star culture. Hoffmann represented a more homegrown East German concept of stardom—the *Publikumsliebling* (audience darling)—but her sweet girl-next-door type was also appealing to audiences beyond the GDR’s borders. Domröse was regularly and aggressively compared to Western mega-stars and sex icons, such as Brigitte Bardot, thereby aligning her with a parallel star culture that brought East German stardom in dialog with western stardom. In contrast to these two, Agnes Kraus was situated as a figure who seemed uniquely created for and by an East German public. As an older, matronly woman, Kraus’s stardom is not based on the ideals of beauty, vitality, fashion, or youth. Instead, her thick Berlin dialect and distinct humor characterized by the *Berliner Schnauze* (Berlin bluntness), appealed on a very basic level and created the effect of a popular figure emerging straight from the masses: Agnes Kraus was the GDR’s *Volksschauspielerin* (People’s Actress).

With a focus on socialist female stardom in East Germany during the height of the global Cold War in the 1960s-1970s, this interdisciplinary project makes contributions to three fields. First, I situate GDR cultural production and star culture historically and contemporaneously to study how it aimed to compete ideologically, economically, and
internationally. In doing so, the project is able to offer a counterpoint to the “dominant” paradigm” of Hollywood in defining the star concept through cultural values, economic structure, and method of analysis. In particular, the productive combination of performance studies and star studies expands beyond the semiotic approach and examines how socialist stars are not only seen by audiences and produced by socialist ideology and economy, but how they perform their stardom within that context both on- and offscreen. Because I forefront the contributions of female actors, my project expounds on the image of the emancipated woman in socialism, leaning on Kimberlé Crenshaws method of intersectionality to examine the intersecting positions of power and oppression in a society where gender equality was not an economic question but a socio-cultural one. Moreover, current scholarship on stars in East Germany, of which there is very little, focuses almost exclusively on male actors, thereby suggesting that star culture in the GDR was male. This project aims to redress that notion.

1.2 Bridging Contradictions in a Divided World

During the early 1960s, cultural officials, film critics, artists, and fans began a public and earnest debate in the GDR press about a socialist star culture and its usefulness for promoting socialism at home and abroad. As divided Germany quickly

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became the geographical center of Cold War politics, the GDR was quick to use cultural production to educate its citizens about the core ideologies of the state’s domestic and international identity: antifascism, socialism, progress, emancipation, and international peasant and working-class solidarity. The GDR struggled to gain international recognition, despite West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer’s Hallstein Doctrine (1955), which isolated East Germany by demanding that the global community recognize West Germany as the only legitimate German state. The escalating conflict between the two Germanies during the global Cold War reached a critical point with East Germany’s building of the Berlin Wall in 1961. Domestically, this brought restrictions: censorship of western culture and many western goods; cutting citizens off from family, friends, and income in the West; and, importantly, travel prohibitions. Not surprisingly, such a development made western culture, especially youth culture, all the more enticing to young East Germans.

The Wall nevertheless introduced a short period of liberalization in the East German arts. GDR cultural officials and film artists used the break from the constant influx of western popular culture to effect internal structural and aesthetic changes that resulted in a brief creative period in GDR cinema.¹³ Not only did many artists experiment with film form and content, but in response to audience demands for more entertainment the GDR expanded its use of popular genre cinema (such as romantic comedies, westerns, musicals, and the Alltagsfilme) and began the creation of a socialist star system.

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Though this brief period of liberalization marked the beginning of cultural and social change, the two-decade period under investigation in this study experienced uneven periods of ebb and flow in cultural policy that created alternating phases of liberalization and restrictions that shaped socialist art and artists. Significant ruptures during this nearly twenty-year period began with the erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961, but also included: the sweeping censorship after the SED’s 1965 Eleventh Plenum (known as the *Kahlschlag*), which resulted in the shelving of a whole year’s worth of film productions; the transition of power within the governing political party, the Socialist Unity Party (SED), from Walter Ulbricht to Erich Honecker in 1971; and the forced expatriation of the musician Wolf Biermann in 1976.

In November 1976, the folksinger Wolf Biermann was on tour in West Germany when the East German state revoked his citizenship as a result of Biermann’s public criticism of the East German state, especially regarding the state’s prohibitive cultural policies. In a matter of days, more than eighty prominent artists signed a petition urging the state to reconsider its actions against Biermann and protesting his exile, which they subsequently published in an international newspaper from Paris, after the GDR national newspaper, *Neues Deutschland*, refused to publish it. Despite the unified response by powerful public figures, the GDR state took punitive measures against its artists. In the years following Biermann’s expatriation, many artists were expelled from the Writers’ Union and from the SED Party, and they were blacklisted, faced expatriation themselves, or were given permission to leave the GDR.\(^\text{14}\) Included were actors Jutta Hoffmann and

Angelica Domröse, as well as some of their most popular male counterparts, such as
Manfred Krug and Armin Mueller-Stahl. While stardom developed and continued to
evolve for the duration of the GDR, this project follows this development only until this
significant cultural rupture of 1976, which irreversibly changed the East German cultural
landscape, including the star culture that had developed up to that point.
Returning to the media debate that began in the early 1960s, in August 1962, coauthors Manfred Freitag and Joachim Nestler began the discussion in Deutsche
Filmkunst, the journal for theoretical and formal innovations in socialist cinema, that
positive socialist heroes should: experience the types of conflict the public would relate
to, bridge the past and the present (which were also in conflict); and depict the dialectic
process as happening somewhere between the “I” and the “we.”15 Earlier that year, the
romantic comedy Auf der Sonnenseite (On the Sunnyside, dir. Ralf Kirsten) had been
released, becoming an instant hit and transformative for the career of the young actor
Manfred Krug. This semi-autobiographical film depicted the protagonist’s journey from
steel factory worker to amateur actor. When his socialist personality was shaped by good
working-class values and the collective experience of the brigade, the worker became an
actor, and Manfred Krug became a star. Through his performance this young socialist
hero depicts a story about the individual finding his place in the collective. Film critic
Fred Gehler published a review of the film in Deutsche Filmkunst, praising Krug’s
performance and the film as a particularly successful youth film: “Jung seine Schöpfer,

timeline of this document, from the letter’s inception and publication on November 1617, 1976 to the final added signatures on November 21, 1976, see also: “Über hundert
Unterschriften: Der offene Brief in Sachen Wolf Biermann,” Die Zeit (Hamburg),
November 21, 2012.
15
Freitag and Nestler, “Gedanken über positive Helden,” 309.
11


jung seine Helden, jung und frisch die Erzählweise.”¹⁶ Gehler commends *On the Sunny Side*—and Krug with it—as a film of its place and time, thereby showcasing a “sozialistisches Lebensgefühl” that included objectivity, irony, genuine romance, and the ability to dream.¹⁷

Stars in the GDR tackled contemporary issues in very different ways, but addressing them was part of the task facing the GDR’s heroes, both on- and offscreen. In 1968, the popular film magazine *Filmspiegel* asked three well-known DEFA actors—selected for their success in finding an “audience of millions” (*Millionenpublikum*)—about their notions of a cinematic hero, especially for the younger generation. Actor Armin Mueller-Stahl suggested a hero (reminiscent of Manfred Krug) who must “mehr singen und Gitarre spielen, er müßte die Sprache unserer Zeit sprechen und die Probleme der Jugend durchleben und bewältigen.”¹⁸ Klaus-Peter Thiele believed heroes were “Vollblut-Menschen [...] mit kleinen und großen Tugenden.”¹⁹ Finally, Eva-Maria Hagen simply identifies one of her own stage roles, Eliza in *My Fair Lady*, as the perfect model because of her “Menschwürde gegen die Arroganz der Männer.” For Eva-Maria Hagen, Eliza was a figure that stood for the “Gedanken der Gleichberechtigung.”²⁰

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¹⁷ Ibid. “socialist awareness of life”

¹⁸ “Wer ist ein Held,” *Filmspiegel*, no. 10 (1968): 4. “…sing more and play guitar; he should have to speak the language of our time and have lived through and conquered the problems of our youth.”

¹⁹ Ibid. “[Ein Held handelt sich] im Sinne eines kämpferischen Humanismus.” Heroes are: “full-blooded humans […] with small and great virtues.”

Films and their heroes had the multifarious task of demonstrating not only a balanced combination of charm and reality, but also speaking to the psychology of the individual in collective socialist society.\textsuperscript{21} This expectation of GDR cinema and its screen heroes continued to be debated throughout the 1960s. In 1969, a Filmspiegel article entitled “The Old and the New” reviewed important criteria for socialist cinema of that decade, with section headings such as useful, current, heroes, psychology of the people, enchantment, and reality. The article was reflecting on the needs of a new society, in which the working class, suddenly finding itself in a new position, turned to established institutions, including culture, to help them orient themselves. How do you dress? How do you behave? What does a socialist worker and mother look like? How does that change over time? If you’re struggling to succeed in this role, where do you turn, especially if there is no room in the official discourse for your struggle? In the throes of social change, stars are uniquely situated to model answers to such existential questions in their film roles.

To understand this claim, we can refer to the work of Edgar Morin, who identified “realistic, psychological, optimistic lines of force [that impacted] everyday affective life” in the United States as the specific context—including the cultural, political, economic and sociological phenomena—that led to the development of a powerful star culture in Hollywood in the 1930s.\textsuperscript{22} Sweeping and accelerated socio-economic changes in society led “to the psychological level of middle-class individuality,” i.e., “the middle-class

\textsuperscript{21} Günter Netzeband, “Das Alte und das Neue,” Filmspiegel, no. 3 (Feb 1968): 3-4.
personality.” For Morin, stars—or screen heroes—had a fundamental role: to help the new personality’s “affective assimilation” into this new class identity. He writes: “[O]f course these heroes remain heroes, i.e., models and mediators; but, by combining the exceptional and the ordinary, the ideal and the everyday, [they] ever more intimately and diversely permit their public to identify itself with them by means of certain increasingly realistic points of reference.”

In other words, the restructuring of the economic make-up of a society—in Morin’s case an enlarged middle class with “new needs and new leisure”—prompted individuals to turn to cultural phenomena, such as cinema, to help them navigate uncharted territory. Morin’s study connects the emergence of a star system with a new social order that suddenly and urgently created a need for the majority social class to find its character. It follows that any society’s process of identification—i.e., establishing its highest ideals—must be realized by aligning individual self-identification with that larger social goal; this is an emotional as much as a psychological process that films and stars are uniquely fit to mediate. The 1930’s “middle-class personality” in the capitalist USA describes a cultural ideological demand much like the “socialist personality” in the socialist GDR of the 1960s did for its enlarged working class.

1.3 The Dialectic of Stardom in Socialism

The very idea of socialist stardom is dialectical. While the state stood to benefit greatly from having national star images who could individualize everyday experiences

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23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
and private desires under socialism, such individualism also potentially threatened the cohesion of the collective. Having such popular public figures also came at great risk, as there was always the potential embarrassment of losing them if an actor fell out of favor with the state or decided to leave the GDR. To deal with the problematic nature of star culture as East German cinema strove to distinguish itself from capitalist filmmaking, including film industry practices of the Nazi cinema preceding it, the GDR applied a number of strategies to redefine the star concept. This included creating and controlling the public dialog around stars, repurposing historically effective strategies for creating a star industry—such as dispersing memorabilia and utilizing multimedia platforms—and outfitting it for ideological soundness via the socialist economy.

East German media developed a broad visual and lexical vocabulary to help shape the national conversation about socialism and celebrities. They used character types that given actors had come to embody such as Gojko Mitic’s Indianer and Agnes Kraus repeatedly playing straight parts and becoming typecast as a character of herself. In some cases, the media suggested an East German alternative to a well-established western star such as naming Angelica Domröse the DDR-Bardot. They also used word substitutes like Publikumsliebling (audience darling), Hauptdarsteller (lead actor), Held (hero) or the German word Filmstern (film star). In addition, the GDR media also frequently used the loan word star, especially to distinguish foreign from GDR stars,26 but also to incite debate and discussion about the phenomenon of East German celebrity culture. As Claudia Fellmer has shown, the German term “audience darling” was perhaps the most

26 See: “Stars ihres Landes,” Filmspiegel, no. 10 (May 1968): 18-19. This article introduced GDR readers to seven female stars from other East Bloc countries.
widely preferred label used by fans, actors, and cultural officials alike for designating and interpellating GDR star figures. The semantics of the expression “audience darling” illustrate well the powerful relationship between star and fan, the obvious target of socialist star culture. Fellmer explains that the term “ideally served the concept of egalitarianism” and therefore at least the appearance of audience access to its stars.  

Egalitarianism is something GDR stars embraced as well, often citing it as the number one reason the GDR did not actually have stars (and denying that they were one)—at least not in the sense of Hollywood stardom. In a 2003 interview with Gojko Mitić, the popular lead in the popular East German westerns, film historian Ralf Schenk asked him if he “sich je als Star gefühlt [hatte].” Mitić answered: “Nein, eigentlich nicht. Auf einer offizielen Seite gab es damals nicht so, dass man Stars haben soll, so wie es im Westen gab. […Aber] das Publikum war da und ich habe es gespürt.” Sharing a story about a casual encounter with a fan who addressed him rather informally (“Hey Gojko!”), Mitić explains that such familiarity was the greatest compliment: “Er hat mich betrachtet, als wäre ich einer von ihnen.” Indeed, in socialist cinema, an actor’s work represented his or her contribution of labor to the state, therefore framing the star as a peer with the working class.

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28 Ralf Schenk, Zeitzeugengespräch: Gojko Mitić (Berlin: à jour Film- und Fernsehproduktion GmbH, 2003), VHS, 0:29:30 – 0:31:37. Courtesy of defa-spektrum. Schenk: “Did you ever feel like a star?” Mitić: “No, not really. Officially, there weren’t supposed to be any stars back then, at least not like it was in the West. [… But] the audience was there, and I felt it.”
29 Ibid. “He saw me as one of them.”
In Mao Zedong’s socialist China, actors were in a parallel sense “film workers,” a term used “to emphasize filmmaking as a collective social practice.” Socialist stars were to offer easy points of identification for the working and farming classes because they were to identify as workers themselves; as a result, they should appear accessible and familiar, rather than set apart. Of course, in his interview Schenk responds to Mitić’s assertion by asking about the privileges he enjoyed as a star in the GDR, such as expediting a vehicle purchase, finding housing, and the coveted permission to travel—questions that asked Mitić to reflect on the ways his lifestyle was, indeed, apart from the lives of “one of them.”

The goals of egalitarianism and familiarity complicated the careers of women actresses as well. For example, the media seemed to struggle on an interpersonal level with Jutta Hoffmann, who they often lamented as behaving aloof and therefore inaccessible; however, as I argue in chapter one, Hoffmann was also depicted as the GDR’s own girl-next-door. The combination gave her combined public image as star, actress, and character a simultaneously enigmatic yet familiar and sympathetic slant—in other words, Hoffman’s strength was to appear extraordinarily ordinary. On the other end of the spectrum was Agnes Kraus, whose public image was practically inseparable from Kraus the person. She was someone audiences imagined sitting down with to enjoy

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30 Farquhar and Zhang, *Chinese Film Stars*, 8.
a cup of coffee; indeed, as a regular TV star throughout the 1970s, audiences happily enjoyed Kraus’s presence in their very homes.

In addition to creating and controlling the public dialogue around socialist stardom, GDR media also employed historically effective means for creating star figures. Multimedia platforms played a major role in fan culture, allowing a celebrity to operate seamlessly across media and gain widespread coverage in a kind of “cumulative” popularity, a strategy in use since the early stages of theater stardom in Europe.\(^3\) This is an element of star culture that other scholars have identified as inherent to well-established star systems such as those in Hollywood and Weimar cinema, as well as Austrian and German theater preceding it. Edgar Morin meticulously quantifies the cost and magnitude of cross-media promotion of Hollywood stars in the 1950s, looking at salaries, news coverage, and star presence in media such as radio.\(^3\) Film studies scholar Richard Dyer likewise defines stars as ideological and “intertextual construct[s] produced across a range of media and cultural practices.”\(^3\)

In the GDR, interviews, the close-up (such as those used in publicity photos), caricatures, and the proliferation of an actor’s autograph were also used to abstract and individualize, as well as market stars. Affordable collectibles such as posters, star postcards, *Künstlerportraits* (2-page inserts featuring brief biographical information and

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33 Morin, *The Stars*, 6. Mega stars outearned producers; Hollywood news required a whole army of correspondents, sending out an estimated 100,000 words a day (the third largest information source in America); and since the 1930s, stars had dominated radio as well, (an estimated 90% of radio programming).

an artist’s filmography), film programs distributed at screenings, and the fan magazines *Filmspiegel* (1954-1991) and its television counterpart *FF dabei* (1969-1996)\(^{35}\) demonstrated the industry’s response to popular demand for such commodities. This was true even as the industry sought to encode social meaning within such personal pleasures, as it did in the preface to the 1977 release of a film star calendar: “Film […] can serve distraction, lies and confusion of thought and emotions – and it can make people more intelligent, more sensitive, courageous and honest. There is no need to state which of these tendencies corresponds to the humanist ideal and reality of our socialist life.”\(^{36}\) The calendar was a form of material culture aiming to educate GDR audiences while it offered them both a “freely chosen role model” and personal enjoyment.\(^{37}\) Such collectibles reveal another element of the industry’s intentions: to simultaneously concede ground to the demands of “popular culture [and to] legitimize cinema as high culture.” The film program brochure was modeled on the theater programs and provided a piece of memorabilia that connected the cinema-going experience in the GDR to the theater.\(^{38}\)

\(^{35}\) FF dabei was previously known as *Der Rundfunk*, which ran from 1946-1969.


\(^{37}\) Ibid.

\(^{38}\) Ibid.
1.4 Masters of their Craft: Theater and Socialist Stars

Film studies scholars Knut Hickethier and Joseph Garncarz\(^{39}\) look at the historic role of European theater to offer an alternative origin story for star systems as they developed in Europe. Hickethier has traced the early history of stardom in Austria and Germany to the 19th-century European theater concept of the “virtuoso,” which legitimated a star’s popularity through his or her mastery of an artistic craft.\(^{40}\) Garncarz identifies these early origins as the birthplace of the film star culture that flourished in Weimar Germany.\(^{41}\) Hickethier’s history of the virtuoso as theater star describes a person, “die durch ihre körperliche Präsenz, ihr Auftreten, ihre Gestik und Mimik nicht nur eine Rolle glaubhaft verkörpern kann, sondern darüber hinaus auch noch ein Publikum zu faszinieren und auf seine Person zu fixieren weiß.”\(^{42}\) This definition is similar to the one offered in a *Filmspiegel* article of 1964, in which film critic Horst Lukas tried to differentiate the East German from the capitalist version of stardom: “Bei uns dominiert das Können, die künstlerische Leistung – die Zuneigung, die man beim Publikum gewinnt durch das eigene Wesen, die natürliche, sympathische Art.”\(^{43}\) Predating the word “star,” theater terms such as *Bühnenhelden* (stage heroes) were used to describe an actor’s extraordinary presence and popularity. The GDR’s use of alternative words such as “hero” and


\(^{40}\) Knut Hickethier, “Vom Theaterstar zum Filmstar,” 30-1.

\(^{41}\) Garncarz, “The Star System in Weimar Cinema,” 123.


\(^{43}\) Lukas, “Haben wir keine Stars?,” 6. “Stardom in our country is different from what is normal in the capitalist film industry. […] With us it’s about ability, the artistic performance—the affection that one wins with an audience through his own being, the natural and personable kind.”
“audience darling” may also be understood as lexigraphical links to this European theater heritage that predated the creation of the word “star” in Hollywood.

Hickethier’s and Garncarz’s studies help us understand the GDR’s own cultural connection to European theater and stars in the performing arts, especially as it strove to distance itself from the more Hollywood-centric histories. In his study of early Hollywood stardom in the 1930s, French philosopher and sociologist Edgar Morin disavowed the historic popularity of theater stars for the Hollywood system: “a stage actor has never become a star to this degree, has never been able to play so important a role within and beyond the spectacle. […] the movies have invented and revealed the star.”

In Richard de Cordova uncovers in *Picture Personalities: The Emergence of the Star System in America*, he identifies two key tendencies underlying the American star system in 1907. First, emerging “discursive” practices in the press functioned as an intertextual platform for creating a star’s public persona; second, the media discourse differentiated modes of production between film and stage acting. Critics deduced that what was particular to film was determined primarily by the framing component of the camera, and the difference “between posing and acting”: “[I]n photography the pose is, in a sense, the limit of the body’s complicity with the act of representation. […] as Barthes has noted, in posing one transforms oneself in advance into an image.”

Though the debates in the GDR certainly created a hierarchical valuation of stage vs. screen acting, the work of actors was organized so that East German actors had to be able to do both, creating a more symbiotic relationship between the two performing art forms. The

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divergent histories between Hollywood—as the prototypical capitalist movie system—and earlier European theater star cultures, help illuminate a fundamental aspect of East German stardom. GDR stars were able—indeed, expected—to tap into Germany’s historical predisposition towards “high-culture” and the cultural superiority of theater that persisted even as film and television gained ground.46

Nevertheless, some of the early developments described by de Cordova’s study were also found in the GDR’s state-owned film industry, including the role of the press in providing a platform for fans to encounter their stars, and a vertical power struggle between the studio and actors over their image. DeCordova’s history reveals messy internal struggles in which actors, afraid of losing credibility in association with a “lower” art form like film, sought a new kind of credibility in cinema, while producers were afraid of conceding power to actors who stood to gain financially by reaching stardom.47 De Cordova argues that the star system emerged as a dual effort made by the film industry and the press, using a multi-media platform to feed audience demands to know their screen icons and create a sense of public access to the stars’ private lives as “a new site of knowledge and truth.”48 In the GDR, in contrast, the stars’ private lives, which potentially exposed stars to very public narratives of scandal, were patently off limits.

The sense of egalitarianism and familiarity developed around GDR stars was, therefore, as carefully constructed for socialist audiences as the belief among fans in

47 deCordova, Picture Personalities, 5-6.
48 deCordova, Picture Personalities, 98.
capitalist societies that they had access to the private lives and “real” personalities of their own stars. For example, stories were circulated around Agnes Kraus in which it was difficult to disentangle myth and reality: the press repeatedly printed the story of people approaching Kraus on the street and inviting her to coffee, and in 1975, the national paper, the Wochenpost, ran a piece allegedly set in Kraus’s own kitchen about cooking being her favorite leisure activity, and published four of her favorite recipes. In lieu of capitalist spectacle and intrigue around the inevitable scandal once a star was revealed to be a flawed hero, the GDR redirected the public’s attention to a star’s gainful employment and therefore the work and cultural legitimacy that s/he gained through rigorous training for both screen and stage. Many theater practices identified by Hickethier (19th-century theater) and Garncarz (Weimar Germany) would be interpreted in the GDR through the lens of socialism to structure and define the star culture that developed in East Germany.

From the start, GDR theaters recruited some of Weimar Germany’s leading directors and artists, who dominated the (mostly Berlin) theater scene in the postwar period and established East German theater as a cultural practice committed to “world peace, democratic renewal and social justice, regardless of what [methodological] tradition its

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members came from or what artistic theories they held.” Brecht’s “objective” epic theater and Stanislavsky’s more “subjective” method acting were the primary theories and practices in GDR theater, and the Berlin theaters directors and their ensembles represented this range: Wolfgang Langhoff (1901-66) returned from exile to lead the Deutsches Theater (1946-63) with a prominent ensemble, including actors Ernst Busch, Horst Drinda, Käthe Reichel and Inge Keller. Fritz Wisten (1880-1962), who ran the Jüdisches Theater in Nazi Berlin until the Nazis closed it in 1941, and spent the rest of the war years in forced labor in Berlin, became the director of the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm in 1946, before restarting the Volksbühne Berlin in 1954. Bertolt Brecht returned from exile with his wife Helene Weigel and founded the Berliner Ensemble in 1949, moving the ensemble from the Deutsches Theater house to the historic Theater am Schiffbauerdamm in 1954. Under their leadership, it became the renowned Brechtian theater with an ensemble that included Erich Engel, Manfred Wekwerth, Peter Palitzsch, and Paul Dessau.

All three of the actresses in this study were at one time engaged with the Berliner Ensemble and trained as Brechtian actresses, though Domröse and Hoffmann both moved on to other theaters, such as the Volksbühne, the Maxim-Gorki-Theater (named after the

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52 Sabine Hake, “Public Figures, Political Symbols, Popular ‘Stars’: Actors in DEFA Cinema and Beyond,” in *DEFA at the Crossroads of East German and International Film Culture* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2014), 206.
Soviet author and dedicated to Russian and Soviet theater), and the Deutsches Theater.

Despite the popular dictum, attributed to Vladimir Lenin, that “of all the arts, cinema is the most important” for educating the masses,\textsuperscript{56} theater, as a centralized institution in East Germany, also created a productive connection between regional identities and the larger national and ideological agenda conveyed by film and television. Though this dissertation focuses almost exclusively on the film and television performances of three GDR actresses, the East German theater was at the heart of their development as performing artists and stars, their work and labor, as well as how their audiences received them as well.

1.5 An Actor’s Work: Economic Considerations

An actor’s work was mostly organized by individual directors and managed through the central casting department. The casting department in the GDR was modeled on the system used in Weimar Germany, which, in turn, was modeled on the successful Hollywood casting system to the extent that casting offices gathered and stored information about actors onto profile cards for quick reference. However, all actors in the GDR registered their relevant personal information (i.e., given name, artist’s name, age, sex, and physical features), and their talents, including linguistic ability and performance styles, with the state-run casting department, instead of with independent studios that contracted their talents on the competitive market. At last count, before German reunification and the dismantling of the DEFA studios and the East German cultural scene, there were around 3,000 registered actors in East Germany, with about one fourth

of them working freelance. That means that the majority of the actors in the GDR had permanent employment, usually theater engagements, but also with East German television (DFF) or DEFA—and when a second venue wished to cast them, the director asking for them had to negotiate with their employer via the casting department for permission to cast them in their film.\(^{57}\) This often meant that DFF and DEFA were often in negotiations with theater directors. If East German television shot 200 productions a year, the 3,000 actors were barely enough to meet demand. This simultaneous demand for film, television, and theater undoubtedly impacted film production as well. DEFA produced about 15-20 films a year.\(^{58}\)

The limited availability of actors in the GDR meant that those actors most in demand had to work on different productions simultaneously. Since the actor’s work was in high demand, a very popular actor was able to gain negotiating power. Though directors may have acted largely in the role of “agents,” actors could also promote themselves. Examples here include Angelica Domröse negotiating with director Heiner Carow to play the leading role in *Jeder hat seine Geschichte* (*Everybody Has Their Own Story*, 1965), which Carow had originally imagined splitting between Domröse and Jutta Hoffmann. Hoffmann also exercised her cultural capital as a celebrity figure within socialism by carefully selecting her roles and then performing them according to her own interpretation. For example, she turned down the leading female part in Frank Beyer’s


Spur der Steine (*Trace of Stones*, 1965) to instead play the heroine in Hermann Zschoche’s *Karla* (*Carla*, 1965), and there are several examples of Hoffmann insisting on her interpretation of a role—either through persuasion in discussions with the director, or by standing up to cultural officials when they condemned her performance as not being ideologically sound. Examples of this include Hoffmann’s realization of her white-collar “Little Lamb” character in *Kleiner Mann – was nun?* (*Little Man, What Now?*, 1967), despite facing the possibility of censorship for failing to present an unequivocally proletarian heroine; and her collaboration with director Egon Günther in *Her Third* (1971) in creating Margit, who was not confined by the generic limitations of socialist realism.

Directors and scriptwriters often had a specific actor in mind and could petition for an increased salary if the argument could be made that an actor’s professional experience warranted it. The way casting and salaries were handled illustrates well how GDR star culture developed in an entirely different economic system from capitalism. It meant, among other things, that stars were not pawns to be used in an economic power struggle between competing studio systems trying to gain the upper hand. Certainly, stars in the GDR, like stars in capitalist systems, represented a kind of currency for the cultural industry; but while “stars were acknowledged in contributing to the success of a given project, […] revenue figures [for film productions] were not taken into account.”

59 The production files, correspondence, and contracts housed at the Federal Archives at Lichterfelder reveal this process. For example, multiple sources related to the production of the film *Effi Briest* (dir. Wolfgang Luderer, 1972) demonstrate the process of negotiation, casting, and salary decisions. See, for example: “Vertragsaufgaben: Angelica Domröse” (BArch DR117 / 34885 51 M 3 15 47); “Besetzungsabteilung: Effi Briest” (BArch DR117 / 30487 51 M 3 15 41); “Effi Briest Briefwechsel, Effi Briest” (BArch DR117 / 32905 51 M 3 15 45). Courtesy of the Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde.
meanst that “professional experience or political merits” were the key criteria for salary increases, rather than the ability of a star to guarantee the success of a film at the box office.⁶⁰ This shift away from an economic dependence on stars at the box office is a stark contrast from capitalist star systems. Morin, describing Hollywood, writes, “the star is the most precious and therefore the costliest substance.” He goes on to explain that the star’s value was heightened after 1948, when television became a major competitor for cinema: “Certain directors are free to choose their stars; they are practically never free not to choose stars. Whether in films determined by the star or in films of which the star determines only the success, the star plays an essential role, at least in the capitalist atmosphere of the film world.”

That the star alone could carry the film would certainly be overstating the star’s role in the GDR. A centralized casting department and the significantly smaller pool of actors to draw upon controlled this competitive aspect significantly. Furthermore, fans did not describe films as a “Domröse-, Bürger- oder Bodenstein-Film. […]” like audiences had in the Weimar period (e.g Hans-Albers-Film or Heinz-Rühmann-Lacherfolg),⁶² or in the United States. Most importantly, socialist ideology did not condone the use of stars to promote or advertise brands or to encourage product consumption, as they did in the capitalist west.

⁶¹ Morin, The Stars, 6.
Acting in the GDR was considered an “erlernendes Handwerk,” and an actor’s Tagesgage (daily rate) was determined by the central casting department and was based on his or her professional training and years of experience. For actors who had permanent engagements, they earned a daily rate on top of their main salary, but for freelance actors, they relied on the daily rate. Rate increases were also justified for any extra skills obtained as necessary for doing the job. For example, Domröse learned horseback riding to film Effi Briest (1970) and was compensated for it. 

Stardom was thus not directly correlated to capital gain—neither for the film, nor the actor. Instead, acting was perceived as labor and a finely-honed skill; like all workers in the GDR, the actor’s work on set or stage was his/her labor contribution to the state, for which s/he was duly compensated.

Acting school lasted three to four years, but many chose to go into theater after graduation to gain professional experience. The salary range for any given actor on a film set could range from 40-75 Marks to 800-1000 Marks per day—the latter being a remarkable salary in the GDR, indicating that actors could, indeed, achieve upward socio-economic mobility through their career choice. An actor’s total income for a production was determined by the number of days the actor was on set. This means, however, that the actor earning 1000 Marks per day was not necessarily the largest

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65 These numbers were averaged from a selection of budgeting documents housed at the Federal Archives at Berlin-Lichterfelde. See also: Fellmer, “Chapter 3 Economics of Production and Consumption,” PhD diss., (2002).
grossing actor in the film; another actor making less per day could still out-earn the highest paid actor if s/he had a more central or leading role. It was nevertheless not uncommon for stars in the GDR to take supporting roles. For example, Angelica Domröse played supporting roles in two all-star cast TV mini-series, *Wege über Land* (*Ways Across the Country*, dir. Helmut Sakowski, 1968) and *Daniel Druskat* (dir. Lothar Belag, 1976). She was reluctant to accept the bit part for *Daniel Druskat*, but her husband at the time, the Czech actor Jiří Vršťala, reminded her of the relatively small pool of actors to fill the GDR’s film and television productions: “Kanten muss man spielen.” In her autobiography, Domröse acknowledged the truth of his statement, “Und wirklich, die Großen des kleinen Landes spielten alle mit: Krug, Thate, Norbert Christian, Angelika Waller, Ursula Karusseit. Alle an der Kante.”

The shortage of actors also meant that most were often working at two venues at once. “Small geographical distances between studio and stage, a mode of employment which had never clearly separated theatre and cinema, and also a shortage of suitable actors in the GDR kept the intermingling of stage and screen alive.” However, in some instances the different needs and artistic philosophies of both venues sometimes worked against each other. For example, GDR television’s need for a star performer in a winning film genre worked in direct opposition to the mission of the famous Brechtian theater that

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66 “Besetzungsabteilung: Effi Briest” (BArch DR117 / 30487 51 M 3 15 41); “Besetzungsabteilung: Der Dritte” (BArch DR117 / 30546 51 M 3 15 41); Vertragsaufgaben: Angelica Domröse” (BArch DR117 / 34885 51 M 3 15 47). Courtesy of the Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde.
67 Angelica Domröse, *Ich fange mich selbst ein: Mein Leben* (Köln: Gustav Lübbe Verlag, 2003), 213. “You have to play minor roles.” “And really, the great ones in the small country all played along: Krug, Thate, Norbert Christian, Angelika Waller, Ursula Karusseit. Everyone played minor roles.”
68 Fellmer, “PhD diss.,” 31.
engaged Domröse. When she began performing at the Berliner Ensemble in 1961, she had already enjoyed enormous success with audiences in three leading roles in romantic comedies for film and television.\textsuperscript{69} In 2001, German film historian Ralf Schenk interviewed Domröse and asked, “Wie war das, Star zu sein in einem Land, das die Starkult so gut wie wenig haben wollte?”\textsuperscript{70} Domröse replied:

\begin{quote}
Ich [war] so jung, […] und jeden Abend bei jeder Probe sah ich das alles nicht so klar. Dann kam ich aus dem Theater raus, und da war riesengroß mein Name. […] Es war einerseits eine gewisse Popularität zu haben, andererseits auf der Bühne schmerzhaft zu merken, was ich alles noch nicht konnte. Ich weiß nicht, wie ich die Frage beantworten soll.\textsuperscript{71}
\end{quote}

The posters that she refers to were promoting her first, highly successful television role—aired in East and West Germany—as Irene Sauer in the romantic comedy \textit{Papas neue Freundin} (\textit{Dad’s New Girlfriend}, dir. Georg Leopold, 1960). She filmed this light-hearted entertainment piece parallel to starting at the Berliner Ensemble, and then followed up immediately with two equally popular sequels. These successes followed on the unexpected popularity of her first cinema role in \textit{Verwirrung der Liebe} (\textit{Love’s Confusion}, dir. Slatan Dudow, 1958), which Domröse had shot as a lay actress at 18, with no formal training.

\textsuperscript{69} Before graduating from acting school, Domröse had leading roles in three romantic comedies, two films (DEFA) and the first part of a television trilogy (Deutscher Fernsehfunk, DFF): \textit{Verwirrung der Liebe} (\textit{Love’s Confusion}), DEFA, 1959; \textit{Die Liebe und der Co-Pilot} (\textit{Love and the Co-Pilot}), DEFA, 1960; \textit{Papas neue Freundin} (\textit{Dad’s New Girlfriend}), DFF, 1960.

\textsuperscript{70} Ralf Schenk, \textit{Zeitzeugengespräch: Angelica Domröse} (Berlin: à jour Film- und Fernsehproduktion GmbH, 2001), VHS. Courtesy of the DEFA-Stiftung. “What was it like to be a star in a country that pretty much didn’t want a star culture?”

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid. “I was so young […], I didn’t really see it all so clearly. Every night I came out of the theater, and there was my name… enormous. […] On the one hand, it meant having a certain popularity; on the other hand, it meant a painful recognition of how much I still couldn’t do on stage. I don’t know how I should answer the question.”
Domröse’s instant celebrity status following these early performances and before completing her schooling and professional training indicates a popular demand for stars in the GDR, but her story also illustrates well the GDR’s problematic relationship with star culture. A star could offer audiences a beauty icon to admire or emulate, someone who is entertaining and funny, a figure offering different points of identification, or a worthy cultural product to proudly claim as their own. Nevertheless, Domröse’s seemingly unfounded popularity with GDR audiences seemed to threaten her future as a serious actress in the performing arts—an actress who had learned her trade—earning her nicknames like “Miss Titelfoto” (“Miss Cover Shot”) and ultimately prompting the Berliner Ensemble management to ask her to leave. Those supersized posters hanging outside the theater signified the outsized popularity of this novice actress in a developing socialist culture that was in the process of defining its own cultural ideology based on labor, training, and hard work. Her position was especially problematic for colleagues at the most renowned Brechtian theater in the world, where Brecht’s theory of performance clearly advised against cultivating star performers. For Brecht, acting is developed (and problems are solved) in conjunction with other actors; no actor (and no person) is “a single social unit” because people develop in a society in the company of other people.

In Domröse’s autobiography, she later deduced that the official decision to allow her stardom at that early stage was precisely because she represented “eine Hoffnung des sozialistischen Filmwesens […] und man [muss] es den Hoffnungen des Sozialismus nun

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72 Domröse, *Ich fange mich selbst ein*, 149.
73 Ibid., 131.
mal nachsehen, wenn sie Lust haben, im Kapitalismus auszusteigen.” This statement clarifies her position throughout her GDR career in support of a socialist star culture, which located her squarely within the public debate. In a 1972 interview with the East German daily paper, the Berliner Zeitung—the year of her enormously successful Paula role in Heiner Carow’s The Legend of Paul and Paula—Domröse asserted: “Und wenn Sie mich jetzt fragen, ob wir Stars brauchen, sage ich: Ja! Doch da gibt’s auch gleich wieder einen wunden Punkt. Mitunter meint immer noch irgendwer, ein profilierter Darsteller garantiere in jedem Fall für Publikumserfolg.” Domröse understood that stardom would allow East German film to compete both socially and economically with capitalist cinema. This strategy for exporting GDR film and television culture is apparent in both the development of stars like Domröse, and the parallel development of popular genres like the romantic comedies she started out in.

1.6 Star Studies and the GDR

The challenges GDR cultural officials and German Studies scholars alike have faced in expanding the concept of stardom to socialism are similar to the challenges faced by star studies scholars in stretching scholarship beyond the well-known and pervasive Hollywood model. With very few exceptions, star studies continues to offer what amounts to variations on a theme, unable to disentangle the study of stardom from the

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75 Domröse, Ich fange mich selbst ein, 93. “hope of socialist filmmaking [...] and you have to look to the hope of socialism, if you want to opt out of capitalism.”

76 Gisela Herrmann, “Ein Wörtchen mitreden wollen. BZ sprach mit Angelica Domröse.” Berliner Zeitung (Berlin), March 15, 1972. “And if you ask me now if we need stars, then I say yes! But then again that’s a sore topic. With that is meant someone who can guarantee success with audiences every time.”
“dominant paradigm” of Hollywood. Early essays, such as Roland Barthes’s *The Face of Garbo*, have waxed poetic to capture a star’s allure and point to it as the root cause of an audience’s “plunge […] into the deepest ecstasy.” They identify in such iconic images a fundamental paradox that star studies continues to attempt to unravel: the specificity and individualism of the star and the star’s seemingly universal appeal and larger-than-life presence in the public imagination. Others, like Graeme Turner and Richard Dyer, have studied “the economy of celebrity” from the basic understanding that “celebrities are developed to make money.” Still others have offered definitions and proposed methodologies for the analysis of a star’s cultural and social meaning; the foremost text here is Richard Dyer’s seminal book *Stars* (1979), in which he applies a semiotic approach to examining stars as ideological texts. Alternatively, Edgar Morin’s earlier book *The Stars* (1957) offered a different approach, describing stars instead as “mediators” between an audience’s imaginary and the real; thus, stars merge the verisimilitude of cinema with fantasy. This is one of the only early working definitions that allows analysis of the performativity of stardom itself.

Each of the early studies discussed above approaches stars as signifying elements of a nation’s cinematic and popular culture. But they exclusively discuss stars as symbols that are created, commodified, and consumed in a capitalist system, meaning that their

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78 Ibid., 262.  
value is regulated for profit by private individuals or individual entities, such as studios, producers, or agents. In this context, star cultures have thus been analyzed as either producing products whose importance relies on supply (e.g., Hollywood system) and demand (fans), or, according to Morin, a mutually beneficial system of supply and demand between the film and press industries. Such a definition, of course, does not take into account the autonomy of the actor him- or herself. It does not ask how actors perform their stardom, both on and off-screen. It does not consider the artistic essence of an actor’s craft as part of the pleasure and desire that sustains star systems. And it does not query how stars not only embody an idealized way of being (beautiful, rich, extraordinary), but also offer different points of identification to appeal to diverse audiences. This last attribute is what opens up a star’s reception to subversive readings that are often outside of the studio’s, producer’s, or even media’s control. Zarah Leander’s queer appeal during and after Nazi Germany to a gay and lesbian fan base is an example here.\textsuperscript{82}

A recent project in star studies us useful here. Sabrina Qiong Yu’s and Austin Guy’s \textit{Performing Stardom: Star Studies in Transformation and Expansion} (2017) proposes that studies in stardom should include analysis of the “star as performer with a specific skill set and repertoire that s/he applies in both the onscreen and offscreen appearances.”\textsuperscript{83} Their project presents fourteen new case studies of stars from around the

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world that look at the performativity of stardom as what the editors call “masquerade, easily put on, changed and manipulated by the industry, but also by stars and audiences.” Their categories of investigation include: ethnicity as masquerade; ageing as masquerade; appearance as masquerade; acting as masquerade; and camp as masquerade.\(^8^4\) The agency this definition gives to performers, industry professionals, and audiences alike recognizes the meaning-making of star figures from all angles, even if the power to make meaning remains unequally distributed. “[T]he notion of masquerade has the potential to destabilize long-held notions of pleasure, glamour, and attraction” that have been codified in Hollywood and star studies.\(^8^5\) This new method allows that such notions are not only interpreted differently by different peoples and cultures, and also may not always be the values held in esteem when determining stardom. A study of socialist stardom, for example, introduces different values of attraction and pleasure that artists, fans, and cultural officials debated, such as artistic talent, humanist thinking, and ordinariness (or plainness).

This project on female stars in socialist East Germany also has much to gain by the application of performance studies to star studies. As a European cinema culture, rooted in a hierarchical structure of the performing arts with theater as the penultimate

\(^8^4\) Ibid., 4-10. 
\(^8^5\) Ibid., 3.
acting achievement, it would be disingenuous to do an analysis of GDR stars based only on the signifying importance of their image. In a state-owned industry such as DEFA, the ability of actors to use performance as a means of controlling their image was paramount; and the performativity of stardom offered both actors and audiences a means to read between the lines, in light of the highly ideological burden placed on public figures the who were stars. Not only does an analysis of performance offer another way to approach the analytic challenge presented by socialist stardom, it also provides a way to get at the gendered dimensions of celebrity culture in the GDR.

Kirsten Pullen’s *Like a Natural Woman: Spectacular Female Performance in Classic Hollywood* (2014) is unique in star studies because Pullen looks at how female stars of classical Hollywood performed their stardom. Pullen frames her analysis by focusing on a version of method acting that she calls naturalism—a paradigm that reigned in classical Hollywood but that “masks its specific strategy and subsumes performers’ labor under the guise of playing oneself.” For Pullen, such acting carries with it political, socio-economic, and aesthetic purposes. Pullen’s project examines what is at stake when such performances are naturalized, arguing “that performance supports dominant constructions but also exploits contradictions within conventional representations of sex and gender.” For the female actresses she examines, Pullen’s analysis considers all the political and aesthetic factors that shape the way an actress’s performance is both “produced and received.” Pullen’s study is instructive because it is

87 Ibid., 11.
one of the few in star studies that uses performance itself as a starting point for the
analysis of star figures.

Two other feminist interventions addressing stars in the Nazi film industry also
provide methods of analyzing of female stardom. Jana F. Bruns, author of *Nazi Cinema’s
New Women* (2009), offers three case studies of female stars, arguing that actresses are
“particularly important venues for indoctrination [as] they are icons on which people
focus their attention and their desires, and they are avenues for identification and
emulation.”88 While Bruns’s argument leans toward gender essentialism, one must
consider the period she is evaluating, especially following directly on the heels of
Weimar cinema, in which female mega-stars, such as Henny Porten and Marlene
Dietrich, were at the center of a thriving star culture and “traditionally the locus of desire
and seduction in the movies.”89 More importantly, Bruns argues that female stars in Nazi
Germany also had an ideological function. The “multifaceted [and] often contradictory”
fact of female stardom, which represented a diversity of women’s roles and female types
that was in stark contrast to the singular function of motherhood for women in the
ideology of the Third Reich is what Bruns investigates as a way to understand the ways in
which Nazi star culture reflected the everyday experiences, dreams, and contradictions of
living in a dictatorial system.

Antje Antschied also takes female stardom in German fascism as her topic of
study and also offers three case studies for closer analysis. Where Bruns identifies
*contradiction*, Antschied finds *ambiguity*, arguing that female stars under Nazism

88 Jana F. Bruns, *Nazi Cinema’s New Women* (New York: Cambridge University Press,
2009), 4.
89 Bruns, *Nazi Cinema’s New Women*, 4.
represented an inconsistent ideology of womanhood, because the Nazi state constantly undertook to use cinema to both appeal to popular wishes and desires, and impose its ideology onto the masses. Certain pertinent questions from these two studies apply to examining star culture in the GDR, as well. What does a study of star culture in a totalitarian or authoritarian society reveal about everyday experiences in that society, especially at the popular level? How can we position stars in such a system as intermediaries between state leaders, cultural officials, and the masses? What are the gendered dimensions of star culture: What does a study of female stars reveal about the popular impulses of their society, especially in connection to the ideological imperatives imposed from the top down? The assumption is that culture is a negotiated social sphere, in which both the processes of production and reception create asymmetrical meanings, practices and desires within that culture.

While scholarship on East German films made at the DEFA Feauture Film Studio in Potsdam-Babelsberg continues to grow, to date very little work in this field has been done on the role of star culture in East Germany; what work has been done tends to focus on male stars.90 Most recently, Seán Allan’s chapter, “Transnational Stardom: DEFA’s Management of Dean Reed” (2016), offers an analysis of the American expatriate actor-

singer Dean Reed, a “transnational star” who found success in socialist East Germany in the 1970s. Allan identifies Reed as an outsider, parallel to the enormously popular Yugoslavian-born GDR star, Gojko Mitić; however, as a former American, Reed represented a unique site for combining political and popular goals at the heart of the Cold War struggle. Reed was an American who had “swapped sides during the Cold War” and therefore embodied a kind of victory over the United States at the political and cultural level.91

In her chapter, “Public Figures, Political Symbols, Popular ‘Stars’: Actors in DEFA Cinema and Beyond” (2014), Sabine Hake finds the study of stardom in East Germany to be a contested site, also identifying it as male, if existing at all. Hake examines three of the top male actors in the GDR, Erwin Geschonneck, Manfred Krug, and Armin Mueller-Stahl, the latter two having emigrated to the west in the late 1970s after insurmountable political conflicts after signing the petition protesting Wolf Biermann’s expatriation. In her analysis, Hake reluctantly uses the loan word “star”—“for lack of a better term”—because she identifies East German stardom as a primarily Post-Cold War phenomenon, developing in large part due to nostalgia for a “vanquished country.”92 However, Hake allows that the socialist star system represented by these three actors illuminates the “relationship between screen persona and public persona, […] the personal to the political, and the individual to the collective.”93 Her work corresponds with available scholarship, which struggles to include actors whose celebrity does not align with the

92 Sabine Hake, “Public Figures, Political Symbols, Famous Stars,” 197-220.
93 Ibid., 199.
Hollywood model of stardom. Hake’s argument is partly based on an analysis of the publications, fan sites, and DVD box sets available since unification, such as *Lexikon der DDR-Stars. Schauspieler aus Film und Fernsehen* (1999), which unequivocally use the word “star” as synonym to the word “actor.” Hake rightfully identifies this post-unification tendency to apply the blanket label of “star” to all GDR actors as incongruent with the self-perception of GDR actors themselves and a-historical with respect to the cultural discourse surrounding East German celebrities.

Prior to Hake’s chapter, Claudia Fellmer’s case study of Armin Mueller-Stahl in *German Cinema Book* (2008) and Stephen Soldovieri’s case study of Manfred Krug in *Moving Images of East Germany: Past and Future of DEFA Film* (2002) focused on two of the GDR’s most famous male actors as representative of a GDR star system. Soldovieri examines Manfred Krug as an example of a “popular film personalit[y]” who was a budding jazz musician (a modern musical genre deemed inherently subversive to socialism) before the DEFA studios promoted him as a film star. Krug was therefore able to satisfy both audience and official cultural needs—a young, mildly subversive hero who could still function as an intermediary of “cultural policy objectives.” Soldovieri aptly points out that a study of East German star culture not only offers a site for analyzing ideological projections, it also draws attention to GDR audiences, which remain an underexplored area of East German cinema studies and performing arts. Hake, in contrast, is more hesitant about such an assertion about GDR star and fan culture, the

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95 Ibid., 62.
latter of which she describes as a “largely retrospective affair.” This is not necessarily true, however. GDR press materials and production documents reveal a quite active fan culture, in both the materials that were published in the GDR and those that did not make publication.

Claudia Fellmer’s dissertation, *Stars in East German Cinema* (2002), is the singular book-length academic study on GDR film stars. All of these works, with the exception of one case study in Fellmer’s dissertation, focus exclusively on male actors. The exception is the pop star Chris Doerk, whom Fellmer describes as a multimedia phenomenon in the GDR who found enormous success as a popular personality in music, film, television, and fashion. Doerk’s stardom, however, began and ended with her marriage and musical partnership with Frank Schöbel—clearly revealing the risk for (female) stars and cultural officials in allowing star couples to flourish in the public eye. Other star couples, like Angelica Domröse and Hilmar Thate, did not allow this collapsing of personal and professional biographies to impact their careers; they were therefore able to protect their popularity as public figures from the dangers of life challenges (such as Domröse’s alcoholism) that could raise potential scandals rendering them unfit to remain in the socialist spotlight.

In both her article on Armin Mueller-Stahl and her dissertation, Fellmer makes the case for an indigenous East German star culture. Leaning on the GDR’s own practice of euphemism, Fellmer embraces alternative phrasing, which gained popularity among critics and actors in the GDR as a way to identify socialist star figures as distinctly separate from western or capitalist stars. This offers a way to circumvent ideological

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96 Sabine Hake, “Public Figures, Political Symbols, Famous Stars,” 198.
conflicts with the Hollywood model by asserting that the GDR invented its own model of stardom—the *Publikumsliebling*. Using this term seems to take at face value that, in putting forth a new word, the GDR also created an entirely new overarching concept. This is an assertion that my research does not corroborate, which is why I continue to use the loan word “star”; this invites analysis of how the GDR engaged with past and parallel cultural systems to adapt their most salient features to socialist ideology and, from there, develop a competing system of its own. In my analysis, the GDR’s preference for the term “audience darling” is seen, in itself, as a performative aspect of GDR star discourse. While highlighting the emphasis placed on the relationship between stars and their fans in the GDR, the term is also an attempt to deflect attention away from cultural officials and the role of the state. In reality, star culture in East Germany thus evolved through a constant negotiation between all three stakeholders in GDR cultural life—the state, the artists, and the fans. My study of East German star culture thus proposes a methodology that considers the limits and possibilities of attending to cultural production at all three levels of the public, especially in a controlled, state-owned industry such as that in the GDR.

1.7 Star Studies: Reconsidering Theory

A star is a “‘complex configuration of visual, verbal and aural signs’ [that] could yield insights not only into the ‘meaning’ of stars, but also the social and ideological function of their image.”

97 This understanding of the star concept, as film scholarship continues to borrow from Richard Dyer’s seminal work, is also useful for considering

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stardom in East Germany. I will continue to use the term “star” to unpack many of the cultural, social, and ideological functions that were at the center of the debate around promoting the GDR’s own celebrity figures. As critical cultural studies scholar Stuart Hall has argued in his essay “Encoding/Decoding,” Dyer’s argument relies on the polysemy of the star image, whose meaning is contingent on its relationship to a broader audience of individuals who decode and make sense of the ideological work of the star; this happens somewhere between the star’s extraordinary social and cultural presence and her ability to pass as typical (and therefore identifiable to audiences). For Dyer, star images often appear in the superlative—the most beautiful, the most desirable, the most successful, etc.—but the omnipresence of their image also codifies this representation as an embodiment of the normal or standard values in a culture. Richard Dyer explains this ambiguity in Hollywood stardom by means of the myth of the “American Dream,” which allows anyone—ordinary people—to climb to the top through hard work.\(^9\) In the GDR, the state also promoted the “ordinariness” of stars, because it demanded that its artists merge their artistic work with that of the working and peasant classes, and that they know them, be shaped by them, and portray their experiences in art. For any social group, such as celebrities, to be at the social top was both unacceptable and undesirable, though the paradox of the specialness and ordinariness of stars confounded participants of the GDR star discourse in the 1960s and 70s, and it still confounds scholars of GDR star culture today.

Stars in the GDR served these purposes but took on other functions as well. The inscription of a culture onto the body of the star makes the star vehicle a powerful tool for the hegemonic discourses in a society; yet behind the constructed star persona is the actor who has techniques at her disposal to find unique resonance with audiences. This point is important because, while it is possible to trace an official discourse in the media about star culture in the GDR, the meaning of the star image was, in actuality, mediated by multiple social actors: the cultural officials who pressed ideological imperatives onto the star; actors who performed both as individuals and as artists and experienced a responsibility to their art, to the state-run industry that employed them, and to the public that consumed their image and performances; and finally, the public, whose desires, needs, and ideological education were the primary target of socialist star culture.

Furthermore, it must be remembered that, despite official rhetoric, the audience was not a homogeneous entity with a singular class or generational experience. Audiences brought with them their own frameworks of understanding, not removed from social discourses but nonetheless unique, as they were structured by the individual’s own intersecting social, personal and historical positioning in terms of gender, sexuality, race, class, generation, and nationality, which the actors themselves also inhabited both similarly and differently from their audiences.

It is in these intersecting social relationships that stars take on special meaning for a society and their audiences, and attention to the vectors of power that exist among them reveal how individuals and the state negotiated matrices of both power and oppression.99

99 I lean here on Kimberle Crenshaw’s concept of intersectionality as she discusses it in her article, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color” (1991). Crenshaw posits that the experiences of power and
The encounter between audience and star in socialist East Germany, even mediated as it was, offers an unexamined story about the extent of the ideological effects of cultural production in the GDR, the effects of the public on cultural politics, and as the daily experiences of an East German public that were thematized on celluloid. As Dyer has argued, stars are not only in a position to reinforce dominant values, or at least “conceal prevalent contradictions”; they also speak to struggles within the system that include questions of social diversity, oppression and privilege. Even within—or perhaps especially because of—the values of the “classless,” emancipated and predominantly white GDR society, these social categories have their place in this study of star culture as well, especially as this society placed the principles of progress and emancipation from oppressive pasts at the center of its identity.

In order to understand how the stars in East Germany functioned as intermediaries in this system of power and oppression, it is important to understand the performance practices that prevailed in the GDR. Bertolt Brecht’s practice of epic theater is central to the GDR’s cultural legacy, and each of the actresses in this study were Brechtian trained. Brecht’s Berliner Ensemble may have regularly run afoul of cultural officials with its experimental and revolutionary performance theory, but his influence among GDR artists and, through them, their fans cannot be understated. Brecht’s epic theater in combination

oppression can only be understood by an examination of intersecting social categories, such as gender and race, with political and cultural structures that affect women. Crenshaw’s argument for an analysis of intersecting cultural and political structures with overlapping social categories is also helpful for examining the experiences of women and men in the GDR, especially as social values are created, practiced and relegated importance in the highly political cultural climate of East Germany’s internal development as a socialist country, and its external struggle to gain political legitimacy in the global Cold War. 100 Dyer, *Stars*, 24-28.
with the ideas about performance of queer theorist Judith Butler—who built on Brecht’s ideas—provide a productive way of thinking about the star/actor/audience relationship.

In “Ein kleines Organon für das Theater” (1948/49),\(^{101}\) Brecht proposed a revolutionary performance theory meant to discourage empathetic and passive audience reception. Without the manipulation of Aristotelian dramatic conventions and the emotional weight of tragedy, audiences could instead reflect on the contemporary critical message (*die Fabel*) through historicization of that message. For Brecht, this is created in a number of ways, including actor techniques revealing both contradiction and conflict (*Dialektik*) that are expressed as a complex ideological whole through the actor’s performance. In the actor’s toolkit is the *Gestus*—“a gesture, an inflection of the voice, a facial expression, […] an utterance”—that is intentional and amplifies the social and political message that is otherwise concealed by dominant discourse.\(^{102}\) Thus, *Gestus* points at the message behind the performance, encouraging a critical and thinking audience.\(^{103}\)

Brecht’s theory is a didactic one that still assumes a receptive audience that must be educated, however. Even though Brecht conceives of the possibility of a thinking audience, he does not discuss the possibility that the audience might decode the message in a unique way. Stuart Hall further theorizes the production and dissemination of messages in media, arguing that while meaning may be encoded into the original message during production, “misunderstandings” may occur and the message re-enters via


\(^{102}\) Ibid., 44, 48.

\(^{103}\) Ibid., 23, 29-33.
decoding “into the practices of audience reception.” Such “misunderstandings” are productive and result from “the lack of equivalence between the two sides in the communicative exchange.” For Hall, “the entry and exit of the message” is allowed relative autonomy due to the uneven but not exclusive power structures of media production.\textsuperscript{104} Stars add an extra dimension to the process of cultural communication as Hall describes it, because the actor/star has an opportunity to mediate the message before audiences decode it themselves.

Building on Brecht’s theories of performance, Judith Butler explores the way in which people, as social actors, can challenge the limits of codified sexual and gendered behaviors in society through performance. In \textit{Undoing Gender}, Butler points out the consequences—both severe and playful—of “violating” gender norms through drag and makes four distinct propositions: 1) “cultural fantasy” and the organization of “material life” are related; 2) “a certain ontology” is revealed and put into crisis when “one performance of gender is considered real and another false”; 3) the performance of drag exposes the “notions of reality” in which we live and operate, including in our bodies and our sexualities; and 4) there are consequences for the “ontological presuppositions” that drag can reveal to us—namely, that presuppositions are at work and “open to rearticulation.”\textsuperscript{105}

Through fantasy, which “allows us to imagine ourselves and others otherwise, […] the possible in excess of the real [is established and] it points elsewhere, and when it

is embodied, it brings the elsewhere home.”¹⁰⁶ Drag is an ironic performance of gender and it points to the performativity of gender itself. In Butler’s earlier book, *Gender Trouble*, she shows how the body is deeply embedded in ideological discourses: through repetition of gender performances within these discourses, “legitimate” and normative genders are codified and reinforced into a heterosexual and reduced binary framework. Ultimately, this legitimation process itself is concealed.¹⁰⁷ For Butler, the “point[ing] elsewhere” that is achieved through excessive performance is a function of *gestus* as described by Brecht, a pointing beyond what is concealed by dominant discourse and to a political message (*die Fabel*). The political implications in Butler’s chapters are that the “real” (the visible or normal) is called into question and new directions (what is normally rendered invisible) are imaginable.

The idea of excess and performance lends themselves well to a reading of cinematic stars. As mentioned above, Richard Dyer identifies the “paradox” of the Hollywood star as representing what is “typical” in society, while exuding a lifestyle that is beyond the means (in excess) of the ordinary person.¹⁰⁸ In this reading, the repeat performances of the often highly excessive standards set by stars across media legitimate social standards that conceal other alternatives and thereby legitimating the social status quo. However, not all actors emphasize the same excess, the same standards, or the same norms. Dyer’s reading is certainly helpful for examining an effect of the star system, but these ideas must be tested and unpacked, for example, through case studies of individual

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¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 216-217.
stars—especially when we move beyond Hollywood. As Butler suggests, the excess can also be ironic; it can be a gestus that points us “elsewhere,” and, when “embodied,” it can drive a message home.

It is an advantage for my project that Butler does not refer to celebrities, although I believe that stars embody these contradictions as social texts. The real advantage of Butler’s approach is in concepts of performance, identity, and agency to extend to the public, which points to a different way of understanding the process of identification between audience and stars. Butler’s argument reminds us that we are all social actors, that performance is not limited to theater and film personalities. This is similar to Dyer’s “life-as-theatre” metaphor that has been part of dramatic theory since Plato, suggesting that we each have a private and a public self, and the construction of the latter involves “self-presentation, performance, role-playing, etc.” For Dyer, this may find expression in the actors and stars embedded in the same cultural ideology, but the implications of such a metaphor also involves audiences who respond to the image and performance through processes of identification and desire.

In this study, I read the image as text and the embodied performances as ideological engagements with a hegemonic discourse reflecting mainstream social values and normative behaviors. This requires both an intertextual analysis and a performance analysis. As Dyer has argued, textual analysis of stars is “grounded in sociological conceptualizations of what texts are, and since what they are is ideology, with all its contradictory complexities, it follows that textual analysis is properly ideological

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109 Ibid., 20-1.
Performance analysis complicates this reading, however, since it centers the actor and not the image, thereby considering the autonomy of the actor to interpret the role for audiences. While Brecht is concerned with class and capitalism, and Butler is concerned with gender and sexuality, Dyer also reminds us that performers and audiences embody the many intersecting social positions that individuals inhabit. Reading these theorists together, we develop a way of understanding the dynamic relationship between star, the characters they represent, and audience as social phenomena. This makes the star construct and a given performance both signifying texts and acts that can be visual, discursive, and historicized. In this way, the star is capable of occupying, exceeding, and reworking social norms and “expos[ing] realities to which we thought we were confined as open to transformation.” The star, therefore, can be read as a text—a text that is produced, consumed and invested with ideology and social value; however, behind the text that is a star is the person whose performances of a character and of his/her stardom must be read in the social contexts that lend the performance meaning.

1.8 This Study: GDR Female Stardom

This study relies on a range of materials, including films, interviews, and archival documents. State-owned film industries are connected to state-owned press and media. In the GDR, the severe censorship of published press documents, interviews, and the films themselves is therefore part of the story we must account for in order to get at the intricacies of the social production of stars in the GDR. Through careful discourse

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110 Dyer, *Stars*, 3
analysis, it is possible to read contemporary published press materials for themes, patterns, and general impressions of film productions and releases, especially their reception among film critics and fans in the 1960s and ‘70s. Production documents, such as correspondence, budgets, casting decisions, and minutes of meetings where the film was being considered for release or censorship, help contextualize official printed materials for a given film. Surveying a range of GDR newspapers may disclose the specific rhetoric released by PROGRESS Filmverleih to accompany each film. Interviews with actors, writers, and directors, editorials, and fan responses often show praise, criticism, or personal requests or desires on the part of the actors and fans for future projects. In addition to the fan magazines, memorabilia such as star postcards and star calendars evidence a strong star industry. Finally, autobiographies and biographies, though written retrospectively, can corroborate or enhance the evidence found in archival sources or film analyses. All of these documents, visual and written, help us understand the creation, development, and function of socialist stars and star culture in the GDR.

In addition to each actress’s film oeuvre and related production documents, I examine the GDR's print and visual media, including local and regional newspapers, film journals, and film magazines, which I have researched in archives in Germany and the United States. The Pressedokumentation holdings at the Filmuniversität Babelsberg include extensive newspaper, magazine, and promotional materials about individual actors and persons, as well as about specific film and television productions. The Bundesarchiv in Berlin and the Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv in Babelsberg, Germany house production documents related to films for cinema and television, as well as TV shows, and TV and radio interviews. To date, the production documents for DEFA feature films have been
far more systematically archived than those for television, thereby creating a noticeable gap in the materials available to scholars. The DEFA Film Library at the University of Massachusetts Amherst houses GDR films and collections of GDR film journals, including *Filmspiegel, Deutsche Filmkunst*, and *Film und Fernsehen*.

This study is presented with three case studies. In the first, “Jutta Hoffmann and the Dialectics of Happiness: A Girl Next Door in Close Up,” I argue that Hoffmann’s star persona embodied a particular version of socialist femininity—a youthful, white European, heterosexual woman with a soft disposition but an inherently strong core and good political instincts, emancipated yet bound by persistent social conventions, pragmatic in her approach but romantic in life. Beyond the seemingly one-dimensional girl-next-door image, Hoffman, a Brechtian actress, called her own normative performances into question, and her dialectical performances opened new possibilities for discussion among censors and fans, covering topics such as class conflict, sexual orientation, gender inequality, and sexual pleasure.

Hoffmann’s images and performances can be seen in the somewhat inconsistent context of the GDR’s policies for women and female emancipation, which continued to place motherhood and childrearing—Muttipolitik (Mommy Policies) at its center. While Hoffmann’s close-up was circulated widely as a depiction of the idealized emancipated socialist personality and woman, her performances show emancipation as a process rather than an achieved socialist reality. On and off the screen she represented a woman capable of navigating social, cultural and political conflicts as essential parts of her own self-development and self-fulfillment—the dialectics of happiness.
I discuss three of Hoffmann’s key performances in detail. In 1967, *Little Man, What Now?* (dir. Hans-Joachim Kasprzik), a literary adaptation made for television, dominated the GDR press. In this iconic role as “Lämmchen,” Hoffmann gained widespread popularity among GDR audiences as well as a victory against censors when cultural officials tried—unsuccessfully—to stipulate the terms of her performance for that character. For Hoffmann’s internationally award-winning performance in *Her Third* (1971), she and director Egon Günther successfully implemented aspects of an experimental style, including non-linear narratives, monologs, and direct address. In *The Keys* (1973), Hoffmann and Günther took their experiments further, demonstrating the power of film form in examining socialism’s progressive goals and the obstacles preventing society from reaching them.

The second case study focuses on Angelica Domröse. Domröse was often depicted as a highly sexualized and carnal figure, in contrast to Hoffmann, and must be seen in the context of the sexual revolutions taking place internationally, as well as in both West and East Germany in the late 1960s and 1970s. As the “GDR-Bardot,” she wore bikinis and modeled fashion, and she was not only a self-assured beautiful woman, but also an object of desire and the public’s gaze. Aware of this aspect of her public persona, Domröse both cultivated and actively resisted it. She unapologetically played the part of a beauty icon and publicly supported star culture for socialism; but she also worked to shed the image of a young, love-sick girl simply playing herself, which audiences saw in her early romantic comedies. She strove to become much more than just a pretty face.

Domröse prioritized theater above other performing arts in a continuous effort to prove herself as a legitimate actress and to master her craft. As her star power developed
and gave her bargaining leverage, she used TV, theater, and film to shape public, official, and personal perceptions of her career and image. Critics began recognizing Domröse as a versatile actress who could play a range of small and large parts for screen and stage, embodying more complex female characters with flaws and virtues that emerge and develop over time. For example, she played two sides of the same character in Heiner Carow’s *Everybody Has Their Own Story* (1965). Her 1970 performance as the adulteress *Effi Briest* was a sympathetic treatment of a naïve girl becoming a damaged woman whose personal development was stunted by rigid, unforgiving social conventions; and her 1972 performance of the uncompromising Paula showed audiences an apolitical woman who wanted it all—emancipation and romance—in *The Legend of Paul and Paula*.

Looking at the politics of desire in the Deleuzian sense, as a collective desire that stems from social relations, I argue that Domröse’s performances and public persona in the GDR engaged the politics of desire, an essential feature of both cinema and star cultures, encouraging both consumption of and identification with public personalities such as hers. Seen this way, the desire that accumulated around Domröse’s image indicates a collective activity and identity that existed in “actual relations between people.” Domröse offered the public the image of self-confident youth, extraordinary beauty, and the simple enjoyment of popular and material culture. The desire for her image and the desires depicted in her performances, however, also paralleled real-life needs for personal fulfillment, love, health, and true emancipation. This required bridging

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114 Ibid.
the fractured self, a condition of split realities between the private and public in a society that declared it had already achieved equality of the sexes and the emancipation of the working class. Domröse, therefore, invited desires that were not private, but rather shared, and that were important expressions of cultural and social life.

The third case I explore is that of “The People’s Actress and Comedienne Agnes Kraus.” Agnes Kraus most often portrayed an unattached, strongly opinionated older women—an older aunt, a widow, or a nosy neighbor—whose meddling was softened by her compassion and her tendency to nurture both people and relationships. Primarily a TV star and beloved for her comedy, she won audiences through her ability to individualize, analyze and offer comic relief to everyday situations. An award-winning comedic entertainer, earning titles such as “Mother of the Nation” and “People’s Actress,” Kraus’s private and professional profiles were collapsed into one indistinguishable public persona, thereby creating a strong sense of familiarity and closeness to this beloved star.

Few GDR stars, even those who worked rather seamlessly between stage and screen, were able to offer a more culturally unifying point of identification than the Berliner Agnes Kraus. An older, empathetic female figure who spoke the language of common people and appealed to audiences across the generations, Kraus was already in her sixties when she reached stardom. She imparted wisdom learned from her experiences through

Germany’s 20th-century. She therefore embodied both the past and present by applying her accumulated knowledge to better her socialist community. Guided by an innate humanism, every gesture and utterance seemed natural and common sense, rather than didactic or overdetermined by cultural and political ideology. Stories set in the countryside and broadcast on television to living rooms throughout the GDR also allowed her to bridge urban and rural environments, thereby becoming an all-encompassing star figure for both working and peasant classes that were at the heart of the socialist state.

I argue that Agnes Kraus used her stardom to raise awareness of contemporary and intersecting social issues, from the housing shortage to abortion, and the fractures in society caused by racial prejudices, gender disparities, and generational differences. Kraus was able to broach such topics through the lens of a rather simplified figure shaped by a genre that also appeared simple and non-fussy. But she also lovingly embraced flawed individuals, not hesitating to present herself as one, too. Rather than treating issues as ideological or individual shortcomings, she presented them as social justice issues that must be overcome in the interest of the greater community.
CHAPTER 2

JUTTA HOFFMANN AND THE DIALECTICS OF HAPPINESS:
THE GIRL NEXT DOOR IN CLOSE UP

“Sie wirkt zart und ist zäh. Sie erscheint nahbar und ist unnahbar wie jeder große Künstler. Sie geht zu Fuß durchs Leben, aber gewissermaßen: hoch zu Fuß.”116

2.1 A Socialist Personality

In January 1973, Jutta Hoffmann’s face appeared on the premiere cover of the new monthly journal, *Film und Fernsehen*. She appears not glamorous but pretty and wholesome, wearing a dark turtle-neck sweater with her hair haphazardly pulled back into a ponytail; she wears eyeliner but otherwise very little makeup. She is soft and feminine, and despite the promise of immediacy delivered by the close-up, she remains somewhat elusive. The image shows a luminous face set against a white background, and the overexposed lighting not only emphasizes the actress’s youthfulness (no wrinkles, age spots, or flaws), it also exaggerates the whiteness of her skin. Taken together, whiteness, youth, and femininity as represented by a beloved female star like Hoffmann reached preeminent and ethereal qualities, and it may seem that “light, purity, and transcendence...exude from [her] pores.”117 Hoffmann’s image entered the GDR media in 1960, coinciding with a conservative social discourse that included sweeping reforms to

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116 Quoted in Peter Warnecke and Birgit Scholz, eds., *Jutta Hoffmann–Schauspielerin* (Berlin: Das Neue Berlin, 2012), 10. “She seems to be gentle and tough. She appears to be attainable and unattainable, like every great artist. She walks through life, but she walks tall.”

women’s policies throughout the 1960s and 1970s focusing on women as both workers and mothers. With female emancipation and motherhood at the center of GDR social politics, traditional femininity as captured in the close-up of a popular but unmistakably familiar and comely young white woman supported the East German state’s policies on gender, morality and family life. The close-up, as we will see, was a strategy used often for Hoffmann, both in and out of her films, and its repetition with limited contextual information demonstrates a strategic use and the power of the press and film industry—both state-owned and state-sanctioned—over her public image.

Beyond this one-dimensional image, however, Jutta Hoffman was also a Brechtian actress. The dialectic of Hoffmann’s performances can be seen in the discrepancies between tentative gestures in her body language and the self-confidence imparted through the delivery of her lines (especially her monologs), as well as the reserved demeanor of her public image and the range and depth of emotions she was able to impart through speech, body language, and her eyes. Within the context of the GDR women’s films, Hoffman’s experimental style invited audiences into private, interior spaces, to offer a glimpse into both the home and her characters’ innermost thoughts. She eventually teamed up with filmmaker Egon Günther in a productive partnership, both experiencing notoriety as daring and experimental film professionals through their combined work. Hoffmann would come to describe their relationship in a distinctly artistic way: “Schauspieler sind Medium der Regisseure, ihr Material, ihre Mitarbeiter und manchmal auch ihre Muse.”

118 Warnecke and Scholz, *Jutta Hoffmann*, 45. “Actors are mediums for the directors, their material, their colleagues, and sometimes also their muse.”
As the introduction to this dissertation outlines, in Brechtian acting, artists develop and problems are solved through collective effort; no actor and no director is “a single social unit” since everyone develops through community with others.\textsuperscript{119} Their collaborations, therefore, appease Brecht’s warning against the ideologically problematic individualism of stardom. Hoffmann, in particular, remained hyperaware of the importance of sharing her successes with the team. Brecht’s observation aptly identifies one of the central challenges a star like Hoffmann would encounter in her GDR career: How to bridge the individual and the collective—whether it be in relation to her individual accomplishments in the context of collective filmmaking, or the task of individualizing her roles for collective social development under socialism. Specifically, her challenge was to individualize the socialist personality and Frauenbild (image of women) in socialist East Germany in a way that could still convey the imperative of the collective for both concepts.

Hoffmann offered audiences a chance to see the psychological and tangible parts of their everyday experiences depicted on the big screen, lending her stardom and her characters authenticity and credibility. Her popularity and style allowed her to expand the possibilities of the normal and the ideal through her performances and professional decisions. Hoffmann’s characters balanced their public and private lives through social change, life’s challenges, and conflict, and she successfully depicted “the issue of potential inner liberation and the difficulty of finding happiness.”\textsuperscript{120} Hoffmann, like most of her figures, lived and functioned in a state where women found their roles in public life vastly

\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., 42-3

\textsuperscript{120} Erika Richter, “A Woman and GDR Society: A Parallel History in Her Third,” Der Dritte DVD bonus material (Icestorm Entertainment, 2006), DVD.
expanded under socialism (i.e., into a male public sphere). Female employment in the GDR by the end of the Cold War in 1989 was over 90%. By the mid-1970s, women averaged 48% of the total labor force; women in West Germany in the mid-1970s comprised 38%. However, these figures neglect the question of domestic and reproductive responsibilities for women and men, concealing behind them the social and work structures that were “tailored to male socialization and conduct” and effectively created a “glass ceiling” that prevented women from gaining top positions in management or state office. This expansion came without the necessary fundamental changes in gendered hierarchical practices in the public sphere, however, or in private practices in matters of love, desire, and family.

Hoffman also challenged a fixed idea of the socialist woman, as well as a singular notion of the idealized “well-rounded” socialist personality—a pervasive concept of socialist citizenship and social engagement, all guided by a well-developed socialist consciousness. The concept of the socialist personality, as it evolved in the 1960s and

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122 The concept specifically targeted GDR youth as the future socialist citizens and therefore the future of socialism itself. The “Gesetz über die Teilnahme der Jugend der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik an der Gestaltung der entwickelten sozialistischen Gesellschaft und über ihre allseitige Förderung in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik” (1974) denotes the privilege and duty of GDR youth to exercise their citizenship with full participation in socialist society, thereby gaining a well-developed socialist consciousness through education, labor, social, and cultural life. In particular, subsection V stressed the importance of the arts in supporting the East German young people’s “allseitig[e] Persönlichkeitsentwicklung” (well-rounded development of
1970s, exemplified the moral code set forth in 1958 in SED party leader Walter Ulbricht’s Ten Commandments of Socialist Ethics and Morals. Among other things, they regulated sexual behaviors and promoted heterosexual monogamous family life. Commandment nine reads: “You should live cleanly and decently and respect your family.” As Jennifer Evans has explained, “The quest for a moral state linked political normalization to popular and official visions of respectability, gender identification, and preferred comportment, elements of which guided sociologists, jurists, legal reformers, and average Germans in their understanding of the causes and consequences of illicit behavior.”

One such perceived “illicit” sexual behavior was homosexuality, which was criminalized in East Germany according to Paragraph 175 from the 1871 German Criminal Code until the GDR state reversed the law in 1968. Though it specifically targeted men, social persecution of gays and lesbians persisted before and after decriminalization. It also remained a taboo topic for the arts until the late 1980s, when the GDR began to try to change public opinion about homosexuality, parallel to a reeducation campaign about HIV/AIDS.

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125 Ibid., 114-115. The original law criminalized homosexuality between men ages 21 and over. In East Germany, the decriminalization of homosexuality applied to men 18 years and older, with the intent of protecting minors from sexual predators (the age of consent for heterosexual intercourse was 16). In West Germany, the law remained on the books until it was rescinded in 1994.
126 See, for example: Niels Sönnichsen, AIDS: Was muß ich wissen? Wie kann ich mich schützen? (Berlin: Verlag Volk und Gesundheit, 1988); The Other Love (Die andere Liebe), GDR, 1988, dir. Helmut Kißling and Axel Otten, 35 min., color. GDR lesbians and gay men talk openly about their first sexual experiences and the difficulties they
While the GDR maintained such regressive sexual attitudes for most of its history, its policies toward women and children were simultaneously progressive and traditional, putting women in the difficult position of balancing the two tendencies. Women were able to be both workers and mothers due to extensive state aid providing childcare and after school programs. However, the reassignment of gender roles in the private and public spheres was not to be fixed by simple political measure, unduly burdening women and preventing them from advancing professionally to become equal to men. Over the GDR’s 40-year history, policies shifted to satisfy state needs and align state policy with socialist ideology. In the 1950s, the state moved women into the workforce as the GDR rebuilt its infrastructure and developed its socialist economy; in the 1960s, it began training female specialists to give women access to professional fields; and finally, Erich Honecker’s Muttipolitik (Mommy Policy) in the 1970s aimed to “improve the conformity of paid labor, household and motherhood.” These moral codes and political measures regulating sex and gender were directly related to the development of socialist citizenship, socialist society, and the socialist personality. As Claudia Fellmer has argued, the idea of the socialist personality as it applied to GDR stars contained “notions of egalitarianism, faced in coming out; Love without Fear (L.o.A. – Liebe ohne Angst), GDR, 1989, dir. Frank Rinnelt, 25 min. color. The only GDR anti-AIDS educational film discusses the prevention of AIDS with young people; Coming Out (GDR, 1989, dir. Heiner Carow, 108 min., color). The first and only feature film about gay life ever produced in communist East Germany.


accessibility and a ‘down-to-earth’ character.’” \(^{129}\) The gender-neutral characteristics of the “socialist worker hero” were targeted at the entire emancipated working class. \(^{130}\)

As a star, Jutta Hoffmann traversed boundaries between audiences, directors, and cultural officials by enacting social and political behaviors expressing generation, race, nationality, sexuality, and gender. Hoffmann captured the GDR’s notion of an “audience darling” by giving audiences access to a socialist figure whose many intersecting experiences mirrored their own. She endeared herself to audiences through how relatable she was in her roles. Her image was idealized but her performances spoke to the mundane. She was earnest about her work and shy about her popularity, even retreating from public attention and confounding the press as to how to cover her public career. She therefore embodied an “extraordinarily ordinary” \(^{131}\) socialist citizen and a certain type of femininity: a youthful, white European, heterosexual, inexperienced, girl-next-door type with an inherently strong core and good political instincts, emancipated yet bound by persistent social conventions, pragmatic but romantic in life. Jutta Hoffmann thus often portrayed an imperfect socialist personality, a woman who never betrayed the belief in a happy socialist future, but who was always navigating stages of conflict and resolution in the process of self-development and self-fulfillment—the dialectics of happiness.

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\(^{129}\) Claudia Fellmer, “Armin Mueller-Stahl – From East Germany to the West Coast,” 91. 
\(^{130}\) Katrin Sieg points out that some women’s literature in the GDR, mainly drama and protocol literature, was able to “carv[e] out a female subject position that challenged the ostensibly gender-neutral concept of the socialist New Man, embodied by the worker-hero.” Likewise, many of the women’s films were able to have the same effect while also contending with the ideological position of the so-called gender-neutral worker hero. See: Katrin Sieg, “Sex, Subjectivity, and Socialism: Feminist Discourses in East Germany,” 105-133. 
\(^{131}\) On the paradox of the extraordinary ordiness of stars, see: Richard Dyer, *Stars*, 43.
2.2 Jutta Hoffmann’s Socialist Education, 1960-1982

Jutta Hoffmann (b. 1941), studied at the Academy for Film and Television in Potsdam-Babelsberg from 1959-1962, after which she joined the renowned Maxim Gorki Theater in Berlin under the management of the Stanislavskian director Maxim Vallentin. She remained there until 1973, when she became a member of the Brechtian Berliner Ensemble, remaining until she left the GDR in 1982. Hoffmann’s career milestones, however, were marked by politics and personal decisions that affected her work in film and television, as much as theater.

1960 was Hoffmann’s debut year, while still a student, with supporting roles on stage and on screen: Her first professional stage performance at the Maxim Gorki Theater was in the comedy Und das am Heiligabend (A Lively Christmas Eve). For the DEFA Feature Film Studio she appeared in Werner Wallroth’s youth film Das Rabauken-Kabarett (The Rowdy Cabaret) that year. Her career start occurred in a short period of liberalization that emerged after the building of the Berlin Wall in August 1961. Thanks to a reprieve from economic and creative competition with the West after the border closing, GDR cultural officials and artists turned their efforts toward creating a truly socialist studio system. They reevaluated DEFA’s successes and failures and implemented necessary structural changes that resulted in its “most creative and diverse” period. The

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132 Prior to Hoffmann’s debut in Das Rabauken-Kabarett, she appeared as an extra in Günter Reisch’s 1959 Maibowle (The Punch Bowl), handing the main character a bouquet of flowers. And despite her two-year theater engagement as Hanka in A Lively Christmas Eve, which was adapted from the Czechoslovakian original screenplay by Vratislav Blažek, she was not cast in Reisch’s 1962 DEFA rendition of the comedy, Ach, du fröhliche... See Warnecke and Scholz, Jutta Hoffmann-Schauspielerin (2012).

133 See Joshua Feinstein’s analysis of the conditions during this period in The Triumph of the Ordinary, 106.
inexperienced actress Jutta Hoffmann took advantage of this innovative art scene, electing in 1962 to go directly to break off her studies and work, to learn by doing in the theater scene and to build a promising film career.

By 1963, the twenty-two-year-old secured her first leading part as Penny in Frank Vogel’s film *Julia lebt* (*Julia Lives*), a modern-day socialist retelling of the Juliet motif from Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. Hoffmann was declared to be “die große Entdeckung,” an actress with “[s]oviel Ausdruck, leidenschaftliches Temperament, Zartheit des Gefühls verbunden mit sauberer sprachlicher Gestaltung.”134 This reception reveals how critics read a particular femininity in Hoffmann’s early public image: a woman with a passionate and gentle constitution that is expressed in a clean (i.e., untainted and proper) and restrained manner that also contains emotion and desire. After *Julia Lives*, Hoffmann’s film and television career took off, and she quickly began to gain control over roles and the people with whom she worked. In 1965 she accepted the title role in Hermann Zschoche’s *Carla*, turning down the lead female role opposite Manfred Krug in Frank Beyer’s critical feature film, *Spur der Steine* (*Trace of Stones*). Though she turned down the role, she still agreed to do the German voice-over for the Polish actress, Krystyna Stypulkowska, whom Beyer cast instead. While it was common practice to use voice-over for international actors cast in DEFA films, using Hoffman’s “sauber[e] sprachlich[e] Gestaltung” suggests not only an eradication of foreignness, but also that Hoffmann herself represented an undisputable kind of Germanness through proper language and a clean verbal style.

134 Horst Knietzsch, “Julia lebt – und Romeo?” *Neues Deutschland* (Berlin), October 19, 1963. “the big discovery ... so much expression, a passionate temperament, [and] tenderness of feeling all combined with a clean verbal style.”
In December 1965, Hoffmann’s career experienced a setback with the so-called *Kahlschlag* (clear-cutting), the disastrous cultural crackdown and sweeping censorship decisions made at the SED Party’s Eleventh Plenum. Cultural officials demanded a cleansing of East German arts—including film—of their overly modernistic, experimental, and politically provocative components, which they feared depicted a misleadingly negative perception of socialist society. Carla and three other films with supporting roles by Hoffmann were banned, including the shelving of Frank Beyer’s *Trace of Stones* after a limited and short release. In the more restrictive environment, cultural officials demanded that art meet the needs of society and that DEFA offer more socialist realist “agitational films [and] treat ‘central problems of social development.’”

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135 The Eleventh Plenum was a meeting of the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party (SED) in December 1965 in which cultural officials re-evaluated the cultural policies leading up to 1965 and specifically the cultural production list from 1965 and for 1966. The decisions resulting from the Plenum were especially disastrous for the DEFA Studio for Feature Films, which saw the banning of 12 films. It also resulted in the ruined careers of several cultural functionaries, and threatened the careers of directors, screenwriters, and actors affected by the banning and shelving of their films. See Feinstein, *The Triumph of the Ordinary*, 98-106.

136 Additionally, three other films Jutta Hoffmann collaborated on were impacted: Frank Vogel’s youth film, *Denk bloß nicht ich heule (Just Don’t Think I’ll Cry)*, was banned; Egon Günther’s comedic fantasy film, *Wenn du groß bist lieber Adam (When You’re Older, Dear Adam)*, was cancelled during production; and Frank Beyer’s political drama, *Spur der Steine (Trace of Stones)*, was shelved days after its premiere in Potsdam in June 1966.

137 Feinstein, *The Triumph of the Ordinary*, 201. In November 1966, DEFA-Gruppe 11 (Group 11, named after the eleventh month and the Eleventh Plenum) was founded and achieved special status in the Documentary Film Studio until it became the uniquely independent Heynowski & Scheumann (H&S) Studio in May 1969. In January 1967, the Association of Film and Television Workers was founded to oversee creative solutions for creating ideologically sound film and television productions in the GDR. Finally, in July 1967, Andrew Thorndike founded DEFA-Gruppe 67 within the Newsreel and Documentary Studio, but, like Studio H&S, it also functioned in an independent fashion until 1983. For a chronological document of events, see Ralf Schenk’s annotated primary document compilation, *Eine Kleine Geschichte der DEFA* (Berlin: Die Schriftenreihe der DEFA-Stiftung, 2006), 144–166.
rebounded rather quickly, but some artists, especially filmmakers such as Beyer, continued to face severe censorship.

In December 1967, Hoffmann took the lead female role in the television film adaptation of Hans Fallada’s 1932 modern novel, Kleiner Mann—was nun? (Little Man, What Now?). She received instant accolades, and for that year she became the GDR’s Lämmchen (“Little Lamb”)—the term of endearment for her character, Emma, a sensitive, guileless, and nurturing woman, who acted on strong instincts to support her husband and child during the Great Depression and the rise of fascism in Germany. Remembering the significance of this role, Hoffmann recalls: “Der Film war ein Erfolg, und ich dachte: Nach Kleiner Mann – was nun? kann mir nichts mehr passieren, ich bin im Wasser und kann schwimmen.” After this success, Hoffmann stayed busy with film and theater, working with film directors Horst Seeman and Hermann Zschoche (her husband at the time), as well as Benno Besson at the Deutsches Theater where she was engaged. In 1970, Hoffmann began her long and productive collaboration with filmmaker Egon Günther.

In May 1971, the regime change from the leadership of Walter Ulbricht to Erich Honecker ushered in another period of liberalization when Honecker famously declared there would be “no taboos,” as long as artistic works were founded on the premises of

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138 Quoted in the Jutta Hoffmann biographical compilation by Warnecke and Scholz, Jutta Hoffmann, 41. “The movie was a success, and I thought: after Little Man—what now? nothing can happen to me. I’m in the water and I can swim.”

socialism. Among those taking Honecker at his word was DEFA director Egon Günther, who began exploring new possibilities for collaborative filmmaking. Günther and his team addressed topics related to love, sexuality, intimacy, and personal relationships, and they focused on the creation of more avant-garde films, emphasizing spontaneity in acting, extended monologs, directorial inspiration taken from the unpredictability of shooting on location, camera work that helped break the fourth wall, and a non-linear narrative. Günther’s reputation for an unconventional film aesthetic and his intense focus on everyday life in the GDR through avant-garde filmmaking often brought him into conflict with GDR cultural officials. Günther and Hoffmann’s first film was the two-part television adaptation of Arnold Zweig’s 1931 novel Junge Frau von 1914 (Young Woman of 1914, 1970). Six more movies followed: Anlauf (The Attempt, TV, banned, 1971); Der Dritte (Her Third, 1971); Die Schlüssel (The Keys, 1973); Lotte in Weimar (1975); Rita (TV, shortened version of Anlauf, 1976); and Ursula (TV, banned, 1978). Literary adaptations were Günther’s most successful genre. Offering the GDR public access to German literary history and world literature, it allowed Günther to touch on contemporary topics such as personal relationships, social constraints, narrating truth,


141 While Hoffmann worked with Günther more than any other director, she also worked with well-known directors such as Herrmann Zschoche (with whom she had been married), Günter Reisch, and Frank Beyer. Her work with Beyer, one of the GDR’s most renowned filmmakers, but who faced censorship and professional setbacks throughout his career, marked the end of her GDR career in 1978, when their movies Das Versteck and Geschlossene Gesellschaft (TV) were banned after her joining many other artists in signing the petition protesting the government’s 1976 expatriation of singer-songwriter Wolf Biermann.
the struggle for happiness, and suicide. For example, his 1975 literary adaptation of Thomas Mann’s *Lotte in Weimar*, a story about unrequited love, social oppression, and the role of artists, was also an attempt to make use of a reliable heritage piece in response to the trouble he had encountered two years prior with his experimental film, *The Keys* (1973).

Hoffmann had the lead role in this GDR-Polish co-production, and she had a supporting role in Günther’s *Lotte* film, playing Adele Schopenhauer—author, sister to Arthur Schopenhauer, and companion to Goethe’s first love and the main protagonist, Charlotte Kestner.

Mann’s novel was a literary response to Goethe’s famously controversial and loosely autobiographical novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (about unrequited love and suicide), which Günther filmed one year later in 1976, while working on more experimental short form films with Jutta Hoffmann. Though a supporting role, Hoffman’s performance as Adele in *Lotte in Weimar* was well received by leading GDR critics like Friedrich Dieckmann:

Wie Jutta Hoffmann ihre Goethe-Erzählung der als mütterliche Freundin okkupierten Weimar-Besucherin vorträgt, wie sie ausgedehnten Passagen durch Haltungswechsel, Saxonismen, kleine selbstironische Brechungen artifizialisert …, ohne Figur und Rede preiszugeben, ist ein Meisterstück des Könners wie der Substanz. 142

Dieckmann’s compliment uses the language of GDR star culture, as film critic Horst Lukas defined it in his 1964 *Filmspiegel* article, “Haben wir keine Stars?”: “Bei uns dominiert

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142 Quoted in Warnecke and Scholz, *Jutta Hoffmann*, 69. “The way Jutta Hoffman performs her Goethe story about the visitor to Weimar who is occupied as a motherly friend, the way she manipulates extended passages through changes in attitude, Saxon dialect, small self-deprecating breaks… without divulging her figure and speech, is a masterpiece of ability as well as substance.”
Egon Günther also relied on his actor’s ability to assert herself with him and the team in order to realize a truly successful project. For example, he solicited Hoffmann’s advice on the original script of *Her Third*, which he co-wrote with Günther Rücker and which was inspired by GDR author Eberhard Panitz’s socialist realist novel *Unter den Bäumen regnet es zweimal* (*Under the Trees it Rains Twice*, 1969). Hoffmann suggested he ditch the socialist realism and write the more humorous version that would ultimately be filmed, thereby allowing her to perform her Margit as she interpreted the role.\(^{145}\) In the role

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\(^{144}\) Quoted in Warnecke and Scholz, *Jutta Hoffmann*, 69. “Here and elsewhere, she humanizes through alienation. Because the gentle showing, light insistence of her style, always remains within the context of the human reality of the person and situation.”

\(^{145}\) Warnecke and Scholz, *Jutta Hoffmann*, 52.
she carved out for herself, Margit complains about the limits of women’s achieved emancipation and extends socialism’s lines of inquiry by calling for greater attention to its blind spots. Comparing their socialist society to her understanding of capitalist societies, Margit tells her friend Lucie, “Was für die Erfolg ist, ist für uns Unlauterkeit. Was für die schrecklich ist, ist für uns interessant. Was für uns kriminell ist, ist für die politisch. Nee, nee. Da müssen wir unsere eigene Werte finden.”

Hoffmann’s interpretation of her roles embodied the dialectics of past, present, and future social and economic realities, as change from past traditions to a socialist future emanated, for her characters, not from an ideological dictate coming from above, but rather through the necessity of change for individuals from below. In the case of her proletariat-turned-white collar “Little Lamb” Emma (Little Man, what now?, 1967) used her instincts and her sense of humanity to help her survive the Great Depression and World War I with her family intact. Margit, an orphan-turned-academic (Her Third, 1972), found herself turning inward to navigate the changes afforded women through emancipation while carving out her own personal happiness and self-fulfillment in matters of love. And Hoffmann’s simple, working-class Ric (The Keys, 1973) confronts gender and class disparity in her relationship with her intellectual boyfriend in a personal and psychological journey aided by her encounters with different hosts on their trip to Poland. Through these roles, Hoffmann revealed that the ideal and the real were often in contradiction, without

146 Der Dritte (Her Third), directed by Egon Günther (1972; Berlin, Germany: ICESTORM Entertainment GmbH & First Run Features, 2006), DVD. “What they [the West and capitalism] consider success is dishonesty for us. What’s appalling to them is interesting to us. What we consider criminal is political for them. No, no. We have to find our own values.”
despairing of the socialist ideal, wondering whether it was worthy or achievable, or ever putting the individual potential to develop political consciousness into question.

The performances Hoffmann gives in films such as *Her Third* (1971) and *The Keys* (1973) were possible because of the freedom Günther both expected and desired from her as a means to help him open up the form of his film. However, Hoffmann had already shown with *Little Man, What Now?* (1967) that she was willing to assert herself as an artist and negotiate censorship and top-down dictates restricting the arts. During production she had given the studios an ultimatum: Either she play the *Lämmchen* character her way, or they find someone else for the part.\(^{147}\) Television supervisor and cultural functionary Heinrich Adamek wanted an indisputable depiction of a working-class communist heroine, a proletarian whose class consciousness was clear and unyielding. Hoffmann, however, insisted on a critical performance of a heroine in the midst of social mobility.\(^ {148}\) Officials conceded, and Hoffmann played it her way and with great success—a monumental achievement considering this role came a short two years after the censorship decisions of 1965/66.

On working with actors, Günther said in 1999,

> Also versuchte ich in jeder Szene, die wir ausdachten oder die ich ihnen einredete, die Schauspieler zu sich selbst zu führen, damit sie in Balance sind, einig mit sich und nicht lügen, sich nicht verstellen müssen. Und wenn das in weiten Teilen stimmt, entsteht eine Wahrheit, die es vielleicht nur im Kino gibt.\(^ {149}\)

\(^ {147}\) Warnecke and Scholz, *Jutta Hoffmann*, 36.
\(^ {148}\) Ibid., 36.
\(^ {149}\) Ibid., 58. “For every scene we came up with or which I talked them into, I tried to draw the actors to themselves, so that they would be balanced, would come to an understanding and not deceive themselves, not have to pretend. And if this worked for the most part, a truth emerged that is perhaps possible only in cinema.”
This way to elicit the truth from an actor, her character, and the conflict being confronted was perhaps a contributing factor in the 1973 censorship decisions affecting *The Keys*, which was approved for only limited screenings and was not allowed to be screened abroad.\(^{150}\) It would not be the last time Günther and Hoffmann ran into trouble with the censors. On November 11, 1976, Jutta Hoffmann was one of more than eighty artists to sign the petition protesting the recent forced expatriation of singer-songwriter Wolf Biermann. As retribution, Hoffmann and other signatories faced severe punishment and struggled finding work. Günther left the GDR in 1978, after his television film *Ursula* was banned. In 1982, Hoffmann received a work permit to join the Salzburger Festspiele and left the GDR for the West as well.

### 2.3 Women, Film, and Society

Hoffmann clearly developed her artistic voice most strongly in her collaborations with Günther. By exploring parameters of the women’s film genre, however, she also took up the issue of emancipation, not as a given, but as an enacted civil right that required ongoing vigilence. Thus, Hoffmann’s roles addressed what had been one of the central tenets of GDR self-identity, which DEFA’s 1952 box-office hit *Frauenschicksale* (*Destinies of Women*, dir. Slatan Dudow) asserted with reference to the early nineteenth-century communist authority on women’s equality, August Bebel: “[e]s gibt keine Befreiung der Menschheit ohne die soziale Unabhängigkeit und Gleichstellung der

Though women’s films referred to emancipation more broadly to demonstrate the GDR’s progressive claims for the entire working class, the genre centers on female protagonists developing “more self-awareness” and the ability to handle conflict in an enduringly patriarchal society in which men are not enemies but allies in the emancipatory process. The broader context of this genre and Hoffmann’s career includes a number of converging cultural and political developments. In films these registered as a turn to the present and the everyday, the strategic use of culturally specific notions of male and female that addressed gender relations and went beyond them, and short-lived periods of liberalization in cultural policy that spurred a turn to more experimental filmmaking.

Working within the women’s film genre, Hoffmann’s performances demonstrated the discrepancy between the ideal public and problematic private lives of women in socialism, as is illustrated in the contrast between her rather one-dimensional public image in the media—especially exemplified by the close-up—and the depth of her figures on screen. The genre was widespread and attracted several filmmakers and actresses as a way to engage audiences in the social issues of gender and class. The genre of the women’s film also responded well to the cultural demands of the 1960s and 1970s that films address the psychology of the individual in collective socialist society and satisfy the needs and represent the experiences of the newly liberated working and peasant classes in a new society.


152 Ibid.
We see different filmic interpretations of individual and collective society beginning in the 1960s, but each film also demonstrates experimentation with film form, content, and acting, and provide the context in which we must see Hoffmann’s films. In 1962, *Monolog für einen Taxifahrer* (*Monolog for a Taxi Driver*, dir. Günter Stahnke), a short film for television depicting a taxi driver’s (Fred Düren) private, cynical thoughts about life, community, and marriage, was ultimately banned for its experimental and modernistic style and negative messages about socialist society. Another more successful example is the 1967 feature film, *Das Mädchen auf dem Brett* (*The Girl on the Diving Board*, dir. Kurt Maetzig), a fictional story about a competitive diver, Katharina Jens, who was played by the GDR’s Olympic diver Christiane Lanzke. The decision to cast her was perhaps due to the physical demands of the role; but it also pulled a GDR celebrity athlete—athletes did not face the same scrutiny about their stardom as actors did—into the performing arts. Katharina’s poor performance during an international diving competition causes the team to lose, and subsequently launches a running interior monolog about her own crippling self-doubt. Unlike the protagonist in *Monolog for a Taxi Driver*, however, Katharina seeks advice from new and old acquaintances, thereby demonstrating a less isolated protagonist and a more compassionate society. A third example is *Das siebente Jahr* (*The Seventh Year*, dir. Frank Vogel, 1968), which is structured around the running internal monolog of a successful surgeon (Jessy Rameik). One week prior to her seventh marriage anniversary, she considers the strengths and weaknesses of herself and her actor husband (Wolfgang Kieling) in their careers, marriage, and co-parenting. Similarly, the monolog was an important device for Hoffmann’s performances as well. Hoffmann’s delivery of the monolog in her films, such
as *Her Third* and *The Keys*, not only brought her thoughts more fully into the film narrative (they were always spoken aloud), but also invited audiences in a very Brechtian way to observe her character’s situation and then step back with her to reflect on its causes. Hoffmann’s monologs give voice not only to the psychology of the individual and the experiences of young people; they also introduce the way in which youth intersects with sexuality, gender and class as socialism continued to define itself throughout the 1960s and the 1970s.

Many of the women’s films tackle East Germany’s struggle to actually achieve “[...] social justice, individual self-determination, love, [and] freedom.”¹⁵³ Though those were broad issues affecting both men and women, within the genre of the women’s film, female protagonists and female actors were placed at the center of the narratives and inevitably depicted their gendered experiences, often eliciting gendered responses. One illustrative example here is the viewers’ response to *The Seventh Year* in *Filmspiegel*. One reader found that the female protagonist “der aktuelle Probleme aus dem Alltagsleben der werktätigen Frau aufgreift.”¹⁵⁴ Another demanded “mehr solcher Frauenrollen,” and another appreciated its depiction of the continued double workday for women:

> Jeder Mann kann seine Frau entlasten, wenn er nur will. Warum bringt der Schauspieler nicht morgens sein Kind mit dem Wagen in den Kindergarten, warum muß die Herzchirurgin diese Aufgabe zusätzlich per U-Bahn erledigen? Sicher brauchen Schauspieler vor den Proben und Vorstellungen Ruhe, eine Herzchirurgin vor der Operation etwa nicht?¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ “Sieben Meinungen zum *Siebten Jahr*,” *Filmspiegel*, no. 10 (May 1969): 20-21. “...captured the contemporary everyday problems of the working woman...”
¹⁵⁵ Ibid. “...more such women’s roles.”; “Every man can unburden his wife, if he wants. Why doesn’t the actor bring the child to kindergarten in the morning with his car? Why does the surgeon have to do this extra task by subway? Certainly a surgeon needs rest before an operation, just as much as an actor before practice or a performance?
Similarly, Jutta Hoffman’s performances show the inner contradictions of the character and the society in which she lives. Rather than boast full emancipation for women, her performances shed light on the actual experiences—the good and the bad—of that very emancipatory process.

Hoffmann’s characters lived and functioned in a society with opportunities for female workers and professionals, even as it limited their access to top positions. This growing economic independence was coterminous with increasing reproductive rights, including the SED party’s 1972 legalization of first-trimester abortions, aligning the GDR with existing Soviet Bloc policies on women, the workforce, women’s equality, family planning, and reproductive rights.156 These policies were resolutely heteronormative and by the 1970s, the GDR was campaigning for heterosexual family planning and childbearing, making the young mother an iconic image of East German society.157 Muttipolitik (Mommy Policies) became official, undoing the broader implications of Bebel’s notion of equality since, aside from being workers, it positioned women as mothers or mothers-to-be and, in the process, sidelined women’s professional equality, sexual pleasure, desire, companionship, and personal dreams.

157 By the end of the GDR, more than 90% of East German women had at least one child; correspondingly, 91-98% of East German women were employed at this point in time. A generous childcare system afforded this high percentage of working mothers by the end of the GDR, putting 80% of children age 3 and under in daycare, and 95% of children ages 3-6 in preschool. Moreover, since 1976, in support of its campaign for more childbearing, GDR mothers enjoyed the “baby year,” which gave women one full year at home with their new baby at full salary. See Ursula Schröter, “Socialist Patriarchy? Women’s Issues and Policies in East and West Germany” (public lecture at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, Amherst, Massachusetts, September 26, 2012). Courtesy of the DEFA Film Library Archive, University of Massachusetts Amherst.
The social and cultural imperative of becoming a mother, as it intersected with notions of self-fulfillment and happiness, was a common theme for the women’s film genre. In comparing *Her Third* to another famous women’s film, *The Legend of Paul and Paula*, Irene Dölling writes: “Paula is even more remarkable when we consider that films like Egon Günther’s *The Third* [sic] usually featured women who perfectly embodied the officially propagated notion of a woman. They managed to combine motherhood with intellectually-challenging employment and commitment to socialist society.”

I would argue this is too reductive a reading of Hoffmann’s Margit, however, who, while being a loving mother, a successful mathematician, and a committed socialist, is a deeply unsatisfied sensual woman. Margit exemplifies the struggle at the center of Hoffmann’s performances of women striving for complete happiness. For instance, in Herrmann Zschoche’s *Carla* (1965), Hoffmann presents a young, idealistic teacher, who is defining her own worldview through the lens of socialism, while encouraging her students to do the same. In Egon Günther’s *The Keys* (1973), she plays a young factory worker, Ric, vacationing with her intellectual boyfriend in Poland, where she eventually must confront the gender and class barriers that stand between them. In Frank Beyer’s *Das Versteck* (*The Hiding Place* 1978), she is a divorced woman taking physical pleasure from her repentant ex-husband without giving more of herself. Hoffmann’s final leading GDR performance, as Ellen in Frank Vogel’s 1978 TV film *Geschlossene Gesellschaft* (*Closed Society* 1978), again features a woman at a crossroads in her unhappy marriage with husband Robert, both trapped by their “unspeakable” problems—substance abuse, infidelity, gender inequality at

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home, and a social disconnect that is so pervasive, it penetrates even their own family dynamic. Such performances demonstrate that a well-rounded socialist personality must possess self-awareness in all aspects of life to become a happy and fully developed socialist citizen.

2.4 A Socialist Star in Close Up

In rare moments, the public gained insight into Jutta Hoffman’s thoughts about her performance of dialectics. In 1969, an undisclosed journalist for Filmspiegel conducted an interview with Hoffmann in a rapid question-and-answer format that presented a quick-witted side of the actress but resisted digging too deep into her life or career. At a key moment, however, Hoffmann offers a critical reflection on her role as an artist and public figure before the interviewer abruptly redirects the conversation. Responding to a question about her recent successes, Hoffmann segues:

JH: Erfolg haben ist problematisch, wußtest du das nicht?
JH: Keineswegs. Aber ich habe sie […] Was ist, wenn du eines Tages kein Risiko mehr eingehen kannst . . . wenn du’s einfach nicht mehr kannst?
I: Mach einen Punkt! Bisher war noch keine Deiner Rollen eine todsichere Sache!

The interviewer is looking for confirmation that Hoffmann enjoys her success, which, according to the interviewer, are measured by how “viel beschäftigt, gern gesehen [und]
gut bezahlt” she is.\textsuperscript{160} However, Hoffmann tries to express how she experiences that success by pointing out that, as a public figure, she feels limited in her ability to push her art form.

This 1969 interview comes two years after the popular film for television, \textit{Little Man, What Now?} during which Hoffmann negotiated her interpretation of her “Little Lamb” as a woman on the move between social classes, rather than the clear and unshakable proletarian woman that officials favored. While this example demonstrates the power of an actress with such a high public profile to navigate censorship, her response to the interviewer’s question two years later shows that Hoffmann ties increasing limitations to her rising status. Her hesitancy to allow too much attention to herself as a star was already evident after the premier of \textit{Little Man, What Now?} in 1967. She avoided talking about her own performance to the press, though the press covered it heavily throughout 1967. In December that year she agreed to an interview with the daily paper \textit{Bauernecho}, which they titled “Keß, liebenswert und tapfer. Wir stellen vor: die Schauspielerin Jutta Hoffmann.” Despite promising to introduce readers to the actress, Hoffmann chose instead to use the interview to discuss the real-life figure Anna Dietzen on whom her character was based. From there, she credits the team for the film’s success and speaks instead in the third person plural “we” and “us.”\textsuperscript{161}

These interviews suggest a twofold response to her growing visibility: the desire to take more risks in her art, and the limits—whether external, internal, or internalized—of her ability to do so as she stands in the spotlight. The interviewer from the 1969

Filmspiegel article unfortunately refuses further clarification of her troubling experiences by abruptly changing the subject:

JH: Manche sollen mich auch kalt finden. Und du?
JH: Sei ehrlich!
I: Also gut: von den Kühlen die Lieblichsten.162

While the interview shows a playful side of the actress, also evident in the playful expressiveness of her eyes captured in the accompanying close-up photos, it reveals very little about her, her artistic goals, or her work. In fact, as the above exchange suggests, the interviewer points out that Hoffmann comes across as aloof. A socialist star, while enjoying the common understanding that her private life is both off limits and uninteresting to GDR audiences, should still create a public image of familiarity and accessibility. This was expected of Hoffmann, but the interviewer’s criticism is also softened by the attempt to suggest that Hoffmann is not “cold” but “cool” and “lovely.” Film critic Rosemarie Rehahn is more direct when she writes, “Mancher hält sie für hochmütig. … Hochmütig ist sie nicht, anspruchsvoll. Das verwechselt mancher.”163

Egon Günther also points out Hoffmann’s private nature when he says, “Ich staune, wie wenig ich … von ihr weiß.”164 However, for Günther this demonstrates Hoffmann’s refusal to be easily controlled, which emerges from “Identifikation und Opposition”;

Rehahn elaborates on Günther’s observation, describing it as Hoffmann’s identification with the character’s experiences and hopes, and instinctual opposition to an imposed status quo, to overbearing directorial or textual (as well as official) authority, and to any normative social conventions that limit personal development and the development of the socialist personality.165 Actor and co-star Manfred Krug also recalls Hoffmann’s private nature, but he describes her tendency toward privacy more as a strategy of intrigue: “Privat weiß ich nicht. … Sie hat schauspielerischen Instinkt. … Sie wusste, ein Schauspieler muss sich wegdrehen, damit er vom Zuschauer wieder gewollt und erwartet wird.”166

Despite such efforts to dispel doubts about Hoffmann’s humility, she seemed to remain uncomfortable in the spotlight. This seemed to be a problem primarily for the critics, of course, while audiences and readers seemed unfazed. Nevertheless, the press often used the opportunity to fill in the blanks themselves, devising an enigmatic image and gendered discourse for her public figure.

In part, Hoffmann’s inscrutability is not surprising, as sensationalizing individuals and their private lives was a media phenomenon associated with western and capitalist star culture. However, that this tendency could affect proper coverage of her work is surprising, since in socialism her work and labor always should have been the cornerstone of her stardom. For example, when Hoffmann’s face appeared on the premiere cover of the new monthly journal Film und Fernsehen in January 1973, this premiere issue offered a six-page interview with the actor Erwin Geschonneck, entitled “My Life Was Always

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166 Warnecke and Scholz, Jutta Hoffmann, 88; quoting Manfred Krug in Die großen Kinofilme, Ralf Schenk, ed. “I don’t know about the private Jutta Hoffmann. … She had acting instincts. … She knew that an actor must turn away so that audiences would want and expect to see him again.”
Agitation for Our Cause: The Actor’s Work,” rather than an interview or article discussing her.\textsuperscript{167} The accompanying Geschonneck black-and-white close-ups present a collage of the actor in various character roles, showcasing his versatility as an actor and reinforcing the connection between his star image and his art form, and therefore his labor contribution to the state. Conversely, Hoffmann’s face on this cover was a closely cropped picture that was taken from the black-and-white photos included in the short 1969 Filmspiegel interview discussed above. The cover photo narrows in on Hoffmann’s well-known facial features, especially her expressive eyes. Though this is certainly a key aspect of her physiognomy and her acting repertoire, the photo also largely limits her popular image to these reduced physical attributes. Without an article and multiple photos such as the Geschonneck feature had in the body of the journal, the Hoffmann close-up objectifies the actress while fetishizing her specific physical attributes over attention to her work and art.

The camera’s focus on Hoffmann’s physical features both represents a gender-specific representation of wholesome youth and demonstrates a beauty ideal with blond hair, blue eyes, and white skin. The idea of a clean, pure femininity intersects with a pure, white image of Germanness—or Europeanness—which the GDR held up as representative of its own nationhood. Though the GDR press does not explicitly point out Hoffmann’s white skin, the camera and lighting refuse to let it go unnoticed—as a topic it is “invisible” (unlike her gender), but as an image it is highly visible.\textsuperscript{168}

\textsuperscript{168} For more on the invisibility of whiteness, see: Richard Dyer, White (New York: Routledge, 2013), especially chapter two, “Coloured white, not coloured,” 41-81.
Racial diversity was not an aspect of GDR star culture. The few non-white actors appearing in DEFA films were most often cast to represent the presence of foreigners living in East Germany, such as political exiles or international students from emerging socialist nations in South America, Africa, and Southeast Asia. In fact, the only ostensibly non-white image that achieved star status was performed by the white, Eastern European actor Gojko Mitić, whose stardom was entirely linked to his popular roles as different Native American figures. Though pragmatic reasons, such as a presumed lack of Native American actors in the GDR, certainly led to Mitić’s performances, DEFA problematically asked its audiences to identify with a non-white populace through the performance by a white European actor. Asking GDR audiences to identify with a racialized Other on an ideological level still did not blur the lines between German and non-German. The GDR’s international solidarity efforts coincided with its own nation-building efforts, and the GDR took a “high-minded” and Eurocentric approach to emerging socialist and non-aligned nations. White stardom implicitly signifies a “quest for purity,” suggesting “Either [whites] are a distinct, pure race, superior to all others, or else they are the purest expression of the human race itself.”

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171 Dyer, White, 22.
If white stardom perpetuates racial superiority and racial purity through “an extraordinarily powerful representation” of an idealized ordinary way of being,\textsuperscript{172} the symbiosis of whiteness, gender, youth, heterosexuality, and femininity that we see in the Hoffmann image raises these values to extraordinary heights. Hoffmann’s star image was created and disseminated widely as a visual representation of an exceptional example of the status quo in East Germany—a “majority-white populace [that] was not permitted to travel internationally,” but also a self-presumed anti-racist society that not only relegated racism to the past but to the West as well, “mythologizing the struggles” of racialized Others under the issue of “global class struggle.”\textsuperscript{173} As part of the GDR’s self-representation, whiteness assumed a taken-for-grantedness, as is exemplified by the Hoffmann close-up, which left the question of race relations in socialism generally, and in the GDR specifically, unexamined and led instead to exclusionary practices. While the GDR certainly avoided an explicit discussion of race within its own borders, whiteness as a racial signifier was undeniably visualized for GDR audiences implicitly, in particular as an image of the nation.

Hoffmann’s youthful, white, and attractive face thus becomes one key aspect of her national star image for both domestic and foreign audiences. In her internationally award-winning role in \textit{Her Third}, audiences meet Margit’s blind second husband (played by Armin Mueller-Stahl) through a flashback. He asks his friend (played by Jaecki Schwarz) to describe Margit to him. Audiences get a verbal description of the familiar face:

AMS: Wie sieht sie aus?
JS: Also, mir gefällt sie.
AMS: Blond?
JS: Ja.
AMS: Und die Augen?

\textsuperscript{172} Redmond, \textit{The Whiteness of Stars}, 264.
The racialized markers the friend describes lead the blind man to assume that she is white. That face has already been repeatedly framed for audiences in the film and extra-filmic materials. The opening sequence consists of a succession of close-up profiles of Hoffmann before the camera shows that the protagonist is a mathematician at work in a computer lab. The black-and-white sequence, narrated by a male voice discussing women’s equal employment opportunities and wages at an electrochemical plant, creates an objective, documentarian effect. In contrast, the intimate camera shot seems to promise to take us into this woman’s private, inner world; indeed, from work viewers follow Margit to her apartment, where more close-ups and medium shots show an unsettling image of a woman seeming to retreat into some unknown troubling thoughts. The second series of close-up shots in her apartment appear as the film switches to color and Margit is revealed as blond-haired and blue-eyed.

These opening sequences of *Her Third* correspond to the repeated focus in the media on Hoffmann’s physical attributes. In 1971, Günther had published a description of the actress in the entertainment paper, *Sonntag*:

> Sie ist eine echte Blondine von der dunkleren Art. Eins von den Mädchen, die einem bis zur Schulter gehen. Gelernte Schauspielerin. […] Lustbetont. Juttas Augen, auf die Antwort hin [die Szene einschneiden], werden, sagen wir mal, zweifach wie der berühmte unergründliche tiefe, tiefe Brunnen zu Assuan, dessen Wasserspiegel von der Sonne nur erhellt wird, wenn sie senkrecht darübersteht. Sie hat ein ovales Mädchengesicht,

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Günther’s idolization of Hoffmann’s appearance describes an ordinary and extraordinary beauty and way of being: she is attractive but not glamorous; she is undeniably charming but still appears real; she is petite and young, even childlike, suggesting a kind of pure innocence. She is approachable because she is friendly—which perhaps once again demonstrates how those close to her, like Günther, tried to dispel the notion that Hoffmann was aloof. Her mystical eyes are both deep and reflective. Importantly, Günther describes her “natural” features: “blonde” (though, admittedly dark blonde), blue eyes, oval face, and the insinuated soft, white skin.

The attributes of blond hair and blue eyes describe a modern German beauty ideal that resonates with the late nineteenth-century allegorical Germania, “the feminine embodiment” of Germany that ties the female body and “blonde Locken” (blonde locks) to the collective idea of the nation: “Konnotierte der männliche Körper stets auch einen Individualkörper, bertrat die weibliche Nationsverkörperung einen überindividuellen Kollektivkörper und die Transzendenz kollektiver Eigenschaften und Werte.”¹⁷⁶ The repetitive description of a petite, sensual, blond-haired, blue-eyed Hoffmann intersects a

¹⁷⁵ Egon Günther, “Begegnung,” 12. “She’s a true blonde, a dark blond. One of the girls who only reaches to your shoulder. A skilled actress. . . . Sensual. Jutta’s eyes . . . become, let’s say, like the deep, deep well at Assuan, whose surface is lit by the sun when it’s high above. She has an oval-shaped young girl’s face, her eyes are imperative, she is 1.64 meters tall, and she’s not resplendent in the flesh, but graceful. A child. She is friendly.”

¹⁷⁶ Bettina Brandt, *Germania und ihre Söhne: Repräsentation von Nation, Geschlecht und Politik in der Moderne* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), 224. “If the male body always connotes an individual body, the female national embodiment represents a supra-individual collective body and the transcendence of collective qualities and values.”
racial identity with a determined type of femininity, and allowed East Germany to lay claim to a larger national heritage, while Hoffmann—both in life and in film—was idealized as a *femme/enfant*, ideal in both beauty and purity.

### 2.5 The Dialectics of Happiness

While the media emphasized a particular physical femininity, a look at Hoffmann’s performances reveals much more than the one-dimensional image gained through repetitive descriptions and images of her physical features. While embodying the image and the persona, Hoffmann also simultaneously resisted it. For example, when she turned down the lead female role in Frank Beyer’s *Trace of Stones* in favor of the title role in *Carla*, she said, “Ich wollte die Hauptrolle spielen, nicht die Blondine zwischen den zwei Helden.” As an actress, she embodies the social constraints her figures face through the physical inability to move into action: hand-wringing; hands covering her mouth; finger-snapping and pumping her fist, as if to say “damn!”; pacing or sitting; turning away from the camera or exiting the room or frame in indecision. At other moments, however, Hoffmann uses the technique of stepping out of character—a character who is held back by her own external and internalized limitations—to demonstrate another possibility: a determined woman making her inner self commensurate with her outer self. In a short monolog in *Her Third*, Hoffmann’s Margit says to her reflection in the mirror, “Wir haben alle Rechte, aber einfach hingehen und sagen, ‘dich brauche ich, dich will ich haben’…”

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Dieses Recht ist für uns noch nicht erobert. Naja, wer soll es uns erobern, wenn nicht wir?”

Margit gives voice to the limitations of her emancipation, while stepping in and out of a role, as is illustrated through the gesture of putting on and then taking off a wig. When the camera eventually pans right and away from Margit’s reflection, it brings her comments back into the film narrative by offering them to her friend Lucie, before cutting back to a close-up of Hoffmann’s face, now looking directly into the camera. She says, “Emanzipiert, aber kein Mann.” Yet, while the monolog points out the problems, it is remarkably hopeful. Margit recognizes that full emancipation for women not only must be won, but that it can be won, and the people to make that happen are women themselves.

Another cut brings Hoffmann back into character and takes viewers back into the film narrative. This scene exemplifies the experimental filmmaking the film team was exploring at the time as a means to grapple with the challenges and ideological conflicts that prevented individuals from finding happiness and developing into well-rounded socialist personalities. Reflecting on her performances, Egon Günther writes:


179 Der Dritte (Her Third), directed by Egon Günther (1971; Berlin, Germany: ICESTORM Entertainment GmbH & First Run Features, 2006), DVD. “We have so many rights, but to simply walk up and say, ‘I need you. I want you’… That right is not yet won for us. Well, who should do that, if not us?”

180 Ibid. “Emancipated, but not a man.”

181 Egon Günther, quoted in Warnecke and Scholz, Jutta Hoffmann, 61. “The tension between entering a role and stepping out of it and back to the private self attracted her. She always liked to interrupt the acting, at which point she would look at the camera and laugh or stay in character after the cut. She wanted to say: But I am I, Jutta Hoffmann. This interplay—immersing herself in the role and then coming out of it—incredibly interested her.”
A closer look at Hoffmann’s performance in *Her Third* illustrates this point. Margit starts as a young, giggly girl, who wrings her hands self-consciously and asks inane questions, because she does not know how to talk to authority figures and men. She becomes an educated, professional woman and single mother of two daughters, who learns along the way what she wants in life but struggles with the social constraints that prevent her from getting it. She continues interacting with her current love interest, Hrdlitschka, with the demureness she exhibited as a young person. When she brings him home and her daughters demand to know who he is, Hoffmann gives one of her best-known monologs.\(^{182}\) Though the camera keeps the scene firmly within the film narrative, cutting a few times to the girls and to Hrdlitschka watching Margit speak, Hoffmann steps out of role, away from the shy and uncertain Margit, and reveals the frustrations of a woman who has been acting for some time, untrue to herself and to others in this aspect of her life:


\(^{182}\) The monolog was a technique Hoffmann and Günther developed for her performances to capitalize on spontaneity and experimental film form. In their final film together, *The Keys*, Hoffmann gives a seven-minute monolog in a parked tram. 

\(^{183}\) *Der Dritte (Her Third)*, directed by Egon Günther (1971; Berlin, Germany: ICESTORM Entertainment GmbH & First Run Features, 2006), DVD. “I’m a mathematician. I work, think and feel in accord with the principles and politics of the socialist technical revolution. But if I like a man, … in all probability I’ll make a fool of myself if I tell him so. No, … I have to conceal my love and bury my desires deep down... If he touches me, I’m supposed to resist him, avert my eyes and say no. Otherwise he is disgusted. Do you understand that I don’t want that? That I can’t do that? I want you to see me!”
The monolog offers a self-reflexive look at the film and the character and invites doubt about Margit’s own behaviors (such as her demureness) and the behaviors of those around her. Such moments question her own normative performances, and—to paraphrase Judith Butler—the “real” (the visible or normal) as well, thereby allowing new possibilities for what is normally rendered invisible to become imaginable.\textsuperscript{184} She knows she deserves intimacy, love, and partnership, and that she has every right to pursue it. She is an emancipated socialist woman. She carries this knowledge about herself and her society, but she struggles bridging the collective advantages socialist women enjoy—the right to work, professional training, economic independence—and her quest for individual self-fulfillment.

Despite Hoffmann’s success with audiences and film critics for her candid portrayal of a woman striving to becoming a well-rounded socialist personality, her performance of Margit’s fluid sexuality and her harsh criticism of outdated patriarchal attitudes in GDR society initiated strong resistance to the film among cultural officials and forced the film team into negotiations with the censors. Even though this performance in 1972 coincides with the era of openness in the arts after Honecker’s ascension to power, the censors found many problems they felt warranted keeping the film from public view. A report from the central committee for culture declared that \textit{Her Third} “entwürdigend für die Frauen [der] Republik ist,” especially to single women, mothers, and their children.\textsuperscript{185} The list of grievances include: a reduction of the challenges for full female emancipation to sexual

\textsuperscript{185} Aktennotiz, quoted in Schenk, \textit{Eine kleine Geschichte}, 176-177. “…degrading to the women [of the] republic.”
problems between men and women; the portrayal of a “mannstolle Frau” (“man-crazy woman”); a limited depiction of healthy morals tied only with the church; scandalous scenes of an abortion attempt and a lesbian sexual encounter; the film mocks the Free German Youth (FDJ) organization when a young Margit dances exuberantly in her FDJ uniform; and incongruence with real women’s lives. Nevertheless, cultural official Kurt Hager replied that, under the auspices of Honecker’s new “no taboo” policy, “Alles Für und Wider im Film soll und muss auch öffentlich diskutiert werden.”186 Notably, the committee does not complain about the two men in Margit’s past who abandon their children, leaving the mother (and the state) to raise them. In fact, the committee does not object to promiscuous or irresponsible grown men; it only objects to a “man-crazy woman,” whose sexual desires lead to situations deemed questionable, such as lesbian eroticism and abortion.

The official response to and the film team’s treatment of Margit’s sexuality are quite different. While the committee is fixated on it, the film team sees Margit’s sexuality as one component of her individual happiness. Indeed, dramaturg Werner Beck’s statement on the film argues that a primary intent was not only to win audiences, but to encourage them to think about the film’s message about emancipation, interpersonal relationships, and society: “daß aber ohne Liebe, ohne den richtigen Lebenspartner nicht nur die Glückserfüllung für den Einzelnen gestört bleibt, sondern auch seine Beziehungen zur gesellschaftlichen Umwelt eingeschränkt oder gar negativ beeinflußt werden können.”187

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186 Ibid., 177. “…all the pros and cons of the film should and must be discussed publicly.”
187 “Stellungnahme zum Rohschnitt des Films ‘Der Dritte’ by Werner Beck, October 15, 1971.” (BArch DR 29481/117 51 M 3 15 39). Courtesy of the Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde. “…that without love, without the right life partner, not only might the
In Margit’s “pursuit of happiness,” the position the film takes on sexuality is perhaps the most ambiguous. After Margit reflects on the limits of female emancipation, she and Lucie share an erotic moment. Margit walks into Lucie’s frame and stands behind her, both women facing the camera. She rubs her cheek against Lucie’s and caresses her breastbone while softly kissing her shoulder. Margit’s eyes are open and attentive, but Lucie is leaning back into Margit’s embrace with closed eyes and an upturned face, surrendering to the pleasure of the caress. Margit steps away and the camera follows, focusing on a close-up of her downcast eyes and arrested movement. When Lucie follows her back into the frame, the women kiss softly before Margit abruptly leaves to go home. Whatever this scene suggests about the women’s needs, desires, or sexuality it does not develop any further, and in the end Margit enters a fully different sexual relationship with her chosen male partner. Though heterosexuality is restored in the end, it is perplexing that the scene between the two women was left in at all. As is clear from the committee’s response, there was great concern about the moral implications of allowing the public to see lesbian eroticism on the silver screen.

When Günther, Hoffmann, and co-actress Barbara Dittus (Lucie) created the scene in 1971, Günther claimed “eher lasse ich mir die Hände abhacken” than take it out. The scene instigated a public debate to which Hoffmann clearly did not feel she could adequately respond. In 2013, Hoffmann described the lesbian love scene as zart (tender) and erotisch (erotic), but when pressed about it in 1972, she described it simply as an individual’s pursuit of happiness become impaired, but his relationship to his social environment might also be limited or even negatively influenced.”

\[188\] Warnecke and Scholz, *Jutta Hoffmann*, 53. “I would rather have my hands cut off…”

\[189\] Ibid.
“Ausdruck natürlicher Zärtlichkeit” (expression of natural tenderness) that is part of female friendship.\textsuperscript{190} However, if we read this as part of a sequence that begins with Margit’s lament about the moral censure of a woman pursuing a sexual partner and ends with the eroticism between Margit and Lucie, the ambiguity hints at broader sexual politics. We assume she is talking about the stigma against women initiating relationships with men, and in the wider narrative, this makes sense. Yet, at this moment in the film and the scene it precedes, the statement allows audiences to reflect more broadly on the limits of sexual emancipation and personal choices in matters of love.

The new filmmaking style Hoffmann and Günther set out to develop and which audiences saw in \textit{Her Third} culminated in their 1973 full-length feature film, \textit{The Keys}. Günther used on-location shooting in Cracow to encourage and capture spontaneity during filming, as well as to create a documentary effect in the film (e.g., an emotional sequence filmed at Nowa Huta steelworks, depicting hard labor and difficult working conditions, especially for women). They also played with the camera; for example, attaching it to a crane for a streetcar accident to disrupt the point-of-view and incorporate extreme close-ups. For narrative, they included unscripted dialog and the monolog.

This film was censored and removed from circulation after limited screenings, and exports for international release were cancelled due to its experimental and improvisational style, as well as its critical treatment of socialist society. \textit{The Keys} is told from the point of view of Ric, a machine operator from a lightbulb factory, presumably NARVA, the primary lightbulb production company in the GDR. Ric and her boyfriend

Klaus (Jaecki Schwarz), a math student and aspiring engineer, are planning a trip to Cracow, Poland. En route they meet an affable young couple from Cracow, who give them the keys to their apartment to use for the duration of their visit. As Ric and Klaus meet different people from all walks of life and become familiar with the city and its history, they begin to anxiously reflect on the meaning of things both large and small—German historical accountability after Nazism, friendship, and the gendered and class differences that persist in their life under socialism. These issues also create tension in their relationship. Ric’s anxieties turn out to be fatal: she fears Klaus has overheard her rehearsing how to communicate her feelings to him about the future of their relationship, and when she realizes he has left the apartment, she mistakenly assumes he is leaving her. Ric runs into the street to pursue him and accidentally steps in front of an approaching streetcar and is killed. Through Ric’s death, Klaus fully realizes what she means to him; but instead of a future together, he is left alone, grieving in a foreign country, trying to navigate the bureaucratic nightmare of arranging transport of her body back to East Germany.

The film encountered harsh criticism and censorship due to both content and film form. The Polish government feared the film represented post-World War II Poland in a negative light—specifically as being a bureaucratic and unsympathetic state, especially toward Poland’s German neighbors—and Polish cultural officials wanted to ban it altogether. The Polish diplomatic office in Berlin wrote a letter objecting to the film and sent it to Peter Heldt, the director of the Department of Culture, as well as to Erich Honecker himself. Criticisms centered primarily on the film’s negative treatment of Poland as a place lacking empathy and for its depiction of troubling German-Polish relations. For example, in one scene at a memorial to Polish victims of German fascism, in which a
distracted Klaus encounters a concentration camp survivor who tries to comfort him after Ric’s death, Rick leaves the scene, ultimately feeling ashamed of his own grief in comparison. Here the past seems unsurmountable for contemporary Germans and Poles to find ways to help each other in the present. The scene was cut out of the final version. Other scenes were criticized because, as Hoffmann later described, they “hätten ihre Drecken fotografiert”: from the heartless treatment Klaus encountered when dealing with Polish officials while organizing transport of Ric’s body back to Germany, to the harsh treatment of Polish workers at the steel mill job site, which the Polish government was particularly proud of.

Cultural officials and critics in the GDR also took issue with both the loose film form and the female protagonist’s tragic death. The tragedy of the World War II narrative combined with the tragedy of the young couple’s impossible love portrayed too negative an image of East Germany’s past and present, especially the country’s self-professed successful emancipation for workers and women from the chains of the past. The film was edited and cuts were made, and it premiered on February 21, 1974 for a limited number of screenings in Poland and the GDR before being shelved a week later, on February 27. Contracts for the film's export to the Czech Republic and to West Germany were cancelled.

When Ric visits the Nowa Huta steelworks, she begins crying inconsolably. A worker herself, she cannot fathom the oppressive working conditions she witnesses there.

193 Warnecke and Scholz, *Jutta Hoffmann*, 63. “As if they’d photographed their dirt.”
She turns away from the camera—and therefore away from the steel operations in front of her and the camera—crying into a handkerchief and repeating, “Es ist so hart!” The single female worker comes over to console her, and the two engage in a conversation about working conditions, stamina, and being a woman in such a physical job. Since the team shoots on location, using a lay actor to play out the documentary-like scene, Hoffmann’s raw emotions also determine the audience’s reaction to the setting. This negative portrayal is especially problematic “in Gegenüberstellung zu dem sauberen elektronischen Betrieb, in dem die DDR-Bürgerin arbeitet.”

If Hoffmann’s performance at the steel mill was able to pull others into the inner world of her character, the opening scene of the film offers an example of how she could create a certain emotional distance and step temporarily away from her character. The Keys opens on a medium shot of Ric standing in front of a mirror, with the camera behind her and capturing her reflection rather than her person. The audience’s viewpoint is shaped by this extra distance to the actress, and the distance is reinforced by the actress’s own somewhat detached performance. Situating Hoffmann within the frame by using a mirror is a technique Günther had used previously in Her Third. Rather than suggest the deeper introspection that staring into a mirror might suggest, Hoffmann’s performance it suggests that her character is standing back from herself, trying to gain an outside perspective of herself (shared with the audience) that, while insightful, is also cool and assessing. The monolog she delivers in Her Third uses the mirror to step out of character and deliver a critical assessment of women’s emancipation. In The Keys, the establishing sequence

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195 “It’s so hard!”
196 Schenk, Eine kleine Geschichte der DEFA, 180. “... in contrast to the clean electronics factory, in which the GDR citizen works.”
shows Ric trying on different outfits in front of a mirror as she packs for her trip to Poland. Rather than react positively or negatively to each outfit—it seems that she does not have an opinion either way—she just goes through the motions of putting on and taking off each set of clothes. This familiar exercise might seem a little odd for most people as they watch Ric perform it, because the decision for or against a certain outfit usually has to do with how one feels wearing it. Hoffmann’s performance effectively removes the whole emotional aspect of this daily exercise, leaving viewers to wonder at its futility.

Günther and Hoffmann were happy to let audiences sort such questions out on their own because their goal was to raise questions about the psychology of the individual and her society. In 1999, Günther reflected on their experimental form from the 1970s and explained: “Ein Film, der eine strenge Konstruktion hat, ist für jede Diktatur höchst angenehm. [...] Dem haben wir uns entzogen.”¹⁹⁷ The most illustrative example of this artistic goal is an extended 7-minute monolog near the end of The Keys. Later, Günther recalls that the monolog was not in the script or that it only appeared in later versions, after much experimentation with the filming and expanding on the free form that Günther and Hoffmann had tried earlier, such as in Her Third. Hoffmann recalls sitting in the depot all day, practicing lines while Günther periodically came in to check on her. It was finally nighttime when Hoffmann felt ready for the monolog scene, and Günther and cameraman Gusko simply put the camera on Hoffmann and let her talk—until a Polish transportation worker stationed at the depot unexpectedly climbed into the car and into the frame to suggest in broken German—which he learned as a POW under the Germans during World War II.

¹⁹⁷ Warneke and Scholz, Jutta Hoffmann, 58. “A film with a rigid construction is particularly pleasing for any dictatorship. . . . We moved away from that.”
War II—that she wrap things up and go home so he could clean the car. In the monolog, Ric expresses her feelings that Klaus, as an intellectual, will continue to move up socially and develop personally, while she will always be a factory worker, aspiring for a family and motherhood rather than a career. Klaus, of course, wants Ric to aim higher, suggesting that his partner should match him in this, but Ric disagrees. Shortly after the monolog starts, Hoffmann turns in her seat and looks over her right shoulder at the camera, eventually shifting sideways to be able to face the camera for the duration of the monolog, which is worth quoting almost in its entirety:


198 Warneke and Scholz, Jutta Hoffmann, 61.
199 Die Schlüssel (The Keys), directed by Egon Günther (GDR: DEFA, 1973), VHS. “I am a girl, who sits at the machine and does not do any complicated work. And that isn’t…it isn’t anything special. Can’t you understand that everything else is too hard for me, too complicated, that it just doesn’t sink in? I don’t understand math and all of that… I’m not made for that… I will remain a worker my whole life, and I don’t have to settle. No, no, no. I don’t settle… But I don’t want to be looked down at by my love and others.
This last statement suggests that issues of social decorum have been a problem in their relationship, namely that Klaus has scolded Ric for lacking good etiquette. If she were to perform such an episode, in which she “eats like a pig,” it would exemplify Brechtian *Gestus* that pointed to class difference. Instead, her monolog delivers the message in a more straightforward manner through direct address. This stubborn resistance to the pressure to refine her manners and change her life goals to move up socially seems to be a theme straight out of *My Fair Lady*, which, in 1968, was a popular theater production in the GDR.

Moreover, it parallels other depictions of working-class women and class disparity in the GDR, such as Domröse’s Paula, whose unrefined and impulsive behaviors embarrassed her lover Paul, a state official who expected his partner to be versed in the conventions surrounding high culture. This is clear when Paul takes Paula to an open-air string quartet concert; he rejects her attempts to be publicly affectionate with him and is embarrassed when she shows an unrestrained emotional response to the music, first crying then clapping enthusiastically between movements.

Like Domröse’s Paula, Hoffmann’s Ric also resists the pressure to educate herself and aspire to a higher social position to fulfill their emancipation and personal development. Moreover, both women, in their own way, desire motherhood above

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I have to be able to give myself as I am. I’m not changeable. [...] What do you know about our life?... And I like to work. I’m good at it. Really good, I think. Oh! Our relationship. From my perspective, it’s not a problem. But for you, I wonder if one day, when you’re at a conference and the women are allowed to come… That’s how it is, my boy. In your eyes, I see the fear that I could stay beneath you. Do you know what? I will stay beneath you. Remain behind! And with the technical issues you’re struggling with, I’ll… I don’t understand! I don’t understand! And I go into the kitchen, make coffee. Oh, I can be happy with you. But can you with me? Man! I eat like a pig and you get so annoyed! Do you know why I eat? Because I like it.

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education and social advancement as a key aspect of a fulfilling life. While Paula never articulates her deep pride in motherhood (just her deep desire for children), Ric does:


Ric does regret harboring such hard feelings, however; later, when she fears Klaus leaves her, she says to the empty room: “Ich bereue jedes Wort.”

It is this critical moment of misunderstanding that leads to Ric’s tragic death, which her monolog in the parked streetcar has foreshadowed. When it looks like Ric might vocalize her private doubts to Klaus, and Klaus is finally coming to some of the same conclusions as Ric, Klaus leaves the apartment to bum a cigarette from a neighbor. Ric mistakes his sudden absence for desertion. She frantically runs to the street to find him, only to run in front of a moving tram and sustain fatal injuries. When critics and officials objected to this outcome, Günther expressed his own cynical frustration at the censors’ opinions: “Aha, Sie möchten gerne verschweigen, dass auch im Sozialismus das Leben mit dem Tod endet!” 201 Officials and critics, however, were objecting to the senselessness of the death scene. Critic Peter Ahrens (aka dramaturg Klaus Wischnewski) expressed his own ambivalence toward the scene: “Anlaß des Todes – ein Mißverständnis. Dessen

200 Die Schlüssel (The Keys), directed by Egon Günther (GDR: DEFA, 1973), VHS. “Do you know what I’m happy about? That equality does not keep us from having children. I want a child. I want to have a child. And […] I’ll love it with a strength you couldn’t even dream of. And that will be enough for me. Man. Do you know what? Kiss my ass, man. I don’t regret a single word I said to you. Not a single word.”

201 Warneke and Scholz, Jutta Hoffmann, 58. “Aha, you would like to conceal the fact that even in socialism life ends with death!”

102
Ursache – ein Problem, das sich zum Konflikt verschärfen muß, den zwei Menschen lösen können im Zusammenleben oder Auseinander-gehen.

While Ahrens’s criticism is responding to The Keys specifically, he also suggests reservations that he is observing a larger trend developing in GDR contemporary films of killing off (female) characters to close the narrative, such as the death of Angelica Domröse’s Paula in Die Legende of Paul und Paula that same year.

The tram accident scene, however, also demonstrates the benefits and challenges of shooting on location and capturing the spontaneity of such a technique, where bystanders become part of the narrative. Hoffmann later recalled that people nearby did not understand if something terrible had happened or if the crew was just in the middle of shooting. With Hoffmann lying on the ground with shattered glass and an overturned streetcar, and dressed in torn clothes and fake blood, bystanders stood by in concerned confusion, which cameraman Erich Gusko readily captured and editor Rita Hiller cut into the final editing of the scene. At one point a man became convinced that he was witnessing an actual accident, and he tried to pull Hoffmann out from under the wreckage, who became terrified that she might actually be injured in his attempted rescue. Annoyed that he had ruined the scene, and more than a little concerned at the physical risk to herself, she refused to reshoot it.

In hindsight, such moments were precisely the kinds of real-life unrehearsed reactions, emotions, and behaviors that experimental artists like Günther and team were trying to

202 Peter Ahrens, “Die Schlüssel,” review of The Keys, directed by Egon Günther, Weltbühne (Berlin-Ost), March 19, 1974. “Cause of death – a misunderstanding. The reason – a problem that intensifies into a conflict that two people could resolve either by being together or breaking up.”

203 Ibid.

204 Warnecke and Scholz, Jutta Hoffmann, 61.
incorporate into their filmmaking. To top it off, they also demonstrated a kind and compassionate society, which cultural officials wished film to show. While the young couple’s vacation in Cracow becomes a tragic lesson and missed opportunity for personal development, interpersonal communication and loving one another, the filming itself invited the public to make different decisions, as the filmmakers hoped the questions the film raised would do for audiences.

Many of Hoffmann’s performances faced conflict with the censors, though depending on which cultural political era their production coincided with, some, like Her Third, enjoyed full release while others, such as Carla and The Keys, faced limited screenings and publicity, shelving, or outright banning. Nevertheless, such roles demonstrated the full ability and reach of her experimental acting, not only for filmmakers and film students, who had access to unscreened films and films with no or limited distribution, but also for the public. Despite the possibility that a finished film might never make it to cinemas, the GDR press informed audiences in advance of films in production and the actors involved in those projects, in order to generate interest for the anticipated premiere. Such censorship created a mystery around Hoffmann’s public persona that suggested something more behind the girl-next-door image, and it likewise angered members of the public when they were able to observe the process for themselves. For example, movie-goer Karin Karmosin from Rostock expressed her “Ärger beim Kinobesuch” (“Annoyed Going to the Cinema”) in an open letter published in the Ostsee-Zeitung on April 13, 1972, after noticing cuts during a second screening of Her Third:

Ich sah kürzlich den DEFA-Film “Der Dritte”. Der Film behandelt eine interessante Thematik, und er gefiel mir insgesamt gut. Ich hatte eine Abendvorstellung gesehen, und zufällig sah ich den Film am 2. April noch einmal in der Nachmittagsvorstellung um 15.00 Uhr im Rostocker Capitol. Dabei fiel mir auf, daß der Film in dieser Vorstellung sehr gekürzt war, und das in mehreren Szenen. Es gibt noch Voreingenommenheit gegen DEFA-Filme. Daß bei guten DEFA-Filmen mehr getan werden sollte, um ein volles Haus zu sichern, damit sage ich nichts Neues. Umso mehr frage ich mich, warum dieser eigenwillige Szenenschnitt? Glaubte man, die Besucher würden den Film so besser verstehen, oder für die Zuschauer lohne der Aufwand nicht?\footnote{Correspondence: Her Third. Sent from dramaturg Werner Beck to Artistic Director of the “Berlin” Group, Gen. Schröder on June 20, 1971.” (BArch DR117 / 29481 51 M 3 15 39). Courtesy of the Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde. “I recently saw the DEFA film Her Third. The film treats an interesting topic, and overall I liked it. I went to an evening screening, and by chance I saw the film again on April 2 at 3pm in the Rostock Capitol theater. I noticed that the film in this [second] screening had been quite shortened, and in several scenes. There is still bias against DEFA films. I’m not saying anything new, when I say that more should be done for good DEFA films to ensure a sold-out theater. That’s why I’m wondering about this arbitrary scene cut. Did one think that the viewers could [then] understand the film so much better or that it’s not worth the viewers’ while?”}

Günther considered such challenges part of the job: “Es machte den Beruf zu einer seriösen Sache. Man wurde sehr ernst genommen, nicht nur von den Zensoren, sondern auch vom Publikum.”\footnote{Warnecke and Scholz, Jutta Hoffmann, 58. “It made the profession a serious thing. You were taken seriously, not only by the censors, but also by the public.”} For Hoffmann’s part, she dared to take the risks, understanding that the complicated and messy intersecting social stations her characters faced contributed greatly to her success as an actress and a star when her interpretation of a character won out against censorship.
CHAPTER 3
ANGELICA DOMRÖSE AND THE POLITICS OF DESIRE:
MORE THAN JUST A PRETTY FACE

Sie ist eine Suchende, sie will keine Bequemlichkeit und keine Zufriedenheit, und wenn sie gezeigt hat, daß sie irgendeine Frauengestalt besonders einprägsam verkörpern kann, wird sie mißtrauisch.208

3.1 A Multifaceted Woman and Actress

In Angelica Domröse’s 2003 autobiography, Ich fange mich selbst ein (I’ll Capture Myself), she poses the question many East German directors asked themselves during the 1960s and 1970s: “Hoffmann oder Domröse?” She states rather emphatically, “[w]ir galten als Konkurrentinnen, Jutta Hoffmann und ich.”209 Filmmaker Heiner Carow approached Domröse in 1965 with the idea to cast “Hoffmann und Domröse” in his new love triangle story, Jeder hat seine Geschichte (Everybody Has Their Own Story), envisioning Hoffmann as the humble, lovable Susanne, and Domröse as the greedy, materialistic Lore. But by then, Domröse had trained as a Brechtian actress at the famous Berliner Ensemble, and she convinced Carow that his two female opposites were actually one and the same person, a dialectic to be played out in a dual role by Domröse herself.210 Carow cannot be credited entirely for his original idea of casting both Hoffmann and Domröse. The different types of female figures the two stars had come to embody already

208 Christoph Funke and Dieter Kranz, Angelica Domröse (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1976), 5. “She’s a seeker, she doesn’t want comfort and contentment, and once she’s shown that she can embody a female figure in a particularly memorable way, she becomes suspicious.”
209 Angelica Domröse, Ich fange mich selbst ein: Mein Leben (Köln: Gustav Lübbe Verlag, 2003), 138. “We were rivals, Jutta Hoffmann and I.”
210 Ibid., 139.
existed in the East German public imagination. Domröse was the sex icon to Hoffmann’s girl-next-door image; if Hoffmann was characterized as the femme enfant, Domröse was the femme fatale. As Domröse points out, however, both those characterizations—and even more—can be seen as simply different aspects of one person, and she wanted to make it okay to embrace them concurrently.

Domröse’s characters often struggled to become fully developed personalities against fragmentation of the self and external limits imposed on their lives. Fragmentation of people and social life is, of course, a tool Marxist scholars identify as a capitalist method of regulation; and similarly, the fragmentation of the self is what postmodern scholar Frederick Jameson has identified as both a “concept” and “experience” of late capitalism.211 As a public GDR figure, Domröse thematized this struggle in East German society as well, especially as an ongoing process for becoming a contented and well-rounded socialist personality. Indeed, Carow became one of the first to let her explore and embody this dialectic of the self in 1965, when he gave her the dual Susanne/Lore role, which he had originally envisioned as two separate parts for the GDR’s two leading actresses of that generation, Hoffman and Domröse. Several of Domröse’s characters, such as Effi Briest and Paula, continued to experience social conflict when they tried to

reconcile their individual lives with social life, and Domröse also professed to having struggled to bridge a private and public version of herself.\textsuperscript{212}

One key aspect of the desire for fulfillment and self-determination that Domröse’s performance of the struggling subject portrayed was a figure’s romantic and sexual life. As one critic from the daily youth paper \textit{Junge Welt} read into her most famous title role in \textit{Die Legende von Paul und Paula} (\textit{The Legend of Paul and Paula}, 1972), the film tries “den Wert der echten Liebe für die Persönlichkeitsentwicklung zu beleuchten.”\textsuperscript{213}

Similarly, GDR film critic, satirist and author Renate Holland-Moritz,\textsuperscript{214} commended the film in her column: “Gewiß gehts um die Liebe, sogar um die ganz große Liebe, und folglich gehts auch um Sex, der freilich nicht als Hauptfeld der Emanzipation aufgefaßt werden sollte. [Es drängt] den Zuschauer nicht in die peinliche Rolle des Voyeurs, sondern [läßt] ihn teilhaben an der schönsten Sache, die es im Leben gibt.”\textsuperscript{215} Beyond Domröse’s sexualized image, the conflicts her characters faced—from her earliest Siegi

\textsuperscript{212} Domröse, \textit{Ich fange mich selbst ein}, 132.


\textsuperscript{214} Renate Holland-Moritz (b. March 29, 1935; d. June 14, 2017) was an award-winning satirical author, journalist and renowned film critic in East Germany, whose career continued with great success in reunified Germany. Holland-Moritz started out as a volunteer and then as a freelance journalist for East German national and regional papers, until she was employed full-time in 1956 with the satirical magazine \textit{Eulenspiegel}. There she started the popular film review column, Kino-Eule, which reached a large readership due to its satirical and biting overtones. In addition to her film criticism and journalism, Holland-Moritz also published twenty books, three of which were adapted for film and television. See: Müller-Engbergs, Helmut et al., eds., \textit{Wer war wer in der DDR? Ein Lexikon ostdeutscher Biographien}, Vol. 1 (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2010), 569-570.

\textsuperscript{215} Renate Holland-Moritz, “Kino-Eule,” \textit{Eulenspiegel}. April 3, 1973. “Of course it’s about love, it’s even about that greatest love of all, but it’s also about sex, which, admittedly, isn’t supposed to be seen as a main component of emancipation. It doesn’t put the viewer in the embarrassing position of voyeur, but rather lets him take part in the most beautiful thing we have in life.”
role to Paula—demonstrated the promise of sexual liberation for both women and men. For example, as the canonical figure Effi Briest, Domröse portrayed not only her character’s immense suffering under the strict moral codes that forced Instetten to punish his young wife Effi for her infidelity; she pointed out that Instetten was likewise controlled by the same rules, asking, “ja, was sollt’ er am Ende anders tun?”

Domröse’s performances increasingly represented an exception to the socialist morality of the early 1960s, which shaped and limited women’s lives as workers and mothers, and which regulated family life. Like the ideology of the socialist personality, socialist morality was a “highly authoritarian concept” that demanded “nonegoism and solidarity with others, personal responsibility and decency, nonmaterialism and commitment to progress.” Throughout Domröse’s GDR career, she pushed the limits of SED prudishness and conservatism, banking on her own ever-increasing talents and popularity with audiences to help advance her career and gain the cultural capital that would enable her to adequately respond to the cultural and social needs of her audience.

Her popularity also served the GDR’s intention to use culture to gain recognition of East Germany in West Germany and abroad. By the early 1960s, Domröse had already grabbed the attention of the West German illustrated press with the success of her early television role as Irene Sauer in the romantic comedy trilogy *Papas neue Freundin* (*Papa’s New Girlfriend*, dir. Georg Leopold, TV, 1960-62), and western magazines like

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Stern continued to follow her screen and stage career in the GDR. By 1974, the West German press covered her regularly—calling her the “DEFA-Star,” “DDR-Star,” “Star aus der DDR,” “Top-Star des DDD-Kinos,” or simply “der Star der DDR”—for her title role performances in *Effi Briest* (dir. Wolfgang Luderer, TV, 1970) and *The Legend of Paul and Paula* (dir. Heiner Carow 1972), both of which premiered in West Germany in 1974. She combined beauty and talent and ensured success at the FRG box office for risky imported GDR films. At home, however, she also satisfied GDR audiences’ wishes to see a beautiful, self-assured, and sexually liberated woman.

Domröse’s role as sex icon in the 1960s-70s coincides with the international sexual revolutions that took place at that time, and it arguably set the stage for the late 1970s and 1980s, when sexual life in the GDR “became a crucial free space in [an] otherwise profoundly unfree society.” Her stardom also coincides with second-wave feminism in the West, which focused on the inherent connections between private and public lives by raising issues such as sexuality and gender, work, reproductive rights, and family life. Western feminists (and western feminist filmmakers) also thematized the fractured self, as it drew attention to women’s individual experiences and struggles, which begin with the understanding of a woman as a whole multifaceted subject.

While the SED party’s “sexual conservatism” may have been in part an attempt to distinguish itself from the authoritarian sexual culture of Nazi Germany (which the GDR did not necessarily see as a rupture with Weimar promiscuity), the GDR also sought to distinguish itself from conservative West German sexual politics that were inherently tied to religious values and the reinstatement of traditional gender roles in the public and

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218 Ibid., 188.
private spheres. As Domröse came to embody complicated and seemingly contradictory female figures, such as Heiner Carow’s dual role in *Everybody Has Their Own Story*, her ability to find points of identification for both sides of a figure and to bridge the fractured self extended the power of her stardom to make a cultural bridge in a fractured Germany as well.

If sexual conservatism in the GDR was part of a top-down enforcement of “socialist morality,” Domröse’s success at embodying sexual liberation represented a powerful collective desire from below for a different kind of socialism, compelling the regime to compromise. As sexual historian Dagmar Herzog has argued, a study of East German sexual politics lends new pertinence to Michel Foucault’s shrewd observation that sexuality is “an especially dense transfer point for relations of power,” a phenomenon that would be evident both in the way popular pressures forced concessions from the regime and in the regime’s evolving efforts to woo its citizenry and solicit not only its compliance but also its love.

For Domröse, it was a question of how far she could push the limits of such concessions to gain love from society’s top and bottom, not only for her persona in the GDR, but also as a star vehicle for the GDR itself. Behind her stardom were the politics of desire, a powerful component at the heart of both cinema and star cultures that encourages both consumption of and identification with stars. Though this desire finds expression through a remarkable individual, it is, in the Deleuzian sense, as powerful as it is because the “desire [itself] is collective: it is a quality of social relation that is actualized in collective production.” Seen this way, Domröse’s “politics of desire” appealed to a collective

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219 Ibid., 186.
220 Ibid., 184.
activity and identity that existed in “actual relations between people.” Though Domröse often depicted very beautiful women, the audience’s desire for her and her female figures, as well as the desires of the characters she performed, paralleled real-life desires for personal fulfillment, love, health, and emancipation in her audience. As the desire around Domröse’s image and performances was not privatized but rather shared, it became an important expression of cultural and social life.

The trajectory of Domröse’s GDR career illustrates negotiations between the general public and the East German regime over a celebrity who represented the necessary “transfer point” for compromise in such “relations of power.” This facet of her stardom addressed the GDR’s desire for audiences and cultural legitimacy, endorsed the audience’s desire for entertainment, fantasy, and cultural representation, and advanced Domröse’s own desire for success and popularity. Domröse’s characters and public persona represented a beautiful and sexually confident woman, culminating in Paula—who, wanting to have her cake and eat it too—refused to decide between a set of limited options for happiness and success and instead went for it all. Domröse was a sex icon in the GDR, but she also worked tirelessly to challenge the simplicity of such a female figure, to redefine it and to supplement her image with a legitimate acting career—to become much more than just a pretty face.

3.2 Setting the Stage: A Theater Education

In 1959, a teenaged Domröse secured her first film role as the young beauty Siegi in Slatan Dudow’s popular romantic comedy, *Verwirring der Liebe* (*Love’s Confusion*). Dudow’s youth story features two young couples whose relationships cross when Dieter (Willi Schrade), who is involved with Sonja (Annekathrin Bürger), meets and is seduced by Siegi (Domröse), whose boyfriend is Edy (Stefan Lisewski). When veteran filmmaker Dudow cast the seventeen-year-old Domröse as Siegi, he chose her from a pool of 1500 contestants precisely because of her youthful beauty and energy and her wide-eyed naiveté. Domröse’s success in the role was instantaneous; but she then immediately applied herself to a rigorous actor’s training at the Academy for Film and Television (HFF), an experience she would later describe as more like a stepping stone on her way to the Berliner Ensemble (BE), where she finally “learned acting.”222 Both decisions—to attend school and then join the BE—were perhaps in reaction to the 1959 observation made in the press that the young Domröse, “frisch und entzückend naiv, darf sich selbst spielen, was gar nicht übel gelingt, aber auch keine Rückschlüsse auf schauspielerische Begabung zuläßt.”223 This is hardly a criticism of her Siegi performance, since the announcement in the GDR’s daily paper *Die Berliner Zeitung* specifically petitioned for a “junges, fröhliches, hübsches Mädchen. Alter 16 bis 20 Jahre, Größe etwa 1,60m. […] ein natürliches Wesen.”224 Domröse’s performance of “herself” is exactly what lent her

222 Domröse, *Ich fange mich selbst ein*, 143.
223 Christoph Funke, “Nochmals zum Thema: *Verwirrung der Liebe*. Bemerkungen zu Slatan Dudows DEFA-Farbfilm,” *Der Morgen* (Berlin – Ostsektor), December 18, 1959. “Fresh and delightfully naïve, [she] can play herself, which isn’t necessarily a bad thing, but also doesn’t let us draw any conclusions about acting talent.”
224 “…young, happy, pretty girl. Age 16-20 years old, about 1.6 meters tall. […] A natural being.”
Siegi the authenticity that garnered sympathy and identification among young audiences. However, as an actress, and now a public figure, she desired a more legitimate recognition of her achievements, and feared that such shallow grounds for her popularity would likely be limited to her teenage and young adult years anyway. The casting announcement itself enforced an age limit: 20 years old.

In 1961, after graduating from the HFF, Domröse faced a career decision between focising on theater in Dresden or the DEFA Film Studio in Potsdam. She decided “gegen die DEFA” and went instead to Dresden, then to Berlin, to study Brechtian theater at the BE under Bertolt Brecht’s wife, Helene Weigel. For Domröse, this decision was the only one that made sense: “Meine Überlegung war sehr rational. Die Filme der DEFA hatten mir nie so gefallen. Wir sind kein großes Filmland, sagte ich mir, aber wir sind ein großes Theaterland. Ich würde also viel mehr lernen am Theater. Und am allermeisten am BE.”

This viewpoint, expressed in hindsight in her 2003 autobiography, attempts to capture the perspective of the barely twenty-year-old Domröse, who saw theater acting as a constant and necessary element for achieving her career goals. Domröse’s decision was certainly influenced by the historical function of theater in Germany and Austria as a high art form that held an important role in the development of society and its social systems.

This attitude towards the performing arts also signifies a challenge faced internally by the DEFA Studios and GDR television. They not only had to compete with the attractions of western cinema and television; they also had to try to undo long-standing preconceptions that cinema and television ranked below

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225 Angelica Domröse, *Ich fange mich selbst ein*, 102. “My thinking was very rational. I’d never really liked the DEFA films. We aren’t a big movie country, I told myself, but we are a big theater country. So I would learn a lot more in the theater. Especially at the BE.”
theater. Since it was common for East German actors and actresses to work simultaneously on productions for the stage and the screen, the GDR began to streamline and control this practice through the central casting department, which negotiated all contracts, requests, and salary for actors. Popular actors, therefore, could seamlessly carry their popularity with audiences from medium to medium.

Domröse’s strategy of movement was a bit different, however. Her time at the Berliner Ensemble represented a unique chance to prove herself a “legitimate” and meaningful actress, since the theater’s reputation and social impact through its direct affiliation with Bertolt Brecht was almost tantamount to socially significant work, in what Christoph Funke called its “activist legacy”:

Almost every Berliner Ensemble production became embroiled in violent controversy, whether it was Goethe’s Urfaust or the new play Katzgraben by Erwin Strittmatter. In this way Brecht became an example of what cunning, what sly intelligence, what strength was necessary to wring compromises from the functionaries, to neutralize them in discussions, or to take literally their lofty declarations of intent.  

During her time at the BE, Domröse was able to participate in the important, culturally subversive work that, as is inherent in Brechtian methodology, questions common assumptions and cultural practices that societies often take for granted. Domröse herself described the BE as a “Gegeninstitution” in the GDR, compared to institutions like film and television that “Produkte hervorbrachten, denen man später Titel wie Papas neue Freundin sein lassen.”

227 Domröse, Ich fange mich selbst ein, 85. “Counter institution.” “[They] made products that would later be given titles like Dad’s New Girlfriend.”
comment is somewhat self-critical, too. In 1961, Domröse was newly engaged at the BE and cast as Polly in Brecht’s *The Threepenny Opera*, and they did not want her to accept the title role as Irene Sauer in *Papa’s New Girlfriend* with GDR television, forcing her to challenge the theater’s position. This early conflict was a strong indication of the tension she would face in her parallel endeavors on the BE stage and in front of the camera, as the BE pushed back against her decision and subsequent stardom.

By 1963, the eighteen-year-old Domröse’s face was supersized and posted outside the Berliner Ensemble, not for her supporting role as Babette in the BE’s production of Brecht’s *The Days of the Commune*, but for her wild success in the romantic comedy *Papa’s New Girlfriend* (1960) and its sequels, *Much Beloved Starlet* (dir. Rudi Kurz, 1961) and *Oh, diese Jugend* (*Young People These Days*, dir. Georg Leopold, 1962). Her efforts to find balance between the sincere (theater) and the artificial (film, television and, especially, the press) aspects of her career and stardom was a development she called her two “Ichs.” She writes: “Mit dem einen Ich war es einfach, das kannte ich, das lebte ich tagtäglich; das andere aber blickte mir von Zeitungsfotos, aus Artikeln und natürlich aus meinen Filmen entgegen.”\(^\text{228}\) Perhaps the greatest lesson she received from her training in Brechtian dialectics was, however, gained while confronting the struggle to reconcile this apparent duality withing and version of herself: a sincere theater actress with the artificial notion of film stars, but also, more generally, the public

\(^{228}\) Domröse, *Ich fange mich selbst ein*, 132. “It was easy with the one ‘I.’ I knew that one, I lived it every day; however, the other ‘I’ looked at me from newspaper photos, articles, and, of course, my films.”
with the private self. Domröse struggled on a practical level to reconcile her rapidly developing film and television stardom with her Brechtian engagements, which inherently rejected the individualism and self-importance of the star and insisted instead on the communal development of “der herrschende Schauspieler.”

Domröse’s rapidly rising popularity contradicted this core Brechtian principle, and Domröse failed to notice that her growing stardom outside the BE jeopardized her position inside the theater community.

Domröse’s early popularity appeared to others as disproportionate for the relatively inexperienced young actress. The extra-large Domröse/Irene Sauer posters that hung outside the BE theater, and her tendency to sign star postcards backstage between rehearsals, combined with the numerous cover photos and articles (even for her supporting roles), earned her scorn and mistrust and snarky nicknames such as “Miss Titelfoto.” Domröse’s early rise to stardom and her sustained position as a GDR star threatened to create a chasm in her professional development that would be difficult to overcome. When she became an instant celebrity as a lay actress in Dudow’s Verwirrung der Liebe, she skipped over the necessary extended process of educational, social, and cultural development for socialist actors and stars. By the mid-1960s viewers voted her as their “Fernsehliebling der DDR” a designation she received many times over, which Domröse later called “die verschämte DDR-Umschreibung für das geächtete West-Wort ‘Star.’” In 1966, after she won the title “Best Actress of the Year,” Domröse’s career at

229 Brecht, Bertolt. “Ein kleines Organon für das Theater,” 60.
230 Domröse, Ich fange mich selbst ein, 149.
231 Ibid., 118-19. “GDR TV Darling.”
232 Ibid., 127. “The shameful GDR euphemism for the prohibited West word ‘Star.’”
the BE ended unexpectedly when Helene Weigel suggested, “Es ist besser wenn du gehst.” Domröse later suspected this decision represented the wishes of director Manfred Wekwerth, who remained unconvinced of Domröse’s capacity to become an effective Brechtian actress.\textsuperscript{233} Though we may only speculate on the theater’s decision to let her go, the abrupt ending remained a kind of trauma for Domröse, despite the fact that it motivated her to move to the Berliner Volksbühne (1967-1979) and begin the next stage of a wildly successful acting career.

At the Volksbühne, Domröse expanded her acting techniques beyond the Brechtian method and gained experience working with different prominent directors, namely Ottofritz Gaillard, Hannes Fischer, and Benno Besson, the latter of whom who had come to the GDR from Switzerland. She also finally landed leading parts in what would be some of her best-known stage performances, including George Bernard Shaw’s \textit{Cäsar und Cleopatra} (\textit{Caesar and Cleopatra}, dir. Ottofritz Gaillard, 1967) and Peter Hacks’s \textit{Die schöne Helena} (\textit{The Beautiful Helen}, dir. Benno Besson, 1972). In 1973, film critic Christoph Funke wrote a portrait piece of the actress in the new monthly journal, \textit{Film und Fernsehen}, in which he attributed Domröse’s development to her ability to embody “verführerische” and “erotische” women such Cleopatra and Helen, while remaining “mißtrauisch” of such parts. To counter the erotic image that made her a sex icon, she also took on some interesting supporting roles, such as the “junges Mädchen mit dicken Waden und schlenkernden Wurst-Armen” in Benno Besson’s production of Brecht’s \textit{Der gute Mensch von Sezuan} (\textit{The Good Person of Szechwan}, 1971).\textsuperscript{234}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[233] Domröse, \textit{Ich fang mich selbst ein}, 141. “It’s better if you leave.”
\item[234] Funke and Kranz, \textit{Angelica Domröse}, 5. “seductive” and “erotic” … “wary.” “…young girl with thick calves and swinging sausage arms.”
\end{footnotes}
The opportunity to choose her parts represented a shift in her career; Domröse had earned decision-making power, which she used to steer her career and gain control of her image as an actress and a public personality. Self-determination as a theater actress extended to her work as a television and film star as well. By the mid-1960s, she was already one of the most popular actors in East Germany, having cultivated her popularity through a multivalenced approach. She was strategic about the promotion of her public image in her theater, screen, and media appearances; she collaborated with several established directors and had long-term engagements at key theaters in the GDR; and she established herself as a talented artist—a “virtuoso”\(^\text{235}\)—whose performances spanned film, television, and theater.

Although she fast garnered attention in film and television, theater and television were key aspects of her growing stardom in West Germany as well. In 1965 she made her first stage debut in the West and internationally with the Berliner Ensemble, joining the ensemble in West Berlin to play Polly in *The Threepenny Opera* (dir. Erich Engel, 1960), followed by an international guest performance in London as Babette in *The Days of the Commune* (dir. Manfred Wekwerth, 1962).\(^\text{236}\) It was also common practice at the time for West German critics to visit East German theaters, which was an additional opportunity to introduce her to West German audiences. For example, West German critic Jochen Kummer from *Stern* magazine covered Domröse’s first leading stage role as Cleopatra:

> Als sie im Schauspiel *Cäsar und Cleopatra* des irischen Dramatikers George Bernard Shaw ihren Cäsar verführte, strömte das Publikum mit Feldstechern ausgerüstet in die Ostberliner Volksbühne. Ganz genau wollten die Besucher


sehen, was sie unter hauchdünnem Tüll verbarg. Sogar das puritanische SED-
Organ *Neues Deutschland* spendete dem Sex-Appeal der Domröse lauten Beifall,
alas die Schauspielerin in der Tragikomödie *Die schöne Helena* (Verfasser: DDR-
Schriftsteller Peter Hacks) wenig später erneut Körper zeigte: “Sie ist nicht nur
vergnüglich anzuschauen: Die Koketterie ihrer Rolle stellt sie mit höchst
verführerischem Charme dar.”

Kummer then segued to inform West German readers that they would soon have a chance
to see her for themselves in West German television: “Inzwischen setzt die DDR
Angelica Domröses Qualitäten auch für den Export ein. So machte das bundesdeutsche
Fernsehpublikum am Neujahrstag 1973 mit ihr Bekanntschaft, als das Erste Programm
den Film ‘Effi Briest’ (nach dem Roman von Theodor Fontane) sendete.”

### 3.3 Angelica With a ‘C’?: Creating a Star for Socialism

Despite Domröse’s early work at the BE for her actor’s training, she later
reflected that it was not there that she became the actress she could and would be.
In her autobiography, she made two observations about mentorship: first, that she
never found a mentor at the BE; and second, that every young actor needs one,

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237 Jochen Kummer, “Die Helena von Ostberlin,” *Der Stern* (Hamburg), August 23, 1973: 48-50. Kummer is quoting *Neues Deutschland*. “When she seduced her Caesar in Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw’s *Caesar and Cleopatra*, audiences, equipped with binoculars, flocked to the East Berlin Volksbühne. The visitors wanted to see exactly what was hiding under the gauzy tulle. Even the puritanical SED-Organ *Neues Deutschland* gave Domröse’s sex appeal a loud applause when the actress showed her body again a bit later in the tragicomedy *The Beautiful Helen* (author: GDR writer Peter Hacks): ‘It’s not just fun to watch: She presents the coquetry of her role with the most seductive charm.’”

238 Ibid. “Meanwhile, the GDR used Angelica Domröse’s qualities for export. So, West German television audiences will get to know her on New Year’s Day 1973, when Channel 1 broadcasts the film *Effi Briest* (based on the novel by Theodor Fontane).”

and she found that person in film. “Ich glaube, dass Schauspieler, wenn sie etwas Wichtiges machen, immer einen Regisseur haben, der sie erst wirklich entdeckt, der etwas anderes in ihnen sieht als das, was alle sehen. Sie werden sein Gesicht. Für mich war es Heiner Carow.”

Between 1965 and 1991, Carow and Domröse would make only four films together, but their collaboration on The Legend of Paul and Paula in 1972 raised her from a star to a kind of megastar, and it secured her stardom in German film history as well.

In 1973, GDR critic Christoph Funke identified her title role in Heiner Carow’s cult classic The Legend of Paul and Paula as the culmination of her strategic development as an actress:

Gerade der kritischen Distanz, die sich Angelica Domröse gegenüber dem Film ganz bewusst geschaffen hat, ist es zu danken, daß sie hier [...] die Rolle fand, in der sie sich mit allen ihren künstlerischen Fähigkeiten am umfassendsten verwirklichen konnte. [...] In der “Legende” erreichte Angelica Domröse mit der Gestaltung der Paula ganz zweifellos einen Höhepunkt ihrer künstlerischen Entwicklung.

The “critical distance” Funke refers to here may be the five-year hiatus Domröse took from cinema before returning to the silver screen in 1973, as Ursula in Ralf Kirsten’s Unterm Birnbaum and then later that year as Paula. While Domröse primarily focused on her theater training during this period of “critical distance,” she appeared in select

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240 Ibid., 140-3. “I think that actors, when they do something important, always have a director who really discovers them, who sees more in them than what everyone else sees. You’ll be his face. For me it was Heiner Carow.”

241 Christoph Funke, “Mühen und Erfolge einer Unruhigen,” Film und Fernsehen, no. 4 (1973): 23-30. “It was precisely because of the critical distance that Angelica Domröse consciously established for herself in relation to film that she found the role, in which all her artistic abilities could be realized so comprehensively. [...] In the “Legend” Angelica Domröse undoubtedly reached the apex of her artistic development through the figure of Paula.”
television roles, most notably as Wolfgang Luderer’s Effi (1970), which premiered to a limited audience on the GDR’s channel 2, which was available only to households with a converter at that time.\textsuperscript{242} It was subsequently shown several times on GDR television, and then brought to the East German silver screen in 1971. It finally made its way to West Germany in 1974 as part of the Fontane retrospective that included Gustaf Gründgens’s 1938 film starring Marianne Hoppe, Rudolf Jugert’s 1955 version with Ruth Leuwerik, and Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s 1974 release starring Hanna Schgulla.\textsuperscript{243} Years later, in her 2003 autobiography, Domröse reiterates that “ohne das Theater hätte ich diese Effi niemals spielen können. Alles, meine ganze Bühnenerfahrung, war in dieser Rolle.”\textsuperscript{244}

While Funke points to Paula as the pinnacle performance, Domröse herself singles out the earlier Effi role as the first screen performance that would compare with her work in theater in “Intensität und geistige Beschäftigung.” For Domröse, \textit{Effi Briest} required sustained concentration over a “lange Probenzeit” versus the “Kleckerarbeit” of film production.\textsuperscript{245}

Theater was not the only preparation Domröse had for her Effi figure, however. She had been developing complex female figures since the beginning of her career. In 1960, one year after playing Siegi in \textit{Love’s Confusion}, she played another illicit lover with the romantic comedy \textit{Dad’s New Girlfriend}. Her character, Irene Sauer, is the boss’s naïve, young mistress, who later falls in love with and marries his son, and ends up...

\textsuperscript{242} Domröse, \textit{Ich fange mich selbst ein}, 173.
\textsuperscript{243} Funke, \textit{Angelica Domröse}, 69.
\textsuperscript{244} Domröse, \textit{Ich fange mich selbst ein}, 172. “Without theater I never would have been able to play this Effi. Everything—all my theater experience—was in this role.”
educating both men on modern, progressive gender roles for socialism through her own developing self-assurance. GDR television quickly developed the popular romantic comedy into a trilogy starring Domröse, with the sequels *Much Beloved Starlet* (1961), and *Young People These Days* (1962). These early roles are coming-of-age stories set in complicated romantic entanglements and they demonstrate Domröse’s success with timeless stories about relationships and society with which German audiences were presumably already familiar. For example, the sexual attraction and romantic impulses that cause the two couples in *Love’s Confusion* so much grief parallels the fate of the two couples in Shakespeare’s internationally renowned comedic play *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Likewise, *Papa’s New Girlfriend* appears to be a comedic and more light-hearted rendition of Lulu in Frank Wedekind’s melodrama *Die Büchse der Pandora* (*Pandora’s Box*, 1902). Lulu is the femme fatale and mistress of the older Dr. Schön; after his demise through her seduction, the younger Schön professes his love, and she starts her relationship with the son.²⁴⁶ Domröse’s enticingly beautiful Irene lives in a society where sexism at the workplace and traditional gender roles at home should no longer be the burden of a young, aspiring female professional. She, like Lulu, refuses (damn the consequences) to tolerate male indifference to her own needs or exploitation of her person.

Domröse continued developing this kind of female figure in more mature roles (albeit still young, if not youthful), which led her to becoming the beautiful but unhappy and unfaithful wife in the title role of Wolfgang Luderer’s television adaptation of

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²⁴⁶ Thank you to Barton Byg for pointing out the parallels between Domröse’s early roles and these larger European canonical texts.
Theodor Fontane’s canonical novel *Effi Briest* (1970). Her next major title role as the uninhibited lover of the married male protagonist in Heiner Carow’s 1972 cult classic, *The Legend of Paul and Paula*, is yet another example. As we saw, her stage performances demonstrate a similar development: in 1961, after performing Brecht’s famously naïve-turned-cunning young Polly from *The Threepenny Opera*, Domröse resonated with audiences as the young, smitten Babette in Brecht’s *The Days of the Commune* in 1962. And in 1967 she gave one of her most memorable theatrical performances ever, as the beautiful, insolent teenaged Cleopatra in George Bernard Shaw’s *Caesar and Cleopatra*. Finally, in 1972, she performed the infamously most beautiful woman in the world in Peter Hacks’s *The Beautiful Helen*. The latter two theater performances earned her a similar “stürmische Verehrung” that she previously had only experienced with film and television audiences—*in part because there was more widespread coverage of these roles in the newspapers and film journals of East and West Germany.*

Nevertheless, it was the 1970 television role of *Effi Briest*, in which she portrayed the development of a woman, from the naïveté of youth to the maturity of adulthood, in a single performance that was career-making for Domröse in both East and West Germany. Like Jutta Hoffmann’s Margit in *Her Third* (1972), a loose film adaptation of motifs from

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247 Funke, *Angelica Domröse*, 38. The “fierce adoration.”

Eberhard Panitz’s *Unter den Bäumen regnet es zweimal* (1969), Domröse’s *Effi* also calls upon earlier literary traditions, such as the *Gesellschaftsroman* or *Entwicklungsroman*, to narrate an individual’s moral and psychological development from youth to adulthood within a specific cultural or social milieu. Effi, however, specifically connected Domröse to a nineteenth-century literary realism tradition that was fascinated with the so-called marriage novel. This genre was dominated by male authors and the novels were narrated around tragic female figures in unhappy, arranged marriages to an often much older man, a situation that inevitably led to infidelity, social ruin and death.\(^{249}\) It suggests not only the actresses’ artistic reevaluations in content and form of a longer cultural heritage that critically examines a society through individual unhappiness, but also their critical response to the 1970s Honecker-era cultural policy reiterating that the arts portray “die harmonische Entwicklung sozialistischer Persönlichkeiten” in their own time.\(^{250}\)

The basis for this call for the arts to support the harmonious development of the socialist personality was first expounded upon in the GDR’s revised and reissued 1964 youth laws. In 1974, a new version restated and expanded the earlier directive that the GDR’s educational, athletic, and cultural institutions should help the country’s youth to become committed socialist citizens and patriots who would both build up socialism and defend it against its enemies.\(^{251}\) The law assigned the arts and the media the specific task

\(^{249}\) *Madame Bovary* (Flaubert, 1857); *Anna Karenina* (Tolstoy, 1878); *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* (Hardy, 1891); *L’Adultera* (Fontane, 1882); *Effi Briest* (Fontane, 1896). An exception to the male-dominated genre may be Austrian writer Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach’s *Unsühnbar* (1890).


of developing “die vielseitigen Interessen der Jugend” in order to ensure their “allseitige Persönlichkeitsentwicklung.” Angelica Domröse’s socialist personalities on screen and in the press complicated this ideological imperative because they portrayed the fractured female individual, who must confront her own emotional and psychological struggles in order to develop as a whole, self-aware person in a restrictive social environment. This depiction of female emancipation as a struggle had decidedly feminist undertones and could appeal to women in both East and West.

West German feminist filmmaker Helke Sander’s 1977 film, *Die allseitig reduzierte Persönlichkeit – Redupers (The All-Round Reduced Personality)*, may be read in dialogue with the complex issues for women that Domröse’s characters also confront in socialism. Though in the GDR women had extensive state support for their economic emancipation, in the East and West, self-determination—especially in private matters—was a necessary factor for living a fulfilling life, even as women aligned themselves publicly with the ideals set forth by progressive political policy goals. It is specifically that autonomy that western feminist filmmaker Sander and Domröse portrayed for audiences. Sander’s female protagonist is a West Berlin artist in divided Germany, who feels compelled to significantly reduce the various demands on her life and person in order to develop into a complete self-conscious person. Her personal development is challenged by the many broken parts working against her, especially her society (i.e., gender and class divisions, public and private life), and the fractured city in which she lives (i.e., divided Berlin). Sander’s film also implicitly looks to East Germany through

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*252 Ibid. The “wide-ranging interests of the youth [in order to ensure their] well-rounded development of personality.*
its attention to the Berlin Wall and how this physical division, which represents the missing half of her city, manifests in the character herself. While Sander thematizes the East/West division by making the Wall a central motif, Domröse’s actual movement across that border wall in the 1970s for stage and screen demonstrates that the East was also looking to the West. It is a testament to her ability to bridge the insurmountable when her performances of figures struggling to become “well-rounded personalities” find a resonance with audiences on both sides of the ideological and physical divide.

Domröse found resonance with West German critics and audiences early in her career. *Papa’s New Girlfriend* (1960) was made before the Wall was built and West German press coverage of her role resulted in an offer to work in the Hamburg, which she turned down. At home, however, the difficult situation around her seemingly unfounded celebrity status was escalating, and it would cause more problems for the young actress before she could get a handle on her career and stardom. The sequel title to *Dad’s New Girlfriend* labeled her as the GDR’s young and enticing “Much Beloved Starlet,” a moniker that may have been a double-edged sword. While the light-hearted romantic comedy—a highly desired genre among audiences throughout the GDR—earned Domröse instantaneous popularity, the term “starlet” also suggested an egotistical, opportunistic social climber. It was perhaps a fitting description for the perceived incongruity between the young Domröse’s lack of training and her early popularity at that time.

Domröse quickly sought to rectify this deficiency not only through education and hands-on training both on stage and in front of the camera; she diversified her talents

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across genres and mediums, playing both leading and supporting roles to balance her stardom with her acting and to demonstrate that she not only could lead, but also support the team during production. Each role, both large and small, came with new challenges that helped diversify her professional portfolio. For example, her Polly performance at the BE’s production of Brecht’s *The Threepenny Opera* in 1962 challenged the actress to not only deliver her lines but to sing them; the long production time for *Effi Briest* (1970) was in part due to horse riding lessons Domröse needed for the role; and in her lengthy supporting role in the five-part television mini-series *Daniel Druskat* (1976), she presented a woman facing both heartbreak and terminal illness.

While Domröse’s increasingly diversified acting repertoire modeled, in part, the ideal development of an “well-rounded” socialist personality through her multifaceted development as an actress, her premature and ever-expanding film and television stardom promoted neither the idea of accessibility nor egalitarianism that was valued in GDR celebrities, nor did it seem to support the ideology of collective over individual progress. Unlike Jutta Hoffmann’s girl-next-door image, or the television personality and “Volksschauspielerin” (“People’s Actress”) Agnes Kraus, Domröse’s assigned labels were individualizing and set her apart from the rest. After recognizing her as the GDR’s own “starlet,” the press in both East and West Germany quickly recalibrated her fame to the level of international stars, such as Brigitte Bardot.

The tendency in the media to compare her to Western stars was perhaps the most illuminating development in Domröse’s elevated life station because it suggested that her popularity extended beyond the contemporary GDR and appealed to a broader European and German cultural heritage. By the mid-1960s, Domröse’s label as the “DDR-
Bardot” suggested a socialist version of the world-renowned French actress Brigitte Bardot, whom the GDR would continue to uphold as the height of female stardom. This comparison began as early as 1959, when the French photographer Georges Raymond was hired to photograph Domröse as the GDR’s new discovery. Raymond arrived at the photo shoot with pictures of Brigitte Bardot and proceeded to create some allegedly erotic photos of the eighteen-year-old Domröse. By 1963, scriptwriter and journalist Hans-Oliva Hagen (pseudonyms Hans Oliva, John Ryder, Oliver Hagen) stated that the GDR needed a “sozialistische Bardot.”

Domröse claims to have been well aware of this perception of her image at the time, and she took an active role to assert her control over it: “Es gelang mir in diesen Jahren immer wieder, Männer zu verblüffen. […] Oliver Hagen zum Beispiel, der in der Kulturzeitschrift der DDR Sonntag die nicht unproblematische Absicht geäußert hatte, mich zur Brigitte Bardot der DDR machen zu wollen.” Hagen’s future wife, Eva-Maria Hagen, later came to carry the moniker of the DDR-Bardot, before it was passed on to Domröse’s co-actress from Love’s Confusion, Annekathrin Bürger. However, this early designation for Domröse’s star image persisted in both East and West, appearing as late as 1973, after the success of her Paula role on screen and her Helena role on stage. The weekly West German magazine Der Stern covered “Die Helena von Ostberlin” and tied this theater role back to Oliver Hagen’s 1963 promise to make “[a]us Angelica

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254 Domröse, Ich fange mich selbst ein, 116, 128-133.
255 Ibid.
256 Domröse, Ich fange mich selbst ein, 116. “In these years I always succeeded to baffle men. […] Oliver Hagen, for example, who, in the GDR cultural magazine Sonntag had expressed the not unproblematic intention of wanting to make me the Brigitte Bardot of the GDR.”
Domröse […]in zwei Jahren die beste Brigitte Bardot, die es je gab,”

Even though the West German journalist felt compelled to point out physical differences—“Brigitte Bardots Oberweite mißt 91 Zentimeter, Angelica Domröses Busen hat dagegen im kleinsten BH Platz”—he supports Hagen’s claim based on Domröse’s ability to “seduce.”

Beyond the crude attention to Domröse’s physical traits, her power to seduce was evidenced in more concrete terms by sold-out tickets to her performances on both screen and stage, a significant fact for GDR cultural officials who saw potential in Domröse’s stardom to promote a cultural image of East Germany in the West.

While journalists like Hagen and multiple press outlets worked to create an exportable DDR-Bardot, Domröse’s early performances also suggest she had a similar goal to entice audiences at home. Viewers see an early comparison to Bardot in her Irene Sauer role, who starts out in Papa’s New Girlfriend (1960) as the young, pretty and intelligent engineering intern who falls for the seduction of her much older boss. His children correct their father’s and Irene’s (mis)behavior by intervening through childish shenanigans to save their parents’ marriage. Consequently, Irene falls in love with and marries the oldest son, Klaus, thereby sidestepping the mistress role and finding herself in the dual gendered roles of wife/mother and young professional. This modification of her social position nevertheless does not fully tame the young beauty, nor do the audience or the other characters want her tamed. This is clear in the third film of the trilogy, Young People These Days (1962), when the family goes on vacation at a lake, where Domröse reveals her new custom-made bikini for the camera. As a device, the anticipation of the

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258 Ibid.
soon-to-be-revealed bikini is set up in an earlier sequence when a fashionable Irene comes home from the tailor. Walking through the door of the room she shared with Klaus, Irene enters wearing a complete ensemble: a pencil skirt, black heels, a black short-sleeved blouse, a coat, and a bowler hat with a bow. Announcing she has just been to the tailor, Klaus responds: “Was ist es denn dieses Mal?” Of course, when she tells him it’s an “echte[r] Badeanzug,” he asks “Noch einen? Einen hast du schon.” Conversely, Klaus is busy sewing a loose button, and after a short exchange about the right way to sew a button, the materialistic Irene exclaims: “Du bist mein Mann, und wie sieht das denn aus?!”

Irene is not only an up-and-coming engineer, she also values appearance and the ability to present herself in a desirable way for herself and others.

Irene finally reveals her “chic” new bikini when the setting relocates to the vacation spot at the lake. Suddenly, Klaus and everyone else stops what they are doing and they all look in the same direction, off-frame and to the right. Irene steals everyone’s attention when she walks up the boat dock toward the camera, now facing her, as if she’s on the runway of a fashion show. Removing a summer coat with striped lining and a sun bonnet, she shows her matching striped skort and a ¾-sleeve v-neck pullover with matching striped trim. Of course, the full reveal is yet to come, and Irene starts to unbutton the pullover and pulls it back to show a strapless bikini, her flat stomach, curvy thighs, and small waist. Finally, she stops and poses like a runway model while everyone takes turns staring and commenting in awe of their “zauber[isch]” and “todchic” new family member. An off-camera male voice says what everyone else is thinking, “Das gehört auf einem richtigen

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259 Klaus: “What is it this time?” Irene: “a real bathing suit.” Klaus: “Another? You already have one.” Irene: “You’re my husband. And how does that look, then?”
Modenschau,” and Irene closes the short scene with her hands on her hips, saying: “Das ist doch alles zu eifer.”

This enviable and seductive image of a bikini-clad Domröse in 1962 is reminiscent of the prolific images of the bikini-clad French “sex symbol” Brigitte Bardot in the 1950s. When 17-year-old Bardot appeared in a bikini ten years earlier in *Manina, la fille sans voile* (*Manina, the Girl in the Bikini*, dir. Willy Rozier, 1952), and more widely in the film’s publicity materials, it sealed the terms of her ongoing popularity in Germany as well. Bardot performed the “Geschichte einer jungen Mädchen zwischen zwei Männern,” who embodied “die freizügige Körperdarstellung, die Mode, ihren herausfordernden Blick, [und] ihren rebellischen Charakter….”

West German papers also likened Domröse to her West German contemporaries Uschi Glass and Senta Berger, two of the West’s actresses the West media also discussed in the context of gender roles and sexual culture at the time. Such comparisons attest to the successful reception of Domröse’s star qualities in both East and West Germany, especially as a figure of the sexual revolution in both states.

While Domröse enjoyed the benefits of her international cultural currency, throughout her career, and especially in East Germany in the 1960s and 1970s, she attempted to define her own original star image and not be an imitation of someone else. Domröse herself encouraged international resonance after her first success in *Love’s Dad’s New Girlfriend* (*Papa’s neue Freundin*), directed by Georg Leopold (GDR: Deutsches Fernsehen, 1960).

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Confusion when she changed her name from Angelika to Angelica. After Dudow suggested she adopt an artist’s name, she changed the spelling of her given name because the “’k’ sieht einfach zu eckig aus.” Beyond pure aesthetic reasons for the change, the creation of an alternative public persona and changing the spelling of Angelika suggests her early intention to use individualizing techniques that would distinguish her from the rest. The “c” not only marks her as different; the Anglicization of the name also locates her public image in a cultural discourse beyond the time and place of the GDR, suggesting especially a particularly western appeal. Parallel to this, Domröse also began to enjoy special privileges. For example, the DEFA studios provided the new actress “Angelica” with a phone (and eventually she got a car), because DEFA had to be able to reach its actors. These privileges did not go unnoticed by family, neighbors, or the actress herself, who all recognized that such amenities, rare in the GDR at the time, signified the special circumstances of her career and life choices.

Domröse also insisted on stars for socialism, and she believed stardom and socialism were not as incompatible as GDR cultural officials seemed to believe. When asked in 1964 if she thought the GDR needed stars, she responded “Natürlich! Der echte Star ist ein sehr nützliches Produkt des Films”; but, she explained, “[m]an wird ein echter Star [...] durch anerkannte Leistung, nicht durch in die Öffentlichkeit gezogene Privatmätzchen.” Ten years later, after her successful Effi and Paula roles, a West German journalist from _Hamburger Abendblatt_ asked her “Emfpinden Sie sich als Star?"

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262 Domröse, _Ich fang mich selbst ein_, 71. “...simply looks too angular.”
263 Ibid.
264 Horst W. Lukas, “Haben wir keine Stars?” _Filmspiegel_ 25 (December 1964): 6-7. “Of course! A real star is a very useful product of cinema. [...] One becomes a real star through a recognized performance, not through public antics.”
to which Domröse replied: “Ich genieße eine große Popularität. Das ist angenehm für eine Schauspielerin. Den Begriff Star haben wir jahrelang nicht gebraucht. Wir haben das versäumt und erst jetzt wieder übernommen.”

Though the GDR would rarely use its stars as products in the broader sense of the market-based purpose familiar to capitalist star cultures—e.g., using celebrity endorsements to brand and promote products—her reference to stars as “useful products” points to an aspect of the “economy of celebrity” culture that would be attractive to GDR cultural officials: celebrities as “cultural workers [who] are paid for their labour, [and as] a financial asset to those who stand to gain” from their popularity (i.e., the state-owned film and television studios, as well as the actors themselves).

While the correlating relationship between film product and star product as “calculable commodit[ies]” for the culture industry was part of what Domröse had in mind, her own pursuit of stardom illustrates that her understanding of the usefulness of stars in and to the GDR was more complex and appealed to both audience and industry

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265 Mathilde Köhler, “‘Liebe hat es zu allen Zeiten gegeben…’ Gespräch mit dem DEFA-Star Angelica Domröse,” *Hamburger Abendblatt* (Hamburg), March 17, 1974. “I enjoy a great popularity. It’s nice for an actress. We haven’t used the term star for years. We missed out on it and only now started using it.”

266 An exception to this would be the pop star Chris Doerk and her husband Frank Schöbel. As Claudia Fellmer has outlined in her dissertation, Chris Doerk was a multimedia phenomenon in the GDR. By the mid-1960s Chris Doerk and Frank Schöbel were a power couple. The youth magazine *Neues Leben* featured Chris modeling fashion, and in the late 1960s Chris and Frank hosted their own television show, *Mode und Musik*. See: Fellmer, “PhD diss.” Chris and Frank filmed *Mode und Musik* in places like malls and fabric factories, and they presented themselves as trend-setters, introducing audiences to new styles, fabrics, shopping experiences and the fashion industry in general.


268 Ibid.

269 Ibid.

needs. Domröse’s vision of socialist stardom is twofold: it includes both the star as product (e.g., the beauty image, the youth icon, the socialist worker-hero, etc.) and the star as craftsperson (e.g., the masterful actor); but it absolutely excludes that third element inherent to capitalist star cultures: the consumption of the star as “private” person. This exclusion precedes GDR film star culture and extends back to Weimar, where the press limited the public’s knowledge of a German star’s private life to simple “biographical information,” which not only established a “cultural consensus” on the actor’s right to privacy, but also allowed stars to direct the public’s attention to relevant career information and actual performances. Similarly, this strict division of private and public lives afforded GDR stars the ability to direct the focus of their popularity among audiences. Thus, GDR celebrities would not find cultural or economic significance in a turn of events where “their off-screen life-styles and personalities equal[ed] or surpass[ed] acting ability in importance.” Instead, GDR stars like Domröse would be defined by their engaging and talented acting and the proliferation of their unique public (not private) image in the media.

3.4 “Der erste Pornofilm der DEFA” or “eine sozialistische Lovestory”? Performing Sex, Love, and the Socialist Personality

The filming of Effi Briest lasted almost one year, and Domröse started preparing for the role five months before filming began. In addition to the long preparation time,

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she pointed out in an interview in 1970, “Es gibt kaum eine Szene, in der sie [Effi] nicht im Bild ist.” Domröse was immersed completely in the role well before filming began (reading the letters and documents of the real, historically based Effi figure), and she was present on a daily basis during filming. This approach signifies an important departure in Domröse’s method from the Brechtian training she pursued at the Berliner Ensemble. In the Brechtian tradition, audiences may have witnessed Domröse creating moments of reflection on the social circumstances of Effi’s suffering through gestus or alienation techniques. Instead, Domröse used method acting, immersing herself in the role completely and finding points of identification and empathy with the character, encouraging a similar response among audiences as well.

Domröse nearly lived at the studio or on set for the duration of that year, electing to be present even on the days she wasn’t filming, if her theater obligations allowed it. This is highly unusual, since actors in the GDR were only paid for their days of shooting. Domröse certainly wasn’t the highest paid actor on set, making about half the amount per day of her male counterpart Horst Schulze in the role of Instetten or the more senior actress Inge Keller in the role of Frau v. Briest. Her decision was in part due to her artistic response to the demands of the role—she found it important to be “richtig eingekapselt”—but also to the needs of the film team, especially in relation to the

275 Ibid. “There’s hardly a scene that [Effi] isn’t in.”
277 Besetzungsabteilung Effi Briest. BArch DR117/30487 51 M 3 15 41. In deference to privacy rights for living people, I am deliberately vague about salaries for individuals. For anyone interested in learning more, the Bundesarchiv Lichterfelder in Berlin houses the documents for the Casting Department in the GDR.
278 Domröse, Fernsehfilm im Kino,” Der Morgen (Berlin), 1970. “properly encapsulated”
budget. Location manager Martin-Günter Britting explained this when he appealed, in a letter dated September 11, 1968, to the criminal division of Prenzlauer Berg to reschedule a subpoena Domröse had received to appear in court for an unspecified reason during the fall shooting at the Baltic Sea. He estimated that the delay would cost the state 10,000 DDM. The budget was already a concern, since production manager Adolf Fischer had proposed in March 1968 that such “ein aufwendiger Film” for television would already cost at least 1.5 Million at the outset, considering that the story spans all four seasons of the year, requires several locations and landscapes, elaborate costumes, new set designs for the studio, and props, including horses and a Newfoundland dog.

GDR television’s Effi Briest celebrated Theodor Fontane’s 150th birthday. It was one of several Effi adaptations available to West German audiences in the early 1970s, most notably Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s 1974 Fontane Effi Briest, starring his key actress, Hannah Schygulla, in the title role. Like Luderer, Fassbinder took his time with the story, expanding the filming over two and a half years and sixty scheduled shooting days and producing a two-and-a-half hour film. Fassbinder’s version came out several years after Luderer’s, which had aired multiple times on East German television and in cinemas by the time it joined Fassbinder’s version in West Germany in

280 “Kalkulationen Effi Briest” (BArch DR117/27721 51 M 3 15 35). Courtesy of the Bundesarchive Berlin-Lichterfelde. This is marginally higher than the original budget proposal of 1,170,900 DDM. “a costly film”
281 Gustaf Gründgens Der Schritt vom Wege (1939); Rudolf Jugert Rosen im Herbst (1955); Wolfgang Luderer Effi Briest (1968/1970); Rainer Werner Fassbinder Effi Briest (1974).
282 “Effi Briest nach Theodor Fontane” distribution materials, dir. Rainer Werner Fassbinder (Munich: Filmverlag der Autoren, 1974). Courtesy of the Pressedokumentation HFF.

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1974. The simultaneous screenings gave West German film critics the opportunity to compare the two versions, commenting on the filmmakers’ different visions of the story, as well as the actresses’ interpretations of the lead role. A critic for the Frankfurter Rundschau, Helmut Schmitz, offered a subjective ranking, favoring Gründgens’s 1939 adaptation over both Luderer’s and Fassbinder’s films. According to Schmitz, Luderer’s GDR version nevertheless beat Fassbinder’s FRG “überraschend publikumswirksame jüngste Verfilmung,” in part because Luderer had access to original settings in the east (Fassbinder shot in Munich, Vienna, Schleswig-Hostein, the Black Forest, and Denmark), but also because he made visible “jenes Gefühl von Leere und Verlassenheit” in the embodiment of his Effi figure, a “languid” character in the “DDR-Star” Domröse’s interpretation.283 While Schmitz identified Domröse as a particularly physically attractive “GDR star,” he did not praise her performance. He himself pointed out that his negative reception of the Fassbinder version did not reflect that of the general audience, which was quite taken with Fassbinder’s Effi Briest284 and likewise impressed by Domröse’s performance.

The critic Volker Baer from the daily Berlin paper, Der Tagesspiegel, noted that Luderer’s GDR version succeeded where Fassbinder’s failed by foregrounding the “Gefühlswerte” in its socially critical narrative through Domröse, “eine ideale Interpretin


284 Friedrich Luft, “Endlich einmal ein deutscher Treffer,” Die Welt (Berlin-West), July 1, 1974. Luft reports that during a festival screening, audiences at the Zoopalast couldn’t break away, filling the theater where other theaters at the festival remained empty.
der Fontaneschen Titelgestalt.” In contrast, Fassbinder’s actress, Hannah Schygulla, performed a “manierierten Getragenheit” that Baer argued “robbed” Fontane of his more “realistisch[e] Elemente.” This difference in reception may also have had to do with the different approaches the filmmakers brought to the project. While Fassbinder centers the art of story-telling and social engagement through the form of the novel itself, professing to make one of the very few real literary adaptations (he provides Jean-Marie Straub’s 1965 Heinrich Böll adaptation, Nicht versöhnt, as the only other example), Luderer focused on the use of flawed female protagonists for expressing social criticism, aiming instead to make a contemporary film out of a timeless story.

Domröse’s success in her Effi role was due, in part, to the timelessness of the figure herself. However, the actress remained disappointed in the film, as she insinuated in an interview with the regional daily paper, the Berliner Zeitung, in 1972. For Domröse, the best way to create a truly collaborative and successful film project was to bring the actor into the film’s creative process: “Selbstverständlich, das Wort sollten weiterhin Buch und Regie haben. Aber ein Wörtchen mitreden wolle man doch zuweilen auch. Schon um von den ‘Filmschöpfern’ gründlicher, tiefer ‘ausgeschöpft’ werden zu können.” This different approach toward actors would also signify a difference

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285 Volker Baer, Realismus und Manierismus,” Der Tagesspiegel (Berlin), January 3, 1975. “emotionally worthy” and Domröse was “an ideal interpreter of Fontane’s title character.”
286 Ibid. “mannered solemnity” and “realistic elements”
287 “Effi Briest nach Theodor Fontane” distribution materials, dir. Rainer Werner Fassbinder (Munich: Filmverlag der Autoren, 1974). Courtesy of the Pressedokumentation HFF.
288 “Ein Wörtchen mitreden wollen. BZ sprach mit Angelica Domröse.” Berliner Zeitung, March 15, 1972. “Of course, the writer and director should have the last word. But I would want to have a say every now and then, too. At least in order for my talents to be fully used by the ‘filmmakers.’”
between GDR stars and their capitalist counterparts. Rather than being exploited as simply the face of the film, a prominent and proven actress like Domröse should be treated like one of the film’s creators. Domröse elaborated on this point, marking a significant difference between her development as an actress and the working relationship of her contemporary and peer, Jutta Hoffmann: “Der Glücksfall sei überhaupt […] das Dranbleiben eines Regisseurs an einer schauspielerischen Entwicklung. Etwa so, wie es der Egon Günther mit der Jutta Hoffmann hält.”

Perhaps this is where Domröse’s problematic relationship to her successful Effi performance stems from, which made her “schlagartig” in both the East and West, but which she criticized as unoriginal: “Ein konventioneller Film über eine Frau die an der Konvention zerbricht.” In the story, Effi naively but willingly enters into an arranged marriage with the much older Baron Instetten in order to secure her future and social standing. Her downfall is an affair with his friend Crampas, which she had to quell the crippling loneliness of her marriage with Instetten, who effectively abandoned her to spend his time advancing his career. The affair sets off a series of events to restore honor and social order at the expense of Effi’s dignity and ultimately her life. While Domröse loved the Effi Briest character, she was annoyed with the costume (blond hair and heavy make-up) and the uninspiring way her Effi was portrayed in the GDR’s adaptation of her. Apparently, her interpretation of the role was not taken into consideration. Instead of considering her ideas for the performance, Luderer let Domröse know that if she didn’t

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289 Ibid. “The stroke of luck is ... a director seeing an actor’s development all the way through. Just like Egon Günther does with Jutta Hoffmann.”
290 Domröse, Ich fang mich selbst ein, 171. “A conventional film about a woman who is broken from conventions.”
want the part then her rival Jutta Hoffmann could have it: “Das Fernsehen weiß genau, es gibt genau zwei Effis in diesem Land, Jutta Hoffmann und Angelica Domröse.” With that observation, he offered her a deal: if she played in his two-part *Alchimistin* (1968) then she would get to be his Effi the next year.\(^\text{291}\)

Though Domröse lamented her lack of say in the filming of *Effi Briest*, she, like Luderer, chose to focus on the problematic view of gender and society. The film and performance became an expression of how enduring social conflicts, inhumane social conventions, and persistent class differences shape gendered experiences. For Domröse this meant stepping into the historical role fully cognizant of the character’s context:

> Der Unterschied zwischen unserem Leben und dem Leben der Frauen zur Zeit Effi Briests ist so groß, daß es nicht einfach ist, die Gedanken und Gefühle dieser Menschen zu verstehen. Deshalb fiel mir die Gestaltung der Rolle auch nicht leicht. Ich mußte mir immer wieder die damalige bürgerliche Gesellschaft vergegenwärtigen, um zu begreifen, warum diese junge Frau so lebte, fühlte und dachte. … Nicht sie [alle], sondern diese [damaligen] Verhältnisse verursachen das ganze Unglück.”\(^\text{292}\)

If Domröse saw this as her role, film critic Susanne Günther with the daily kiosk paper, the *Berliner Zeitung am Abend*, credited scriptwriter Collin und director Luderer with creating a female character that would resonate with contemporary audiences: “Sie bieten uns Frauen die Möglichkeit, mit einer unserer berühmten Schwestern aus der Literatur

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\(^{291}\) Ibid. “Television knows that there are exactly two Effis in this country, Jutta Hoffmann and Angelica Domröse.”

\(^{292}\) Susanne Günther, “Tödliche ‘Ehre,’” *BZ am Abend* (Berlin), March 7, 1970. “The difference between our lives and women’s lives at the time of Effi Briest is so great that it is not easy to understand the thoughts and feelings of these people. Thus, the design of the role was not easy. Time and again I had to visualize the bourgeois society at that time in order to understand why this young woman lived, felt, and thought so. Not all of them, but these circumstances cause all the misfortune.”
Zwiesprache zu halten und unsere mit ihren Problemen zu vergleichen.”

Günther seems to have the view that GDR women, even in their emancipated state, were experiencing “problems” that could be compared to those of a nineteenth-century woman.

Film critic Hans Braunseis, writing for the national paper, Der Morgen, commended Domröse’s efforts in staging Effi for a contemporary audience: “Angelica Domröse gibt eine lebensstarke Effi, eine verspielte, aber schnell reifende, erotisch wache, in trüber gesellschaftlicher Langeweile sich schließlich treibenlassende junge Frau von immer gegenwärtigem Reiz.”

The viewpoint is decidedly reminiscent of Brecht, as in his theory audiences should take away a critical understanding of the social structures that prevent Effi and Instetten from choosing different fates. The technique Domröse used to enter into the role and convey the social injustices committed against Effi, however were reminiscent of Stanislavski’s method acting. She aimed for an emotionally compelling and sympathetic performance, with which contemporary audiences could identify and validate. Fontane’s female characters, such as Effi, thus corresponded well to the GDR’s Frauenfilme genre of the 1960s-1970s, which framed the question of social emancipation in the story of female emancipation. As with Jutta Hoffmann, Domröse contributed to the genre by embodying and performing the process of emancipation—the ideals and the obstacles, both social and internalized, that must come into conflict before progress is made.

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293 Ibid. “They give us women the opportunity to commune with one of our famous literary sisters and to compare our problems with theirs.”

Roles such as Hoffmann’s Margit in *Her Third* and Domröse’s Effi, in very different ways demonstrate the way young people respond to their environments and develop as individuals with a specific social and political consciousness. While the benefits and shortcomings of modern GDR socialist society shaped Hoffmann’s Margit, the social injustices committed against Domröse’s Effi, who lost everything and everyone when her husband Baron Instetten learned of Effi’s illicit love affair with a man named Crampas six years prior, were part and parcel of the strict late-nineteenth century German moral codes of the aristocratic class. While Margit was encouraged to make her imperfect society better, Effi was powerless to do so—and it was Domröse’s performance of Effi’s experience of powerlessness that offered social reflection and a recognition of the need for change. Indeed, Baron Instetten does not develop throughout the novel and film either, bound as he is to the same code of honor that condemns Effi and which she warns against: “Unser Ehrenkultus ist ein Götzendienst.”

To idolize, worship and uphold such a culturally and politically rigid code of honor is to sacrifice the happiness and potential of both individuals and society to a lofty, pervasive and unattainable ideological goal.

Domröse’s Effi embodied a female figure whose sense of self and her own development were full of potential but ultimately stifled by an inhumane social order. Effi, opposite Instetten, does arguably develop as a character; she gains through her losses—especially the estrangement from her daughter—a strong sense of self and a remarkable ability to sympathize with Instetten’s own entrapment by state and society.

295 “Our cult of honor is idolatry.”
For the state, the characters and social dynamics of Fontane’s nineteenth-century novel narrated the inevitability of socialism; Effi’s struggles revealed the inimical qualities of her nineteenth-century society, which justified the GDR’s own development toward socialism in the twentieth century.

Though officially Effi Briest’s tragic story justifies the historical trajectory that leads to socialism, the film also appealed to critics, artists and GDR audiences in a more contemporary way. For East Germans, Effi’s warning against a society’s “Götzendienst” at the cost of individual dignity and happiness may have resonated with audiences and artists alike, who lived under the thumb of the conservative SED party. Despite the fact that Domröse lamented the conventionality of the film, its strong resonance with GDR audiences was evident and it was broadcast several times and screened in cinemas, showing that her interpretation of the role struck a meaningful chord with GDR viewers who identified, through Domröse, with the plight of this 19th-century female woman.

In her Effi performance, Domröse set out to find and become another person entirely, “vom jungen Mädchen bis zur Mutter und reifen Frau.”297 This is a significant development that took her acting far beyond her first performance as Siegi in Love’s Confusion, in which critics observed that the young lay actress was simply playing herself. Perhaps she found points of identification for a contemporary performance of the role in Effi’s increasing isolation as she lived in contradiction to her society, highlighting the continued fracturing of Effi’s self as she struggled to make sense of the different parts of her and hold them together: “Ich liebte Effi, dieses Menschenkind in seiner

Vereinsamung war mir so nah.” Or, as film critic Christoph Funke remarked, “Im schmerzlichsten Zusammenbruch findet Effi erstmals zu sich selbst. Leidenschaftlich lehnt sie sich gegen den menschenfeindlichen Ehrenkodex auf.” In contrast, the “Lebensfreude” of Domröse’s Effi was exactly what she valued most in the tragic character, as an artist but also for her audiences. It is what bothered the cultural officials the most: “Sie [officials] konnten Freude und Tragik nicht zusammenbringen. In diesem Punkt muss ich unseren Film dann doch verteidigen. Vielleicht liegt gerade darin seine Stärke, dass so viel unbedingte Jugend noch durch meine zentimeterdicke Schminke hindurchscheint.”

The merging of pain and joy is a theme that Friedrich Nietzsche examined in the context of art in *The Birth of Tragedy*, in particular through analysis of the duality between the Apollonian (individuality, dialog, logic) and the Dionysian (”oneness,” or the “Ur-Eine”) drives, and their fusion: “These two very different drives (Triebe) exist side by side, mostly in open conflict, stimulating and provoking (reizen) one another to give birth to ever-new, more vigorous offspring in whom they perpetuate the conflict inherent in the opposition between them, an opposition only apparently bridged by the common term ‘art.”

While Nietzsche described the painful process of losing one’s

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298 Domröse, *Ich fange mich selbst ein*, 172. “I loved Effī. In her loneliness, this human being was so close to me.”

299 Funke, *Angelica Domröse*, 68. “Through the most painful ruin, Effī finds herself for the first time. She passionately rebels against the misanthropic code of honor.”

300 Domröse, *Ich fange mich selbst ein*, 173. “They [cultural officials] couldn’t merge joy and tragedy. In this, I have to defend our film. Perhaps its strength is precisely that so much youth unequivocally shined through my centimeter-thick make-up.”

individuality to bask in the pleasure of existing united as “one living being.”\(^\text{302}\)

Domröse’s performances as a whole depicted the painful process of understanding one’s individuality—to develop as a whole person—by embracing opposing sides of oneself, in order to strive towards a full life in the collective. In the end, Effi had come to terms with her own decisions and her husband’s decision, as painful as they may be. But the reckoning she faced did not return her character to a full life. This is also a theme in *The Legend of Paul and Paula*, a love story about two very different people representing seemingly opposite aspects of society, but whose love prevails past the conflicts, differences, and tragedy of their story.

Two years after Effi, Heiner Carow’s romantic drama *The Legend of Paul und Paula* opened on March 29, 1973 in the GDR’s largest premiere movie theater, the Kosmos, located in Berlin. The film was an immediate box-office hit and remains one of the most popular DEFA films of all time.\(^\text{303}\) *The Legend of Paul and Paula* is above all a sensual love story, but it also combines elements of the GDR’s Alltagsfilme with the vibrant and quirky counterculture cinema that emerged internationally in the 1960s and evolved into the 70s. The film also offers audiences romance, sex, tragedy and interspersed comedic aspects in one compelling narrative. Paula is an apolitical working woman and single mother of two small children from two separate fathers. Her happiness becomes dependent on her relationship with the man she loves, Paul, who is a state official and married. Paula has a deep desire to have a child with Paul, despite her

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doctor’s warning that she won’t survive another pregnancy, and when she becomes pregnant, she makes the fatal decision to keep the pregnancy. Paula is driven by her emotional and physical desires, which is precisely what attracts Paul to her, who is trapped in a loveless marriage with the more “bourgeois” Ines. Though Paul is a member of the Party, he and Ines are not happy because their marriage is based solely on their mutual social and financial aspirations and held together by the misguided conservative practices of the Party regarding marriage and family. Paula, in contrast, has chosen single motherhood over such social expectations, holding out for a relationship based on love and passion.

In some ways, this representation of a contemporary GDR working-class woman is a logical follow-up to Domröse’s nineteenth-century Effi, as well as her Siegi. Domröse had played a working-class woman in a minor supporting role in the five-part television series *Krupp und Krause* in 1969; but her performance of Paula four years later, a working-class woman in an apron and house dress, is a stark departure from her more historical figures for screen and stage, such as Effi, Cleopatra, and Helena, whom she played simultaneously to Paula. It is also very different from her first television role as the fashionable and intellectual Irene Sauer in the *Papa’s New Girlfriend* trilogy (1960-1962). Paula preserves the sexuality and seduction of Irene, though she does this, inevitably, as an older, more mature performer. While Effi represents the process of maturation, starting at the same age as her Irene and Paula characters, she advances in age past both, if not in experience. Unlike Effi, however, Paula does not marry the wrong man for the wrong reasons, though in her desperation and loneliness she comes close to marrying her friend, the much older Herr Reifen-Saft, a tire dealer who is in love with
her. Alternatively, a male stand-in is the GDR state itself, with its socialized childcare and Muttipolitik allowing women financial independence without sacrifice to child-rearing. But the state as a stand-in for a real partner does not cut it, and in the end, Paula resists accepting any kind of substitute, even in the kind and fatherly Herr Reifen-Saft.

Paula discovers that neither financial independence nor motherhood are enough to bring complete happiness, a conflict Domröse portrays in a pivotal scene before meeting and falling in love with Paul. After a long day at work, sorting bottles at the grocery store, Paula hauls the coal for her apartment stove from the sidewalk, past the movie theater below her apartment, and down to the cellar. The chore takes hours, during which the sooty, exhausted Paula walks by the display window of the theater several times, allowing the camera to briefly stray from its protagonist to her environs. The featured film is Bernard Borderie’s 1964 French adaptation of the historical romantic novel, *Angélique: marquise des anges* (Anne and Serge Golon, 1957). The protagonist, Angélique, is a poor, country noblewoman whose parents betroth her to the eccentric but wealthy count, Jeoffrey de Peyrac, who is twelve years her senior. Like Effi, but unlike the female protagonists in many of the other well-known marriage novels of the nineteenth-century, *Angélique* comes to love her husband. Unlike Effi, however, Angélique resists powerful social opposition when trouble strikes her marriage. When Angélique’s husband is charged and convicted of sorcery during a political play by the Archbishop of Toulouse and King Louis XIV, Angélique defends him and when her defense fails, she goes underground to plan and exact her revenge. On Paula’s last trip down the stairs with her coal, she stops and looks at the display case and the camera
focuses in on the strong-willed *Angélique*, played by the beautiful and glamorous French actress Michèle Mercier.

After this coal scene, Paula is alone in her room where she lays on her single bed, which has exactly half a headboard. The headboard is over-the-top and even silly, but it works as a device to represent her unfulfilled needs. Domröse is lamenting her loneliness aloud, eyes cast down and away from the camera: “Um neun ins Bett. Es muss doch noch was anderes geben. Schlafen, arbeiten. Und wieder schlafen und arbeiten. Und das mit 23.” At this point, Domröse hears the music and dialog of the *Angélique* film up in her room. Though audiences cannot make out the words themselves, the French film is a reminder of a similar romantic love story of a young woman in an arranged marriage to an older man. Paula cries: “Ach, Gott. Wenn sie bloß nicht täten, als ging es ohne das. Ich komme auch ganz gut ohne aus.” It’s unclear if the “das” here is love or sex, but for a passionate woman whose excesses are performed both emotionally and physically, the distinction may not be so important. As far as audiences know, Paula has been without both since coming home with her son to find the baby’s father seducing a pretty young woman in her apartment. Paula appears to now be thrust outside of the promiscuous sexual culture that framed her story up until this point, and which led to pregnancy and single motherhood, not marriage, partnership, love, and far less sex. Paula cannot live this way and begins to consider the possibility of finding happiness and companionship with a steady older man, her friend, the tire salem-san Herr Reifen-Saft. Again, playing with comedy, audiences cannot invest much in him as a love interest, because how can one take seriously a lover whose name essentially means Mr. Tire Juice?

304 “Oh, God. If only they didn’t act as if we could do without it. I’m fine without it.”
This monolog, lying on her bed, is the part Domröse performed when Carow finally invited her to audition for the role—an unusual hurdle at this point in her career—in which she finally convinced Heiner Carow that she was the right one for the part.\(^{305}\)

Convincing Carow was a challenge from the beginning because he was adamant that Paula be “ein Gesicht von der Straße… Ein unbekanntes Gesicht.”\(^{306}\) Carow’s doubt about casting Domröse for this part was not only due to her age (she was 30 years old), but also because he could not see Domröse doing the leap from Effi—who was “zu vornehm, zu aristokratisch”—to Paula. When Carow told her the list of actresses he had in mind, however, she argued, “die kannst du nicht nehmen, ich bin nackt besser! Und natürlich muss man nackt gut sein für diesen Film.”\(^{307}\) By the time Domröse tried out, Carow had already sat through weeks of try-outs with hundreds of other actresses.

Domröse immediately captured the part: “Naiv, zärtlich, voll von Liebessehnsucht und absolut in ihrem Anpruch auf Harmonie und Glück. Überzeugend durch die Ehrlichkeit ihrer Gefühle.”\(^{308}\)

Though Domröse didn’t embody Paula as Carow envisioned her, she knew two things for certain: First, The Legend of Paul and Paula was a bold, socially critical film, and second, she had the cultural capital and the experience to pull off such a controversial role. Paula was an isolated and deeply unsatisfied socialist woman, whose struggles were

\(^{305}\) Domröse, *Ich fange mich selbst ein*, 186.

\(^{306}\) Ibid., 185. “… a face from the street. An unfamiliar face.”

\(^{307}\) Ibid. “You can’t use them! I’m better for nude shots! Of course one has to be able to do nude shots for this film.”

exacerbated by a restrictive society and class barriers. If Domröse’s experiences and star power couldn’t convince Carow to let her play Paula, she would rely on her reputation as the GDR-Bardot, a bikini-wearing beauty icon, to qualify her for a role that demanded a lot of sex appeal. Carow decided to cast Domröse as Paula (and the newly-discovered Winfried Glatzeder as Paul), and the two made their second film together. The casting decision worked well: *The Legend of Paul and Paula* was the second highest grossing film of 1973, and its success helped turn around waning audience numbers for DEFA productions that year, which, by 1972, had fallen to 25% of what DEFA had achieved at its peak in the 1950s. 309

While Domröse was already a GDR celebrity, her Paula role elevated her status among audiences significantly, just as the Angélique role did for Michèle Mercier in France. And like Mercier with Angélique, Domröse would never again be able to disentangle her public image from Paula. This conflation between the star and the character is what Richard Dyer describes as giving a magnetic power or “erotic charge” that runs like a continuous thread through different performances and makes the star a desired object of the viewer’s gaze. Paula’s popularity among GDR audiences, however, went beyond the gaze. The film’s quirky humor interspersed with tragedy appealed on a visceral level; but it was ultimately Paula’s uninhibited emotional way of confronting life and her triumph over Paul’s commitment to the Party, which sustained his petty bourgeois lifestyle, that endured with audiences.

309 Klaus Wischnewski, “Träumer und gewöhnliche Leute, 1966 bis 1979,” in *Das zweite Leben der Filmstadt Babelsberg, 1946-92*, ed. Ralf Schenk (Berlin: Henschel Verlag, 1994), 223. The popular western *Apachen (Apaches)*, which was directed by Gottfried Kollwitz and starred Gojko Mitić, was in first position that year.
The Angélique reference evokes both the name Angelica Domröse and Domröse’s recent Effi role, a woman whose fate is determined by the unforgiving social and political forces that trapped her in an arranged marriage and continued to restrict her life. Through Paula, Domröse got to revisit the situation of a figure like Effi, albeit in an entirely contemporary context. As Paula, she is no longer trapped in a loveless marriage during a time when divorce would be unthinkable. The contradiction, however, is that the divorce problem persists in Paul and Paula’s situation, because divorce is unthinkable for a Party member and state official like Paul, who has the support of the Party to fix his marriage, but not to end it. Moreover, Paula is a financially independent and self-sufficient woman; but problematically, she is not political and is not motivated by Party or ideology. As a state official, Paul is held to the sexual conservatism of the SED party and represents the opposite pole from that represented by Paula of the GDR’s ambivalent relationship to sexual culture at the time. His fling with the beautiful Ines led to marriage, an institution that has trapped him rather than bring him happiness.

Interestingly, Paul’s and Paula’s stories neither confirm nor condemn the virtues of sexual promiscuity or sexual conservatism. At first, the film seems to contest the party’s “notion of socialist virtue, the suspicion that a private bliss might draw citizens away from socialism rather than toward it, and a generalized skepticism about the pursuit of pleasure as potentially depoliticizing."310 By the end of the film, however, despite their different life’s paths, neither Paul nor Paula are motivated by political ideology. Paul’s motivation for joining the Party was to gain upward social mobility, and Ines’s reason for marrying him was the same. Once Paul comes into Paula’s life, she becomes the other

woman, motivated in her affair with Paul by the promise of love and happiness. Paula does not seem to care about a career or social status, but rather sexual pleasure, companionship, and love, which are considered apolitical and self-serving goals.

According to “socialist virtue,” then, neither Paul nor Paula can find either happiness in personal ambition, or private bliss. As Irene Dölling has argued, Paula’s death is a “taming” device (not a negation) of her femininity—as an unskilled working-class but also young and sexually liberated woman—which allows the film to discard the unfavorable aspects of her character and reintegrate her virtues into the “new” Paul at the end, the sole survivor of the relationship and the clear hero, the embodiment of “a normative … ‘socialist person.””311 Yet, in the end scene, it is now the single-parent Paul in the half-bed, surrounded by his children but without his partner, Paula, who, as the doctor had warned would happen, died during childbirth. The half-bed raises doubt about the possibility of personal development, fulfillment, and happiness, even when one single-mindedly pursues his or her own desires or dreams.

The success of the film, therefore, was not in its packaged presentation of a “socialist personality” in Paul, whose redemption came through his relationship with Paula and was fixed through her subsequent death. It lay instead in its “authenticity” of representation and depth of emotion. As one GDR critic remarked, “Für Angelica Domröse scheint es ein Spiel ohne Maske.”312 Critics in both the East and West recognized the significance of the role not only for the GDR but also for the actress and

311 Irene Dölling, “‘We All Love Paula but Paul Is More Important to Us,’” 81.
her career. Heinz Hofmann, writing for the GDR’s Nationalzeitung Berlin, stated simply: “Dies ist der Film einer Schauspielerin.”

Domröse’s performance of the role was so convincing that reviewers perceived this older Domröse as once again playing herself in front of the camera, although Domröse’s biography did not parallel Paula’s at all. She was not working-class, had little experience performing working-class women, and she and her husband, the Czech actor Jiří Vršťala, did not have any children. Thus, this time when critics observed that Angelica Domröse appeared to be playing herself, the reception also showed how far she had developed as an actress and acknowledged her ability to offer audiences authentic points of identification with her figures. One critic from the daily paper Neue Zeit, described Domröse’s performance of Paula’s virtues: “Mit leidenschaftlichem Ausdruck zeichnet Angelica Domröse die Verzweiflung Paulas über ihr Alleinsein, ihre Temperamentsheftigkeit, ihre Freude, zu lieben und geliebt zu werden, ihre Hingabe, ihre seelische Größe in großen Entschlüssen überzeugend nach.”

The West German press places The Legend of Paul und Paula in succession to Egon Günther’s and Jutta Hoffmann’s Her Third, which had screened one year earlier in FRG theaters. Citing comparatively low ticket sales for Her Third, the Frankfurter Rundschau emphasized the combination of sexual impulses and artistic potential in finding the box-office success that Her Third supposedly had not enjoyed, and not only

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314 Domröse, Ich fange mich selbst ein, 268.
because of its sexy “Bettszenen.” The bed scenes, set in Paula’s half-bed, are more than the location of lovemaking; they represent both the drawbacks and the potential of sexual and romantic fulfillment.

The half-bed is where Paula shares with the audience her excessive emotional and physical need and the depth of her loneliness and need. It is precisely Paula’s excesses that allow a figure like Paul to imagine a life beyond an unhappy bourgeois marriage and the unsatisfying material comforts of his social station and career. Sometimes Paula’s excesses make Paul uncomfortable, however; for example, when he takes her to an outdoor concert, he gets annoyed when she tries to touch him publicly and is embarrassed that she does not know when to clap during the musical performance. Exhibiting her indomitable independent spirit, Paula shakes him off and begins to cry, clapping profusely when the music and the moment moves her, and ultimately it is such brave displays of raw emotion that Paul also finds he needs in order to escape his stale life. In the end, it is Paul who will demonstrate such behavior, camping outside her apartment door, imposing on her time with Herr Reifen-Saft, and finally breaking her door down with an ax to demonstrate his need for her. But Domröse’s Paula is the one to show him the way. In an erotic make-out scene, when Paula seems to be nearing climax from Paul’s kiss and touch, the camera shows audiences a beautiful Paula in the throes of passion.

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Her head is thrown back, her body is wrapped around Paul, and she is panting, sighing, and saying her lover’s name over and over again. Such scenes intentionally elicited responses such as in FRG critic Heinz Kersten’s review entitled “Nacktes Fleisch und große Gefühle,” but GDR scriptwriter Ulrich Plenzdorf also suggested they had created either “der erste Pornofilm der DEFA” or “eine sozialistische Lovestory.”

Domröse, of course, knew the film had this potential and with complete confidence convinced Carow that if the GDR had a porno/love film actress, she was the one who could do “nackt besser.” After making-out, Paula tells him to come to her place the next day, and she will not accept no for an answer. The entire scene is Dionysian, and it is Paula’s attempt to show Paul, who in many ways is her opposite, the potential for both their lives if they throw caution to the wind and join together as a couple. Paula’s excess and frenzied, unbridled passion overrides Paul’s more Apollonian self-discipline, restrained behavior, and in this scence, his repeated attempts to gain control of the situation by discussing it and asking a lot of questions.

Upon Paul’s arrival, Paula has staged her bedroom as a fantastical scene with copious numbers of yellow and red flowers in her hair, pinned on the thin silky slip she wears, on the walls, and on the half-bed, upon which sits an overloaded plate full of oversized meat, vegetable, and fruit shish kebabs. After placing a crown of yellow flowers on Paul’s head, they start to eat with their hands and discuss Paula’s ancestry with full mouths. The entire scene is staged and performed in excess: Paula carelessly rips her slip (presumably the only one she has) when she pulls the pinned flowers off, and

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she steps on and crushes the many flowers on the floor. The couple takes a few bites of the food before tossing it out of the way, and Domröse shows Paula’s pent-up energy and nervous, giddy childish laughter, heavy breathing, and constant chattering.

Paula sees she must distract Paul from his fear of state authority and his sense of familial duty, especially to his son. His first hallucination is seeing his three colleagues, other functionaries, on the sofa playing a drum set; when Paula assures him they cannot see anything, Paul’s hallucination places black blindfolds over their eyes. When he asks what was in the Schnapps, she assures him it wasn’t the schnapps but suggests instead it is their mutual seduction, pushing her ripped slip off her shoulders and down. Paula’s seduction works when music (played by the famous GDR pop-rock band, the Puhdys) begins and Paul starts hallucinating their half-bed has been transported to a river barge with all of Paula’s ancestry on board and a nude Paula wrapped in sheer white tulle fabric. While the newlyweds dance and celebrate with her family, Paul’s colleagues find their way back into the scene. One points at a virtually naked Paula and cries, “Das ist Porno,” but the other man says, “Guck doch weg!” prompting him to cover his eyes with his hands and turn his back. Nevertheless, the intrusion pulls Paul out of the fantasy and back to reality. Paula tries again, expressing her burning needs to her lover. She rhetorically asks him to explain “inequality” to her; he explains a simple math equation, pleading with her to be serious: “Eins ist kleiner als zwei. Sie sind ungleich.” But Paula dismisses it. She leans back into the pillow and looks just past the camera while playing with her hair and smiling, offering a different example: “Paul ist anders als Paula.

318 “That’s pornography!” “Look away, then!”
319 “One is less than two. They’re not equal.”
Besonders an bestimmten Stellen." When her face turns back toward Paul, she suddenly looks worried and unsure; she abruptly sits up and wraps her arms around her nude body and pleads: “Komm hier Paul. Komm schnell. Ich bin so allein! Völlig allein! Komm, lass mich nicht allein!” They embrace and Paula cries, “Mehr! Mehr!” Ideals such as equality of the sexes are inadequate to Paula if she finds herself without companionship and intimacy.

*The Legend of Paul und Paula* is an example of what feminist film theorist Linda Williams would refer to as a “film body genre” in her analysis of pornography, horror films, and melodramas. Body genres display various degrees of excessive violence, sex, and emotions, signified largely through the secretion of bodily fluids, such as blood, semen, and tears. Following on Williams’s comparison, we can read Plenzdorf’s comment about the film as a suggestion to discuss it as a “porno [and] love story,” rather than “porno or love story.” As Williams explains, “melodramas are deemed excessive for their gender- and sex-linked pathos, for their naked displays of emotion,” or, more specifically, what Ann Douglas refers to as “soft-core emotional porn.” The fantasy scene in *The Legend of Paul and Paula* may be one of the most melodramatic scenes in DEFA (a genre considered taboo in GDR cultural production) because of its “‘lapses’ in realism by ‘excesses’ of spectacle and displays of primal, even infantile emotions” and its

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320 “Paul is different from Paula. Especially certain parts.”
321 “Come here, Paul! Hurry! I’m so alone! Completely alone! Come, don’t leave me alone! More! More!”
322 Linda Williams, “Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess,” *Film Quarterly*, 44, no. 4 (Summer 1991): 3.
ability to cause the spectator to have a physical and emotional response to the screen body.\textsuperscript{323}

Domröse’s performance, however, is not confined by such generic structures and visual pleasures, and she does not impose these limitations on her viewers either. While the narrative is arguably “driven by the desire of a single protagonist,” the display of “rapture, [which is] the pathos of melodrama,” does not simply exist for the protagonist’s “power to excite.”\textsuperscript{324} Viewers respond in kind because they understand Paula’s struggle intellectually, as well as emotionally and physically. GDR viewers would understand that Paula’s dismissal of “(in)equality” is not to suggest that women’s emancipation is unimportant, or even that Paul’s reliance on logic and order is unnecessary; her actions suggest that without the individual pursuit of happiness in matters of love, companionship and physical intimacy, emancipation and social order alone cannot offer a full life. She is tapping into a collective desire in GDR audiences, rather than manipulating her audiences through gratuitous emotional display and an oversensationalized performance.

Domröse felt the West German press misunderstood the film, and she responded aggressively to the high-profile attention. Despite her earlier statements in the East that the GDR needed stars, once abroad she toed the party line in such matters and rejected the designation, presumably because in the West it was tied to a capitalist understanding of stardom and celebrity. In a press briefing with Glatzeder, Domröse, and Carow, the West German press approached Domröse as a star to behold, but the reporting describes

\textsuperscript{323} Ibid., 3.
\textsuperscript{324} Ibid., 4.
an encounter with a true diva, earning her the nickname “Dornröse.” For example, in response to seemingly standard questions, such as what she was currently working on in theater, she responded curtly with “vieles” and then restated that she’s “kein Star.” Setting herself apart from the concept, she says, “Wenn ich, wie die Stars der dreißiger Jahre, auf einem Sockel stünde, würden mich nicht so viele Leute um Rat fragen, wie es seit der ‘Paula’ der Fall ist.” What she means is that after The Legend of Paul and Paula, fan letters revealed that audiences now looked to a combined Paula/Domröse figure as an example of how to live their lives, asking Domröse, “Was würde Paula machen?” However, the interviewer seemed uninterested in how or if Domröse understood her Paula to be a role model for GDR audiences and asked instead what she does with all of her (fan) letters. She replied, “Das ist meine Sache ... Ich kann schließlich nicht tausend Briefe in der Woche beantworten.” Finally, in a poorly-worded statement meant to downplay her presence, she nevertheless revealed her sense of self-importance: “Ich bin schließlich für einen Film hier und brauche nicht für mich Publicity.” By the time she made The Legend of Paul und Paula, Angelica Domröse had learned the difference between good and bad publicity, and she knew that overblown publicity could have negative consequences on her career. Having a reputation of being “thorny” in West Germany was preferable to having a reputation of being an arrogant and individualistic “Miss Titelfoto” in East Germany.

325 Domröse, Ich fange mich selbst ein, 194. “What would Paula do?”
326 Lotte Holetz, “Paul und Paula: Filmbesuch as der DDR. Heimlich trifft er seine Freundin,” Abendzeitung (München), March 15, 1974.
Angelica Domröse was one of East Germany’s biggest female stars in the 1960s and 1970s. She appealed to a collective desire for entertainment and fantasy, artistic achievement and authenticity, sexual liberation, and for an attractive and charismatic young public figure. She also attracted the interest of cultural officials precisely because of her ability to draw a crowd and fill theaters and to instigate sustained public discussion and excitement about her films, both at home and in West Germany. Domröse’s approach to her stardom validated her own career by legitimizing her iconically beautiful public image and professional engagement through a rigorous actor’s training. It also modelled, however, socialist stardom through the cultivation of her own unique public image and her legitimacy as a talented actress on stage and in front of the camera.
CHAPTER 4

THE PEOPLE’S ACTRESS AND COMEDIENNE AGNES KRAUS: ‘AN ORIGINAL BERLINER WITH HEART AND SOUL’

Ich habe jetzt das Gefühl, mit diesen Rollen näher an die Menschen heranzukommen, ihnen auf irgendwelche Weise nützlich zu sein, Freude zu bringen. Es tut einfach gut, wenn einen die Leute mögen, und wenn sie einen mögen, weil man Rollen spielt, die etwas Menschliches haben, menschlich sind. Menschlichkeit, das ist mir überhaupt das Wichtigste, das ist der Grund, warum ich gern hier lebe.  

4.1 Mother of the Nation: Wisdom, Wit, and Warmth

Agnes Kraus (née Irmgard Friederike Agnes Krause; b. February 16, 1911, d. May 2, 1995) began her acting career in the late 1920s at the Berlin Acting School under German expressionist director Leopold Jessner, who famously miscast her as a tragic actress. At age 19, Kraus had her first engagement at the Anneberg-Buchholz theater in Saxony, Germany, where she debuted as Queen Elisabeth in Schiller’s tragic drama Maria Stuart (1930). Audiences “fell out of their seats” laughing at this performance, and though years later Kraus would facetiously describe this as her first

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327 Henryk Goldberg, “Im Gespräch mit der Schauspielerin Agnes Kraus. Menschlichkeit – das ist der Grund, warum ich gern hier lebe,” Neues Deutschland (Berlin), December 31, 1981. “I feel like I get closer to people through these roles, that I’m somehow useful to them and make them happy. It’s also good for oneself if the people like you, and if they like you because you play roles that depict human nature. Humanity is the most important thing to me. It’s why I live here.”

328 This is the birth date published widely in every biography available on Agnes Kraus. However, her casting card filed with the GDR’s central casting department lists a discrepancy, offering November 16, 1917 as her birth date. “Besetzungsabteilung: Agnes Kraus.” (BArch DR117/47241 51 M 3 15 49). Courtesy of the Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde.

“Lacherfolg,”330 after this early career disappointment Kraus began a life-long quest to find her own identity as a performer. After a long career that began in the lively Berlin cultural scene of Weimar Germany, then continued through fascism, war, and the immediate aftermath of World War II, Kraus eventually found her way to East Germany where she would have an important role in the development of the new socialist society. She found enormous success in East German TV comedy in the 1970s, in particular at a time when the GDR was seeking to establish its own identity as a nation, a project in which entertainment television played a significant role.331

Kraus became well-known in the GDR as Aunt Minna in the television drama Dolles Familienalbum (Dolle Family Album, dir. Eberhard Schäfer) in 1969. This five-part mini-series is about a multigenerational German family in post-World War II East Germany that faces losing its family home in order to make room for building the new socialist society. Despite the success of the series, it wasn’t until 1972—when Kraus was 61 years old—that she had her breakthrough role in the full-length television comedy Florentiner 73 (73 Florentiner Street, dir. Kurt Belicke, 1972). Again thematizing the shift to the new socialist society, in this film she played the much-loved but ornery widow “Mutter Klucke,” who had lost her only son in World War II and now turned her motherly attentions to her new tenant, the young, pregnant and very much alone Brigitte (played by Edda Dentges). Kraus’s stardom became solidified in this role, and she went

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331 For more on this argument about the cultural-ideological role of entertainment television in the GDR, see Claudia Dittmar, Feindliches Fernsehen. Das DDR-Fernsehen und seine Strategien im Umgang mit dem westlichen Fernsehen (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2014).
on to become an award-winning actress, TV personality, and GDR star. She was voted “Fernsehliebling der FF dabei” (the East German TV magazine) eight times, and “Fernsehliebling der DDR” five times during her 17-year GDR television career.

The motherly trope that was at the heart of Kraus’s on-screen characters was reinforced through carefully chosen character names. The given name Alma, for example, derives from Latin and means “fostering” or “nurturing,” and it signifies the chief characteristic of her protagonist Alma Krause in the Viechereien trilogy (Animal Tales, 1977-80). Her most famous role as Nurse Agnes, as well as her Agnes Obermann character in Aber Doktor (But, Doctor!, 1980) simply used Agnes Kraus’s own given name for her characters, insisting on the fusion of actress, star, and character in a way we will explore below.

While Kraus was undeniably gendered in such maternal roles, she was not sexualized. The desexualization of her person, codified in her single status and her advanced age, ensured she would be relatable to all audiences—men and women, young and old, rural and urban. As an unattached older woman, she represented everyone’s favorite aunt, a grandma, an interfering mother—the kind of figure most people had in their lives in some capacity or other. Scriptwriters and the studio encouraged the familiarity audiences felt with this star. Though the appearance of egalitarianism was an ideological hallmark of GDR socialist star culture, it usually reached its limits with stars’ actual private lives. Kraus’s stardom, however, depended on her fans believing that they had real access to their star. The GDR media—from film and television to the

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press—made sure that Kraus was perceived as an open, genuine, and warm person, whom everybody knew and trusted.

Comedy was one way Kraus’s authenticity was packaged for audiences, and it helped sustain her popularity. Kraus’s slap-stick comedic roles, e.g., as the dental assistant Agnes Obermann in But, Doctor!, were wildly popular; but the roles were also very limiting, as they seemed to turn Kraus herself into a stock character that audiences came to depend on seeing from film to film. The characters relied on grand gestures and silly antics, such as Agnes Obermann mimicking a flight ground crew employee directing a taxiing plane when her boss, the dentist Dr. Flanke, is pulling his car into an empty street; or when he falls into a pond and she lays down on the dock doing exaggerated swimming motions to show him (who cannot swim) how to save himself. However, Kraus herself preferred situational comedy like we see in films such as 73 Florentiner Street, because it enabled her to use satire and irony to highlight problems around her, rather than being the source of conflict or laughter herself. If the highly entertaining slapstick roles fed audience demands for simple, comedic entertainment, the situational comedy ingratiated Kraus with audiences because she was able to touch on issues that affected people’s daily lives, and her comedy allowed her to do it in a straight-forward way.

Kraus spoke Berlinish, the distinct Berlin dialect, which meant she spoke in a direct manner in the language of everyday people in an unfiltered and often humorous way. Her sense of humor—her Berliner Schnauze (Berlin bluntness)—represented a droll but an endearing mode of communication as much as her use of the Berlin vernacular did. The Berliner Schnauze, while bordering on rude simply through its candidness, is also
known for its use of irony. For Kraus, the “inability” to lose her dialect was something she claimed many people could relate to. This is perhaps the most salient explanation for the persistence of this character trait across Kraus’s public performances for both television and the press. Kraus explained, “[i]m Fall der heiteren Rollen kann [man] sich in dieser Beziehung ein bißchen gehen lassen.” Kraus’s “heitere Rollen” were primarily television parts, and this so-called freedom to let go and be herself in these roles suggested authenticity—that she was really like the characters she portrayed. It was also unlike the pressure she experienced when learning how to use her voice for stage performances, where her mentor, Helene Weigel, allegedly instructed her to read the newspaper aloud for one hour every day “[um] das Nölen … weg[zu]kriegen.”

Though theater played an important role in her career trajectory, it was often not congruent with the public image created and perpetuated through her television and media presence. The persistence of her distinct dialect was one of many ways the media industry used her personal and public biographies to boost her stardom; however, this perceived limitation that came across as wholly genuine, was an enforced one used to create a star whose personal and public biographies seemed to never be in contradiction.

Language is nevertheless one aspect of Kraus’s stardom that reveals how manufactured her public persona was. For example, in 1971 Kraus travelled with the BE to Paris for a guest performance of Brecht’s Der Brotladen (The Bakery, 1929-30). In Paris, Kraus put on a double performance: one as the widow Queck on stage, but also, to her colleagues’ amazement, another in the streets of Paris. She spoke fluent French,

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interacted with the locals, and demonstrated a more worldly and extroverted side that rarely showed itself in a woman who seemed more comfortable around animals than people, and whose strong Berlin dialect seemed incongruous to the Agnes Kraus they encountered in Paris.\textsuperscript{334} This episode may reveal Kraus’s own bourgeois upbringing, a biographical detail that did not coincide with her proletarian Berliner persona. While the surprise her colleagues expressed perhaps demonstrates that nobody really knew her—except her sister, who guarded her secrets—GDR cultural officials certainly knew of Kraus’s multi-lingual abilities. Under languages, her casting card at the central casting department lists German, English, French, Berlin dialect, and Bavarian.\textsuperscript{335} The public would never know about the potential diversity represented by such linguistic talents because Agnes Kraus’s star personality was largely dependent on her inability to speak anything other than Berlinish.

This, and her Berliner Schnauze, identified her as not only a classed figure but a national one as well. Her Berlin persona—her combined Berlinish and Berliner Schnauze—offered historical continuity with an established socialist subculture by appealing to a working-class continuity with art in the Weimar Republic. Whether it was conscious or not, it also worked in a more contemporaneous manner by counteracting the “voice” of the SED, which spoke a distinctly Saxon dialect:\textsuperscript{336} GDR Head of State Walter

\[\text{335}\text{ “Besetzungabteilung: Agnes Kraus” (BArch DR117/47241 51 M 3 15 49). Courtesy of the Bundesarchive Berlin-Lichterfelde.}\]
Ulbricht (1950-1971) and his successor, Erich Honecker (1971-1989), spoke an (Upper) Saxon dialect. Honecker’s was acquired, as he was born and raised in Saarland in southwest Germany, where the native dialect is Rhein Franconian. As a “sociolect,” Berlinish was stigmatized in the West as being lower class, but in the GDR, it was a unifying point of identification for the working and peasant classes that were at the social and economic center of East German society. Kraus represented the nation not on the level of policy and ideology, but rather on everyday life of the people. Unlike the Saxon dialect and its connotations with political leadership, which represented a homogeneous East German nation, the cosmopolitan and historical development of the Berlin dialect represents a proud local character and a more heterogeneous identity that is influenced by French, Yiddish, and Slavic languages, as well as Plattdeutsch (Lower Saxon), which is both German and rural.

As a unifying figure whose experiences spanned Germany’s 20th-century from Weimar to East German socialism, Agnes Kraus excited audiences as an older, wiser maternal figure. She cast an optimistic light on life after disappointment and tragedy and found both community and shared humor in life’s situations. Through her wisdom, wit, and warmth in her combined characters and public appearances, Agnes Kraus earned the reputation of being not only the GDR’s Mutter der Nation (Mother of the Nation) but

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338 Schönfeld and Schlobinski, “After the Wall,” 120.
also the country’s cherished Volkschauspielerin (People’s Actress). Critics debated—but continued to use—the term coined by Kraus’s fellow actress, Barbara Dittus, who tried to explain the special kinship audiences felt with their “People’s Actress.” Dittus referred to Kraus as “Mother of the Nation.” Interestingly, this designation had already been assigned to Kraus’s West German contemporary, Inge Meysel, who starred in the popular West German series, Die Unverbesserlichen (The Incorrigibles, 1965-1971):

Wie die fälschlicherweise oft nur als “Mutter der Nation” angesehene Inge Meysel ist auch Agnes Kraus aus der DDR eine Künstlerin, die es meisterhaft versteht, die Typen aus dem Volke darzustellen, die sich einen hellen Blick bewahrt haben, die das Herz und die Schnauze auf dem rechten Fleck tragen. Auch sie könnte man mithin als eine “DDR-Mutter der Nation” abstempeln, auch ihr würde man damit nicht gerecht.

As this West German critic’s comment suggests when he compares Meysel and Kraus, the Kraus persona also appeared to mean “mother” and more. Kraus’s character was carved from the people and it tempered the didactic aspects of her star persona, instead inviting audiences to readily identify with it.

The comparison places the familiar and nurturing trait of Kraus’s public persona in the company of a West German contemporary who also embodied a woman of the people. Nevertheless, Kraus was not created for border-crossing. She was created for the GDR public, and the GDR did not promote her image abroad. Alternatively, Kraus was meant to offer GDR audiences a different kind of Mutterfigur from Inge Meysel, who

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340 Johann Wohlgemuth, “Volkschauspielerin Agnes Kraus,” Westfälische Rundschau (Dortmund), March 12, 1985. “Like Inge Meysel, who is often mistakenly regarded as just ‘Mother of the Nation,’ Agnes Kraus from the GDR is an artist who masterfully depicts the types of people who have retained a bright outlook, whose heart and candidness [Schnauze] are in the right place. She could also be labeled as a ‘GDR Mother of the Nation,’ but that wouldn’t be doing justice to her either.”
would hopefully be more appealing and ideologically sound and would pull GDR audiences away from West German television.

The comparison is nevertheless significant: the emergence of a star like Agnes Kraus certainly corresponds to a shift in the GDR toward popular culture, in part in response to growing competition with the West and discontent within, when it began to explore new ways to attract audiences and to help create national images of East German socialist subjects.\textsuperscript{341} Despite some parallels, however, Kraus’s female figures undoubtedly belonged to socialism and to East Germany. Unlike Kraus’s West German counterpart, however, her figure focuses not only her immediate family, but the larger socialist family. Like the GDR’s \textit{Dolle Family Album}, West Germany’s \textit{The Incorrigibles} touches on social issues—specifically, family politics—through conflict and the everyday functioning of the family. Unlike Kraus’s Aunt Minna, however, Meysel’s character is the mother at the center of the family, rather than the unattached aunt. She struggles with shifting roles for women in society—from housewife to working woman, for example—and she prioritizes her children’s well-being above all else (i.e., in her traditional view of things), to the detriment of her own self-development and her relationship with her husband.\textsuperscript{342} Kraus’s Aunt Minna, on the other hand, not only adapts her way of thinking about gender, family, and society, but promotes the family’s shift to the new society and the socialist family by way of example.


\textsuperscript{342} Irmela Hannover and Arne Birkenstock, \textit{Familienbilder im Fernsehen. Familienbilder und Familienthemen in fiktionalen und nicht-fiktionalen Fernsehsendungen} (Berlin: Adolf Grimme Institut, 2005), 25.
The two concepts of Volk and Mutterfigur have strong roots in Weimar Germany, which was also a fatherless postwar society. For post-World War II socialist East Germany, however, the emasculated nation depended on strong women with a central, ideological and practical role in the public sphere. Unlike Bertolt Brecht’s unsympathetic Mutter Courage (1939) who chooses war profit over the welfare of her children, and unlike the 1929 film Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück (Mother Krause’s Journey to Happiness, dir. Phil Jutzi), the dramatic story of a working-class Berlin family whose misfortunes have a tragic ending for the family figurehead Mutter Krause, Agnes Kraus’s mother figures have survived and overcome the tragedy and inhumanity of both capitalism and war and bring their lived experiences with them to build the new society. Her rendition of the national mother figure also transcends the traditional reproductive and domestic limits of the figure by repeatedly depicting a childless woman whose maternal nature serves the interests of the larger community rather than a single-family unit.

Kraus’s characters and her public persona were “auf den Leib geschrieben”343 and the biographical elements created a compassionate and familiar personality that warmed

the general public to her. Agnes Kraus the person, the artist, the character, and the star was as familiar to the people as their own mothers. In an interview in 1973, Kraus explained, “Ich werde auf der Straße angesprochen, zum Kaffee eingeladen. Es ist, als wenn ich die Figur bin: die Minna Ziegenhals, die Klucken. Ja, es ist die Schönste in meinem Leben, daß die Zuschauer mich mögen.” Her characters’ meddling ways and tiresome antics were in the end endearing qualities, and they acted on good instincts, imparted wisdom, and despite a sharp tongue, won audiences over with her heart and wit.

4.2 Life Lessons: On Becoming Agnes Kraus

In 1936, after her disastrous Elizabeth performance, the disappointed actress— still working under her given name Irmgard Krause—went to Berlin to work with Eugen Klöpfer at the Berlin Volksbühne and got a supporting role in the 1936 UFA film, Eskapade (Escapades, dir. Erich Waschneck). At this time, she also worked and lived with director Jürgen Fehling. An associate of Klöpfer’s, Fehling was known to be a great expressionist artist and a terribly difficult partner. In spite of his affiliation with Expressionism, a degenerate art form under the Nazis, Fehling became one of Joseph Goebbels’s “Gottbegnadeten” artists—an “Important Artist Exempt List” that designated some 1,200 artists as having exceptional value to National Socialist cultural ideology, and who were exempt from the deployment of artists in 1944 for the war effort, a mobilization that nevertheless resulted in the forced closing of almost all German theaters

345 Lebensläufe, episode 130, “Agnes Kraus – Volksschauspielerin,” directed by Leonore Brandt, aired June 6, 2013, on MDR Fernsehen (Mitteldeutscher Rundfunk).
(Theatersperre) from September 1944 through the end of the war.\footnote{Maximilian Haas, “Die Gottbegnadeten-Liste,” Eine Institution zwischen Repräsentation und Macht. Die Universität für Musik und darstellende Kunst Wien im Kulturleben des Nationalsozialismus, eds. Juri Giannini, Maximilian Haas, Erwin Strouhal, (Vienna: Mille Tre Verlag, 2014), 239ff.} The list included individuals from music and the fine and performing arts, and Fehling shared the distinction with other famous performing artists such as Heinrich Georg, Werner Krauß, Heinz Rühmann, and Eugen Klöpfer.\footnote{Ernst Klee, Das Kulturlexikon zum Dritten Reich: Wer war was vor und nach 1945. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag.; Maximilian Haas, “Die Gottbegnadeten-Liste,” Eine Institution zwischen Repräsentation und Macht. Die Universität für Musik und darstellende Kunst Wien im Kulturleben des Nationalsozialismus. Eds. Juri Giannini, Maximilian Haas and Erwin Strouhal (Vienna: Mille Tre Verlag, 2014).} Readings of Fehling’s productions during this time nevertheless find an ambivalence, if not an outright criticism, of the Nazi regime, and suggest he maintained his privileged status through powerful associations rather than ideological productions.\footnote{John London, “Non-German Drama in the Third Reich,” Theatre under the Nazis, ed. John London (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), 248-9.} Most notably, the premier in March 1937 of his production of Shakespeare’s Richard III—which enjoyed twenty-one performances and a handful of later revivals—prompted critical readings of a petulant man-child and scheming leader, with side characters resembling contemporaries such as Goebbels, extras resembling soldiers, and ahistorical props and settings for the time period of the narrative, but contemporary for 1930s Germany.\footnote{Ibid., 248.}

Agnes Kraus’s close association with men on this list, such as Eugen Klöpfer and Jürgen Fehling, undoubtedly remained an uncomfortable biographical detail for GDR cultural officials who promoted her as the country’s beloved “People’s Actress.” As was normal for actors bridging the National Socialist and postwar eras, Kraus’s record filed
with the central casting department had to address her work in Nazi Germany. To the question, “waren Sie Mitglied der NSDAP oder in angeschlossenen Verbänden der NSDAP?” Kraus answered “Nein.” To the question “hatten Sie eine Funktion?” Kraus answered “Nein.” It seems plausible, however, that not only would GDR cultural officials want a clean official record of the actor’s own actions, but also her affiliations. Close personal relationships with artists on Goebbels’s list of extraordinary artists could sully Kraus’s public image in the GDR and would be deeply incongruous with the public image of the GDR’s larger than life people’s comedienne. In the end, biographies or actress portraits of Agnes Kraus in the GDR press glanced over her life under Nazism or skipped over it altogether.

For Kraus, however, the motive for skimming the period may be deeply personal. Kraus’s relationship with Jürgen Fehling allegedly ended in a suicide attempt, but little more is reported about this relationship and there are only indirect allusions to its lasting impact on her. But so much is clear: after the tragic ending of her relationship with Fehling, she remained single for the rest of her life. Late in her career, in 1983, Kraus agreed to an interview with TV talk show host Heinz Florian Oertel for Porträt per Telefon, in which GDR viewers could call or write in questions for Oertel’s famous guests to answer on live television. When Kraus was asked about her marital status,

351 Lebensläufe, episode 130, “Agnes Kraus – Volksschauspielerin,” directed by Leonore Brandt, aired June 6, 2013, on MDR Fernsehen (Mitteldeutscher Rundfunk).
352 Rüdiger Steinmetz and Reinhold Viehoff, eds. Deutsches Fernsehen Ost. Ein Programmgeschichte des DDR-Fernsehens (Berlin: Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg, 2008), 300. Porträt per Telefon aired more than 240 times from 1969-1990, and Heinz Florian Oertel was its moderator for the more than twenty years of its existence. The
she replied that she is “nicht verheiratet und war nie,” but when Oertel shied away from the question, Kraus, a little annoyed, asked him if he was interested in why she remained single. Indeed, Oertel was not interested in the answer to Kraus’s question, and her single status remained one of the most stable and yet elusive aspects of her stardom. After Kraus’s death, her sister Rohtraut gave an interview in which she addressed this question that the GDR media had largely ignored or danced around during Kraus’s lifetime:


With the end of this third relationship, presumably with Jürgen Fehling, Kraus lost not only the love of her life, but also her connections to the Berlin theater scene. Shortly after her relationship with Fehling ended, Kraus left Berlin to work under Otto Falckenberg at the Münchner Kammerspiele, where she remained until the Theatersperre in 1944. It was Falckenberg’s suggestion that she adopt an artist’s name, and from that point on she became Agnes Kraus. Though it marks an important transition in her career, Kraus’s time at the Münchner Kammerspiele was brief and her work there was

show featured celebrities and prominent people from all fields, e.g., film, television, sports, entertainment, academia.

353 Porträt per Telefon, episode 160, moderated by Heinz Florian Oertel, directed by Gerhard Nerger, featuring Agnes Kraus, aired June 7, 1983. “[She] isn’t married and never has been.”

354 “Erinnerungen an eine Fernsehlegende. Meine Schwester, die große Agnes Kraus,” Super TV, no. 5 (1999). “She wanted to have every man she liked. But she had only bad luck: The first man, a priest, wanted to get married immediately, so she ran away. The second man, an Italian puppet master, was gay. And her great love, a director, turned out to be a perverse lover who ruined theater for her. At some point, she gave up on men.”

355 See also: Ursula Meves, “Tierparkbummel,” FF dabeit (Berlin), April 28, 1980.

356 Porträt per Telefon, episode 160, 1983.
insufficient to support herself. Before the war’s end, Kraus left the stage altogether to work at the Mainfränkisches Puppentheater, a traveling puppet show. Eventually she started her own puppet show with her sister Rohtraut, which they outfitted with their own homemade puppets and took to schools and different venues.

After the war, the sisters made their way back to Brandenburg, where Kraus became an East German actress. After the war, she found work in theaters in Havel and in Potsdam doing chamber plays as a Salondame (society lady), a typecasting of a brassy but elegant and worldly woman of intrigue. She quickly became frustrated with the finite possibilities of this role, and in 1951 she applied as a bit player at the BE, where she thrived under the mentorship of Bertolt Brecht until his death in 1956 and then under his wife and widow, Helene Weigel. In 1956, Weigel engaged Kraus at the BE, where she remained for twenty years (1956-1976) and “found herself” as an actress, which she attributed to Brecht and Weigel’s “Talent zum Komischen und ihre warmherzige Menschlichkeit,” but which the media attributed to them casting her in “plebejisch[e] Rollen.”

Parallel to her career at the Berliner Ensemble, Kraus began in the early 1950s to play small, supporting dramatic roles for DEFA. Several titles belong to some of DEFA’s

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Even though Kraus only played small, supporting roles for cinema in this period, her presence as a character actress and the way she humorously inserts herself into the frame and the narrative indicated her ability to offer a critical, if not also comical view of society. For example, in *Spring Takes Time*—an experimental crime film about investigating an enormously expensive pipeline break that resulted in a major injury—Kraus plays Ursuline, one of the few female workers and has only a few scenes and lines. In one sequence, editor Erika Lehmphul makes drastic jump cuts to juxtapose two very different events: the confrontation between the engineer Solter and his authoritarian boss Faber during a company meeting called to assign blame for the accident; and a company party with dancing, live music, and alcohol. In the latter, the camera spends significant time on Ursuline dancing with her male colleague Meermann (played by Heinz Scholz), with the first cut to the dance party coming right after the elderly Dr. Kranz suddenly grabs his chest during Faber’s and Solter’s heated confrontation. The cut is cold and dispassionate, considering the severity of what is happening to Dr. Kranz, but Kraus’s subsequent performance makes clear that this disconnect is precisely the point. In three cuts, the dancing couple gradually moves closer together until it looks like Meermann is
perhaps unwittingly invading Ursuline’s space, as she uses her body posture to hold him off: he leans forward, causing her to keep taking steps backward through the frame, but as she pulls away from him, smirking, the dance starts to feel like a chase with her leading, and he is never quite able to catch up with her. Her erect body posture reveals that she is completely in control (on the contrary, his seems a little out of control and by the third cut he seems to need her to hold him up). It is Ursuline’s smile that brings some comic relief to an otherwise uncomfortable scene that creates a desire in the viewer to get some personal space, and through that gesture, audiences can find the space necessary to analyze the sequence.

Throughout the dance, Meermann is pontificating to her and their nearby colleagues about being in the right or wrong, but Ursuline does not speak a word until the very end of the dance when she tells him “don’t speak such nonsense.” Despite their increasing physical closeness, the two never really come together, neither in dance nor in conversation. The collaboration between actress and camera is remarkable; even though the scene features only two minor characters, Kraus’s performance captures a microcosm of the film’s central critical social commentary: alienation, distance, and poor communication create problems between individuals who could otherwise solve problems and challenges, including the demands of the planned economy, if they weren’t stumbling over petty obstacles, mainly themselves.

Despite her success at the Berliner Ensemble and her regular work in supporting roles through DEFA, it was in television that Kraus finally made her career. She was already in her late 50s when she landed her first major television role as Aunt Minna in 1969. In television, she was able to create both attractive and ideologically sound
socialist entertainment for domestic audiences by portraying everyday people living everyday life. This aspect of her stardom, however, continued to be important in all of her performances for stage and screen. For example, following the success her role as the widow Queck in Brecht’s The Bakery, the weekly magazine and TV guide for GDR film and television, FF dabei, reported in April 1972 that the “Bertolt Brecht” mechanics brigade of the Schwarze Pumpe gasworks company elected Kraus as an honorary member as a way to recognize an actress who so convincingly played “die ganz gewöhnlichen Leute.” In television, however, she expanded on such well-known theater performances that portrayed everyday people, and she finally began play the roles that would make her famous.

Agnes Kraus presented self-aware characters whose attention to individual struggles served the interests of the greater community and a better society. Throughout her television career, Kraus’s comedy, in both her leading and supporting roles broached social and historical topics, such as: gender roles and family life (Dolle Family Album, 1969; Der Mann, der nach der Oma kam, Engl. title: The Man Who Replaced Grandma, 1972); persistent racial prejudices (73 Florentiner Street, 1972); the housing shortage (Nurse Agnes, 1975); motherhood and abortion (73 Florentiner Street, Nurse Agnes); generational differences (Die Gäste der Mathilde Lautenschläger. Engl. title: Mathilde Lautenschläger’s Guests, 1981; Mensch, Oma!, Engl. translation: Gosh, Grandma!, 1984); and the legacy of World War II (Dolle Family Album, 73 Florentiner Street). Kraus also drew attention to her own most passionate issues: the concerns and


Kraus’s films often drew correlations between the issues rather than treating them in isolation. For example, Nurse Agnes highlighted the relationship between abortion rates and the housing deficit, when her character campaigns aggressively and hilariously against the young, narcissistic, male town mayor on behalf of a young woman who is reluctantly considering abortion if she cannot find adequate housing for her growing family. 73 Florentiner Street highlighted the intersecting problems in society of racial and gender prejudices through a rather developed storyline of a side character, who is a single mother of three boys from different fathers with different ethnic backgrounds. From Kraus’s Aunt Minna in Dolle Family Album (1969) to the widow Mutter Klucke in 73 Florentiner Street (1972), to her iconic nurse Agnes (Nurse Agnes, 1975), and more, Agnes Kraus was known for portraying brazen but nurturing woman—an aunt, widow or neighbor—who always had “ein großes, weites Herz und viel Zeit für die großen und kleinen Sorgen ihrer Mitbürger.”

Rather than treating these issues as ideological or individual shortcomings, she presented them with understanding and sympathy, while giving no quarter in her belief that they were social justice issues that individuals and society must overcome. In addition to her ability to capture the lives and experiences of the common people, Kraus’s popularity with audiences also came from her comedy. Though at first glance the point may seem somewhat trivial, audiences wanted a figure

363 Klaus-Dieter Winzer, “Kleine Rollen, doch ‘große Schauspielerei,’” Märkische Union (Potsdam). February 17, 1982. “…a big, huge heart and a lot of time for the large and small worries of her fellow citizens.”
that embodied and performed scenarios relating to their lives and would help put them into perspective by introducing humor; but they also simply wanted entertainment that was funny, and Agnes Kraus brought “Leute zum Lachen.”

4.3 Laugh and Learn: Comedy in the GDR

Agnes Kraus’s comedy was concerned with the mundane, not the macropolitics of socialist society. This position gained significance as Kraus’s career bridged the cultural chasm created by the Wolf Biermann affair in 1976, which marked the end of the GDR careers of both Jutta Hoffmann and Angelica Domröse, as well as many other GDR artists who signed the petition protesting Biermann’s forced expatriation. Her career and public image also were not able to evolve past this event. She offered her fans continuity and laughter during what proved to be a tectonic shift in the GDR cultural landscape and the permanent loss of some of its most beloved stars and artists. At this time, Agnes Kraus was reaching the pinnacle of her stardom, having just enjoyed her most popular role as Nurse Agnes (1975), going on to do several more TV films until the mid-1980s.

In order to have the long and sustained career as a comedienne in the GDR, Kraus herself needed to project a rather simplified star persona, which correlated well to a genre that also appeared simple and non-fussy. Most of Agnes Kraus’s films were not designed to be particularly visually stimulating or complex and featured high-key lighting, medium shots, and a mostly stable camera. Kraus offered a persona that did not change from character to character—not in physical appearance, dress, speech, or in personality. Her blond hair was always coiffed the same, and her make-up was conservative; she wore a

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simple dress and sometimes a cardigan, unless she was playing nurse Agnes, when she wore a uniform. She used simple, easily identifiable props, such as a beloved pet to co-star with, or her moped that was a signature part of her nurse Agnes character. Through Kraus’s uncomplicated and endearing figure, her films were able to broach such serious social topics as gender, race, family life, and generational differences because their mediation by the comedic genre and an unassuming star persona made them non-threatening.

Kraus’s performance style and public persona arguably became a genre in itself, as the formula that made up Kraus’s comedy, like generic formulas themselves, came to be an aspect of her performances that audiences came to expect and rely on. In 2003, the German public broadcaster RBB (Rundfunk Berlin-Brandenburg) offered an Agnes Kraus retrospective that aired Thursday evenings for five consecutive weeks. The Berliner Zeitung covered the event, suggesting that the actress embodied a genre that was the “Agnes-Kraus-Film.”

Though this observation came years after reunification and the end of Kraus’s career, it is provocative in its description of a socialist icon. When the GDR press had begun deliberating East German socialist stardom in the 1960s, film critic Horst Lukas pointed out that if the GDR had a star culture, identifying a distinct body of films by a film star was not a characteristic that carried over from capitalist star cultures:

Zumindest war bei all unseren Unterhaltungen nicht einmal die Rede von einem Domröse–, Bürger–, oder Bodenstein-Film; kein einziges Mal hörten wir, daß man Günther Simon oder Armin Mueller-Stahl mit ihren Filmtiteln in Zusammenhang brachte, geschweige denn diese Namen vor den Filmtitel setzte.

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366 Lukas, “Haben wir keine Stars,” 7. “At least in all our conversations there was never talk of a Domröse, Bürger, or Bodenstein film; never once did we hear that Günther Simon or Armin Mueller-Stahl was associated with their film titles, let alone put these
Lukas could only think of one exception: “Manfred Krug! Seine Filme sind – zumindest zum Teil – untrennbar mit seinem Namen verbunden.”367 If the lovable actor and heartthrob Manfred Krug was the only example in the 1960s of a performer who had reached such stardom, Lukas’s point would have to be amended by the end of the 1970s, after Kraus had her first major hit as the widow Margarete Klucke in the TV film 73 Florentiner Street, marking the start of her iconic career.

While the public loved the entertainment value of Kraus’s slapstick comedy, she herself lamented the feeling of being laughed at by her audiences.368 In 1979, the daily regional paper Die Union did a piece profiling the actress, in which she raised the issue of comedy for women and her wishes to diversify her acting with “eine erste Rolle”: “Ich wäre richtig stolz, wenn die Zuschauer vielleicht mal nich über mich lachen würden.”369

In the context of gender and comedy, this distinction demands some attention. Kathleen Rowe’s groundbreaking study of female comedians, Unruly Women, analyzes the generic and cultural conventions that “represent women as objects rather than subjects of laughter.”370 Woman as spectacle is an old gendered trope: for women breaking into a genre such as comedy, the ability to deflect laughter from one’s own person is groundbreaking. Rowe’s analysis of the American comedienne Roseann Barr, for

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names in front of the film title. This only happened in once case: Manfred Krug! His films are—at least in part—inseparably linked to his name.”

367 Ibid., 7.
example, whose late 1980s-90s sitcom *Roseann* centered on American working-class families and became the most watched TV show of its era, draws attention to the revolutionary aspect of “female laughter to challenge the social and symbolic systems that would keep women in their place.” In East Germany this struggle existed as well, but within an entirely different political context. In the public sphere, one aspect of the struggle over comedic entertainment and social satire was constant: “Wenn sie [die SED] es dennoch stattfinden ließen, dann deshalb, weil es das Publikum begeisterte. Es ging um die Zustimmung des Publikums zur gesamten Veranstaltung. Satire sollte Öffentlichkeit beweisen – in einer Öffentlichkeit, die unter Parteikontrolle genommen war.” Kraus’s own struggle to direct the laughter—to be the subject and not the object of the audience’s amusement—is certainly tied up in the Party’s ambivalence toward the genre. Kraus’s satire and challenge to public discourse was counteracted by the more slapstick films written for her that turned her own figure into the spectacle. Considering the long gendered and sexist trope of the woman as spectacle in western society and culture, such films were an easy sell to audiences.

While there were a small number of female comedians in the GDR, such as Marianne Wünscher, Helga Göring, and Helga Hahnemann, as well as Agnes Kraus, they made up a small group. Marianne Wünscher was a supporting actress who appeared beside other comedians, such as Agnes Kraus in the DEFA omnibus film, *Verzeihung, sehen Sie Fußball* (*Excuse Me, Are You Watching Soccer?*, dir. Gunther Scholz, 1983). As two older women, Irma (Wünscher) and Herta (Kraus) are sitting down like the rest of

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East Germany to watch the 1982 World Cup between Italy and West Germany on Herta’s new but fuzzy color TV. Wünscher’s comedic performance as Irma highlights Herta’s own strange eccentricities, as the two women sit in in the privacy of the cramped living room to watch an international event happening outside East Germany’s borders. The setting represents the individualistic lifestyle East Germans had come to live in the 1980s and how a device such as a television enables antisocial behaviors by keeping people inside and away from each other (let alone obsessively watching a West German cultural event). The multi-talented Berliner Helga Hahnemann, a cabaret artist, sketch comedienne, TV actress, singer, and TV moderator, seemed to reach a similar level of popularity among the audiences that Kraus reached. Like Kraus, Hahnemann was also famous for her distinct Berlin dialect, but in the GDR cultural landscape Hahnemann occupied a different persona as a multi-talented artist rather than the almost singular character of Agnes Kraus, which blended star, actress, character, and genre.

Attempts at developing satire and comedy for GDR television began in the early 1950s, when GDR cultural officials recognized the steep competition of western media, including radio, TV, and cinema. GDR television started by offering short entertainment pieces and cabaret, such as the cabaret and variety television show *Fernsehkarussell (TV Carousel, 1952-1954)*; the satirical short film series made at the DEFA studios, *Das Stacheltier (The Porcupine, 1953-1964)*; and a sketch comedy show that featured one or several GDR actors in each episode, *Schauspielereien (1978-1990)*, much like the popular American sketch comedy show (albeit without the variety show aspect), *Saturday Night Live (1975-present)*. *Schauspielereien* allowed filmmakers, such

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as the prolific comedic director Roland Oehme (*The Man Who Replaced Grandma*), and actors like Jaecki Schwarz, Carmen Maja-Antoni and Marianne Wünscher to showcase their versatility across several back-to-back short sketches.

In 1983, the writer Annelies Schulz developed one whole episode of *Schauspielereien*, entitled “Wenn ick nich wär”: *Schauspielereien mit AGNES KRAUS*. The director, Klaus Gendries, a prominent TV filmmaker, who continued to be prolific after unification, had directed Kraus’s first starring role in *73 Florentiner Street* (1972) and its sequel *News from 73 Florentiner Street* in (1974). He would also made the 4-episode TV miniseries starring Kraus, *Aber Vati!* (*But, Daddy!*, 1974-1979). Agnes Kraus was an ideal actress for *Schauspielereien* and sketch comedy. Rather than demonstrate versatility, however, Kraus’s episode showed her same nosy, droll but endearing figure across four skits—as a bathroom attendant pushing her way into the customers’ lives to return lost money, a slaughterhouse worker and mother trying to set her daughter up on a blind date, a retired, lonely teacher seeking attention and companionship from her neighbors, and Aunt Meta, a well-meaning meddler in her nephew’s life.

The uniformity of Kraus’s public persona is something she complained about repeatedly, and in the GDR it was unique to her stardom. Other actors, such as Erwin Geschonneck, were afforded both the diversity of roles that Kraus herself craved and the extensive filmography that was evidence of an enormously successful film career. For example, in one year, Geschonneck played a dramatic role (*Nackt unter Wölfen*. Engl. title: *Naked Among Wolves*, 1962) and a comedic one (*Karbid und Sauerampfer*. Engl. title: *Carbide and Sorrel*, 1963), and he had many leading roles in both film and television. In his leading role as Bruno Nakonz in *Ein altes Modell*. (*An Old Model*,
1976), as the husband of Frau Frieda (Agnes Kraus), his screen presence dominates rather than shares the narrative. This TV film premiered on Geschonneck’s 70th birthday and may very well have been a celebration of him, one of East Germany’s most beloved stars. Within this dynamic, however, Kraus assumes an unusual role in Frau Frieda because here she is married. When she discovers one morning that their old electric coffee grinder no longer works, she scolds Bruno for giving away the hand grinder and sends him to the city to get the electric one repaired. Frau Frieda’s nagging is simply a device to send Bruno on his day-long journey from the village into the city; but for Kraus, the supporting role is an outlier, in which she can only portray a very limited, stereotypical notion of a nagging wife in the pairing with Geschonneck. As we have seen, in individual roles, especially for DEFA, Kraus was a powerful supporting actress; but within the comedic genre and its history in the GDR, she led.

By the time Kraus’s films were made, GDR TV culture was undergoing a significant shift under new leadership of the new Party Secretary Erich Honecker, which moved it toward normalizing East/West German relations. In the 1950s, the number of comedies in relation to other programs was relatively small: in three years, DFF produced only 13 comedies—on average 4 per year.374 By the 1960s, DFF began to institutionalize the genre, creating two studio locations: a regional television theater in Moritzburg, near Halle in 1963; and then, in 1967, the Abteilung heitere Dramatik in Adlershof. With the “insecurity and retreat” of filmmakers that was spurred by the 11th Plenum in 1965, Horst Claus posits that genres like westerns and comedies “appeared [ideologically and

financially] at just the right time,” and filmmakers moved to “‘safe’ subjects drawn from literature and history, [and] comedies.” Comedy, however, was not always considered “safe,” as the GDR struggled with bringing out the entertainment value of comedy while managing the satirically critical, which could be seen as “parteifeindlich” while also serving as a useful tool for demonstrating movement towards a more democratic society, where “ein kritisches Wort geäußert werden kann.” To control criticism, satire and comedy in the GDR became embedded in the power struggles over the public sphere. This is perhaps most evident in comedy’s home in GDR television, which was the media arm of the SED party.

From the mid-1960s onward, the GDR began strengthening its own cultural identity, including vis-à-vis Moscow. GDR television turned insular, focusing its efforts on attracting East German audiences and deterring East Germans from watching West German television. In May 1971, the regime change from Walter Ulbricht to Erich Honecker brought new policies, including more contact between the two German states. In June 1971, the 8th Party Congress of the SED took place; at the Congress, Honecker called for a new, more relaxed cultural atmosphere that would generate more productions, including more entertainment television. Finally, in 1973, GDR viewers were officially allowed to watch Western media, although the government simultaneously tried to discourage it, in part by creating more East German entertainment television. This approach toward television exemplified Honecker’s conflicting position vis-à-vis West

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376 Dittmar, *Feindliches Fernsehen*, 181.
Germany. While allowing policy, economic, and political developments, Honecker’s East Germany also followed a policy of Abgrenzung from West Germany, thereby emphasizing the development of a particular East German cultural identity. In May 1972, the Transit Agreement resulted in an increase in West German visitors to the GDR and an influx of Western culture. In June 1973, the ratification of the Basic Treaty between the FRG and the GDR recognized both states as sovereign nations and legislated Willi Brandt’s conciliatory Ostpolitik. However, “Gleichzeitig setzte die SED-Führung alles daran, die eigene Identität zu stärken und die politische Lösung von den zwei deutschen Nationen nach außen hin sichtbar zu Machen.” Thus, “die Bundesrepublik Anfang der 1970er Jahre [wurde] als Ausland interpretiert, [und] die Tilgung der Bezeichnungen ‘deutsch’ bzw. ‘Deutschland’ [führte] bei zahlreichen Institutionen zu Umbenennungen: ...aus dem ‘Deutschen Fernsehfunk’ wurde das ‘Fernsehen der DDR.’”

Television, comedy— at least in the early years—was supposed to function at the nexus of entertainment and propaganda; however, by 1967 dramatic comedy turned to everyday topics (heitere Gegenwartsdramatik). By the 1970s, when DFF began to prioritize entertainment value over the propaganda purposes of comedy, viewer numbers finally climbed, a pattern that held until the 1980s. This development demonstrates both the influence of the public’s wishes for media representation and the power of television as a medium for reaching the wider public. Though until 1969 there was only one East German station, and then there were two, television broadcasting began in 1952 and by 1968 four million television licenses had been issued. Parallel to the growth of

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378 Ibid., 285.
379 Klötzer, Satire und Macht, 41-42.
380 Klötzer, Satire und Macht, 50-52.
television as medium and technology in GDR homes, however, was audience access to western shows. By the late 1960s, 80 percent of the population could access West German television, though officials had developed several strategies throughout the 1960s to try to prevent viewers from watching it—including asking children at school what they (i.e., their parents) watched at home. In 1973, Honecker finally announced publicly that viewers could watch whatever they wanted, though it was still more or less unacceptable to publicly admit to watching West German programs.  

In this context, it is clear that Kraus’s comedies served a crucial role in helping set and achieve the goal of creating entertainment and public figures that could draw audiences and support socialism, especially through East German television. For example, Dolle Family Album was the first family drama made in the GDR, a genre created to help shift GDR television away from overtly ideological and somewhat expensive historically-themed programming to instead address audience demand for entertainment. In a report on this TV film by the Staatliche Komitee für Rundfunk dated September 5, 1971, its author, Traute Hellberg, writes critically about the it, the comedic genre, and the specific popularity of TV families, albeit with an eye on both East and West:

Unterhaltungssendungen, besonders mit Fernsehfamilien haben’s in sich. Im Osten wie im Westen. Bei uns spricht man, frei nach Brecht, vom Leichten, das schwer zu machen ist. In der DDR von der Waffe des Lustspiels. Einigkeit besteht nur darüber, das Fernsehvolk will unterhalten sein, aber wie? Billig soll’s nicht sein aber zu Herzen gehen muß es. Wer

381 Randall L. Bytwerk, Bending Spines: The Propagandas of Nazi Germany and the German Democratic Republic (Michigan State University Press, 2004), 94-95.
382 The production of Dolles Familienalbum followed a costly 13-episode antifascist World War II series, Rote Bergsteiger (dir. Willi Urbanek), the first GDR television series. The series aired irregularly (it did not have a set schedule) from 1969-1971. See: Steinmetz and Viehoff, Deutsches Fernsehen Ost, 229.
aber dem Publikum nach dem Munde schreit, macht sich verdächtig. Engagement ist schließlich wichtiger als Lachen; wenn schon Unterhaltung, dann nur um den Zuschauern die Aufklärung schmackhafter zu machen, sagten Schulmeister in Ost und West und haben dabei sehr verschiedenes im Auge. In der DDR, so ist zu hören, lacht man von neuer Position aus. Was soviel heißen soll, wie, man freut sich mit den Helden der sozialistischen Gegenwart, wenn sie, allen Widerwärtigkeiten zum Trotz, ihr gestecktes Ziel endlich doch erreichen, daß den Leuten dabei nur lösbare Konflikte zugemutet werden, versteht sich von selbst. Versagen ist nicht drin, und wenn, dann nur vorübergehend.\footnote{Traute Hellberg. \textit{Staatliche Komitee für Rundfunk Report}, September 5, 1971. Courtesy of Filmuniversität Babelsberg, Pressedokumentation. “Entertainment shows, especially those with TV families, are difficult. In East and West. Based on Brecht, here one says it is difficult to do light-hearted shows. In the GDR, comedy is a weapon. There is only consensus that TV audiences want to be entertained, but how? It should not be cheap, but it must speak to the heart. But whoever simply gives in to audience demands is suspicious. Dedication is more important than laughter; if it’s already entertainment, then only to make the enlightenment more palatable for audiences, as school masters in East and West Germany have said, and with that they have very different ideas in mind. In the GDR, it’s said that one laughs from a new position. That means that one is happy with socialist heroes of the present when they, despite all the odds, finally achieve their goal, that the people here expect only conflicts that can be resolved goes without saying. Failure isn’t an option, and if there is failure then only temporarily.”}

Kraus’s Aunt Minna in \textit{Dolle Family Album} helped her family members (and audiences) resolve the sometimes painful but necessary transition families and individuals faced, as socialist society and its economy reorganized; but the series also “stellt aus dramaturgischer Perspektive eher den Übergang zum neu entstehenden Fernsehgenre dar.”\footnote{Steinmetz and Viehoff, \textit{Deutsches Fernsehen Ost}, 230.} Kraus’s later roles in comedy continued GDR televisions efforts to both create a ideologically sound entertainment television. The conflicts were easier to resolve through comic relief and were mediated by a star with whom audiences identified and whose authenticity was verified repeatedly in the press then disseminated widely and directly to people’s living rooms through television. This, combined with her success at presenting
simple, everyday Volksfiguren, allowed Kraus to gain her several memorable titles such as The People’s Actress and TV Darling, the latter of which correlates with the lexical alternative Audience Darling that was often preferred for GDR (film) celebrities over the problematic loan word Star.385

4.4 Agnes Kraus’s Compassionate Comedy: An Analysis

73 Florentiner Street first aired on February 6, 1972 on the GDR’s premiere channel with national reach, Channel 1. It is a full-length TV comedy adapted from the 1967 novella Das Durchgangszimmer (The Connecting Room), by satirical author and GDR film critic Renate Holland-Moritz. By May of that year, it was also screening in theaters, and within ten years, it had enjoyed more than 3,000 viewings.386 The success was felt immediately, resulting in its sequel one year later, News From 73 Florentiner Street, for which Holland-Moritz was one of the scriptwriters.

73 Florentiner Street is a film about women and community, in particular motherhood and family in a new society. Neither the characters nor Kraus’s audiences would misinterpret the phonetic similarity between her character’s name, Margarete Klucke, and its phonetic similarity and animal reference to a hen (Glucke), which left no doubt as to the character she inhabited. Lovingly called “Mutter Klucke” by her new subtenant, Brigitte (played by Edda Dentges), Kraus plays a true mother hen. Frau Klucke immediately adopts a protective maternal position towards nineteen-year-old Brigitte, whom she likewise calls “meine Kleene” (“my little one”). As Brigitte is the

386 Thomas Beutelschmidt, Kooperation oder Konkurrenz? Das Verhältnis zwischen DEFA-Film und DDR-Fernsehen (Berlin: DEFA-Stiftung, 2009), 126.
narrator, in both the book and the film, her thoughts and secrets are shared with audiences before they are made known to the other characters, especially Mutter Klucke. Unbeknownst to Klucke, Brigitte is pregnant and estranged from both the baby’s father and her own mother—the father having already moved on to another relationship, and the mother ashamed of her daughter’s fatherless pregnancy. Brigitte is first disappointed to find that her impulsive decision to leave her mother’s home and rent a room from Frau Klucke landed her in a Durchgangszimmer—a connecting room that serves as a kind of passage between main rooms in the apartment. In the connecting room, however, she is able to build relationships with the other house residents as they move through her space into the rest of the apartment to visit Frau Klucke. Nevertheless, fearing the same kind of condemnation she experienced from her own mother, Brigitte keeps her secret while unsuccessfully searching for more suitable housing. Once the secret is out, however, Klucke is the last to know, and she and Brigitte must deal with the fallout from the deception and confront negative social perceptions of single mothers, which lingered despite the GDR’s Muttipolitik, the official policy that emerged in 1972 from the GDR’s earlier policies on women and which pledges to support mothers.387 Brigitte soon learns that Klucke and the rest of the residents—who are now her friends, even her family—feel only joy for her and her baby.

Even though she was a supporting actress, this was a starring role for Agnes Kraus, and viewers again witnessed her dominating screen presence in this breakthrough role. The film centered on and was narrated by the character Brigitte, but the way Kraus

inserts her character into the scenes and narrative makes it clear that she is the glue that holds it all together, much like the typical mother figure holding a family unit together. For example, in one of the early scenes in the connecting room, Brigitte is relaxing after work when Mutter Klucke lets herself in, followed by a visiting neighbor, Frau Knatter (played by Steffie Spira), who must pass through the room to leave the apartment. As the three women engage in verbal sparring over privacy and the use of the room, the two older women eventually enter Brigitte’s frame. First, Frau Knatter enters and sits on the bed on the left side of the frame, with Brigitte in her chair on the right. Second, Klucke enters and situates herself right in the middle. In a medium shot capturing the three women crowding the frame, it is thus Agnes Kraus and not Edda Dentges who sits center, taller and more prominently than the others.

Kraus’s central presence, even from the position of supporting actress, is not surprising from a casting perspective. When Holland-Moritz was asked about the adaptation of her Mutter Klucke figure, she explained that, for her and the whole creative film team, as well as for the Department of Dramatic Comedy, there was never a question that Agnes Kraus should play the role:

Die Urberlinerin Margarete Klucke mit der großen Kodderschnauze und dem butterweichen Herzen, der es nicht um die Miete zu tun ist, sondern um einen Menschen, ein Menschenkind, dem sie Mutter sein kann – sie konnte nur Gestalt annehmen in einer Schauspielerin, die all diese menschlichen, allzu menschlichen Eigenschaften ebenfalls in sich birgt, und die jenes unnachahmliche Berliner Fluidium umgibt, das nun einmal zur Persönlichkeit der Kraus gehört.\(^\text{388}\)

\(^{388}\) Renate Holland-Moritz, “Die ideale Mutter Klucke. Eine Hauptrolle für Agnes Kraus im neuen heiteren Fernsehfilm Florentiner 73,” Volkswacht (Gera), February 4, 1972. “Margarete Klucke, the original Berliner with a tender heart and typical Berlin way of speaking, for whom it’s not about the rent but about the person, a human being, whom she can mother—she could only take shape in an actress who already possesses these all-
Nevertheless, faced with such a role, Kraus expressed uncertainty: “Das kam mir fast anmaßend vor. Da ich im Leben nie eine solche Rolle spielen durfte, nahm ich an, ich könne ihr auch auf der Bühne oder vor der Kamera nicht gerecht werden.” As an artist, however, she observed: “Und dann sind ja auch viele dieser Film- oder Theatermütter ausgesprochen steril und langweilig.” More to the point, Kraus explains that in many ways, she ultimately identified with her roles because she saw her profession as “Ersatz fürs Leben.” The autobiographical elements that made it into her character biographies, such as her single and childless status, denoted things she missed in real life.

Other than her sister, Agnes Kraus was alone. She was also surprisingly shy and found it difficult to connect with people. So when acting allowed her to take on a more assertive persona and experience the things she did not have, she used it as a way to experience things she did not have in life. In her 1983 interview with Heinz Florian Oertel on *Porträt per Telefon*, Kraus explained: “Ich kam im Leben nicht so ganz zurecht. Das war alles sehr schwierig und ich … ich hatte ein bisschen Scheu und Angst for too human qualities and has that inimitable Berlin aura, which is part of Kraus’s personality.”

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389 Renate Holland-Moritz, “Agnes Kraus – die ideale Mutter Klucke,” *Freie Erde* (Neustrelitz), February 4, 1972. See also: “Eine mütterliche Berlinerin. Heiterer Film mit Agnes Kraus nach einer Erzählung von Renate Holland-Moritz,” review of *Florentiner 73*, dir. Klaus Gendries, *Thüringische Landeszeitung* (Weimar), February 5, 1972. “It seemed to me almost presumptuous. Since I could never play such a role in life, I assumed that I could not do it justice on stage or in front of the camera. But then many of these film or theater mothers are extremely sterile and boring.”

vom Leben. Aber Sehnsucht. Ich wollte dabei sein und nah daran sein.”391 This is a point Kraus had tried to make with audiences before. In a 1979 interview Kraus said: “Ich war eigentlich immer im Leben zu spät gekommen. Auf dem Tanzboden. In der Liebe. Überall. Das lag an meiner falschen Erziehung. Stets stand ich am Rande. Und ich dachte mir, vielleicht kannst du die Gefühle, die du ja hast, auf der Bühne zeigen.”392 These statements reveal that Kraus was willing to discuss her bourgeois upbringing, her failed love affair, and her mistakes or regrets—her lived experiences were, after all, the basis of her wisdom, and her advanced age offered her the temporal distance to be able to gain perspective and sometimes find humor in life’s missteps. It also shows how she perceived her role as a public figure, foremost as an actress but also as a star with the platform to discuss such difficult and sometimes sad things, to begin a conversation with her audience. The press, however, never seemed comfortable with Kraus revealing so much of herself, and such moments of truth never developed beyond statements such as these. Instead, she famously showed her repressed feelings about life, personal connections, and her nurturing tendencies in her love for animals.393 In her films, this was most obviously integrated into her role as the widow Alma Krause in the trilogy Animal Tales (1977), Oh, Auntie! (1978), and Alma Tires Out Everyone (1980).

391 Porträt per Telefon, episode 160, 1983. “I didn’t come to terms with life. It was all very difficult and I …I was a bit shy and scared of life. But I longed. I wanted to be present and close.”
392 Dohrnov, “Unser Porträt: Agnes Kraus (1979). “I always arrived late in life. On the dance floor. In love. In everything. That was due to my misguided upbringing. I was always on the fringes [of life]. And I thought, maybe I could show the feelings I had on stage.”
Alma Kraus is a passionate bulldog owner and widow of a veterinarian who accompanies her nephew to his apprenticeship in the countryside to assist a large animal vet. In this role, she put the welfare of animals first and tried to show others by example that all creatures, big and small, deserve to be loved. Once Alma and her nephew arrive in the village from Berlin, she soon learns that her nephew’s new boss, Dr. Otto Kröpelin (played by Fred Mahr), is an avid hunter. A romantic attraction develops between her character and Dr. Kröpelin, but Alma is unable to understand how he can care for animals and hunt them, too, and she holds him off for most of the trilogy—even sleeping in the bathtub to avoid sharing a bed with him when such a situation arises. She tries repeatedly to convince him to stop hunting. She eventually takes matters into her own hands by loudly scaring off any deer when he goes out at night to sit in his hunting blind. In fact, many of her roles demonstrated a deep love and understanding for all living creatures, though in life she found it difficult to find this same emotional connection with people.

The motif of being an animal lover is also peppered throughout Kraus’s other roles, such as when her character Alice Räppel in *One Hour Delay* talks her cab driver out of his sandwich so she can take it home to feed the crows. This dialog provides a good illustration of how Kraus’s personal profile was collapsed into that of her character. Filmed entirely in medium shots, the scene shows Alice Räppel facing forward in the back of a cab at nighttime. Though the driver is watching the road and not his passenger in the seat behind him, the camera offers a shot-reverse-shot between Kraus and his reflection in the rearview mirror, which suggests that it is actually the dialog is central here and not the mise-en-scene, which is visually quite limited. The medium shot also
shows Kraus’s face change through different degrees of delight, however: from seriously asking for his sandwich, to amused that he thinks she wants it for herself, to happy that he gave it to her for her birds. As she’s taking the half-eaten sandwich and putting it in a plastic bag, she tells him: “Oh, dankeschön! Da werden sich meine Krähen aber freuen!” At this point, the driver asks about a famous Krausian reference, which any Kraus fan recognize and enjoy. According to repeated reports in the press, Kraus tended to her “Futtersucht” each day by feeding the seagulls (not the crows) at the Weidendamme Bridge. When she thanks th driver, he asks, “Wieso Krähen? Ich denke, Sie füttern die Möwen auf der Weidendammebrücke!” Not missing a beat, she answers: “Sie haben ihre Ration heute schon verdrückt!” Irritated, the man refers to another well-known Krausian personality trait when he calls her “mother”: “Nein, Mutter, geben Sie mir meine Stulle zurück. Ich bin selber eine Piepe.”

Kraus’s reported *Futtersucht* was conflated with a kind of *Muttersucht*, in that she projected her nurturing and maternal instincts onto animals and living creatures of all kinds, even mosquitos. In response to such stories, Kraus explained to the press, “Ich kann nicht anders, ich muß mich um die kümmern, die kein er will. Das ist wohl so ‘ne Art verdrängter Mutterkomplex.” Alice Räppel character gives the same reason to the cab driver: “Ich kann nicht anders!” While Kraus seemed ready to psychoanalyze her

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394 “Oh, thank you! My crows will be pleased!”
395 “The crows? I thought you feed the seagulls at the Weidendamme Bridge!”
396 “They ate their portion today!”
397 “No, mother. Give me my sandwich back. I’m just a little chick myself.”
398 Holland-Moritz, “Die ideale Mutter Klucke,” Volkswacht (1972). “I can’t help it. I have to take care of those, whom no one else will. It’s a bit like a repressed mother complex.”
399 “I can’t help it!”
childless status, the GDR press cultivated it and absolutely relied on it as a staple part of her public persona. She wasn’t just anyone’s mother; she was “Mother of the Nation.” The references within the film were well-known Krausian characteristics and eccentricities, and her witty performance in this scene collapses her public persona into her character and demonstrates that Kraus’s humor allows her to find humor not only in situations but also in herself.

The conflation of character role and star persona, and the continuity across media and throughout her oeuvre also points to the fact that Kraus was not only a star and a comedian, she became a genre in herself. Audiences came to have a certain expectation of Kraus’s performances and her films, and she and the film team delivered regularly. After 73 Florentiner Street, Kraus would go on to perform supporting and starring roles in about two films for television and cinema each year, until she retired in 1984.

While Kraus represented the embodiment of a maternal figure both in and out of her roles, motherhood itself was a main motif throughout 73 Florentiner Street. Kraus used her signature droll humor, irony, and self-effacing comedy to bring to light several social issues that stood in the way of healthy interpersonal relationships and a strong community. Several side stories show that despite forward progress in the GDR, motherhood and child-rearing generally require continued social work and understanding, especially when they intersected with other complex social and medical issues. For example, a small but provocative side story adds an additional dimension to the challenges of family and reproduction. Brigitte’s neighbors, Mr. and Mrs. Regler, seem to be infertile. They have, in any case, unsuccessfully tried to have children of their own, and are coming to accept that they may never be parents themselves. They redirect all
their maternal and paternal desires toward Miss Maaß’s children and Brigitte’s own pregnancy. Side stories such as this one reveal to viewers that socialism has not and possibly cannot fix everything, but at the same time it offers alternatives and solutions in the the socialist community. The children in the apartment building are the privilege and responsibility of all the adult residents, including the Reglers. The collective and community are thus not only an ideology; they are also social values with a real impact on people’s lives. In this, the film demonstrates the possibilities of the socialist family, which redefines the intersection of family and community life.

Nevertheless, a second side story reveals the limits of that ideal through the pervasive prejudices against single mothers and racial difference. A charismatic neighbor, the interpreter Miss Marina Maaß (played by Jessy Rameik), is a single mother with three sons from fathers with different national and ethnic backgrounds. Since the protagonist, Brigitte, is facing single motherhood herself, she finds Maaß’s treatment by the community concerning and she also feels drawn to Maaß in a kind of solidarity for their similar situations. Their situations are not altogether the same, however, and the film and the novel handle this side story a little differently, although both make it clear that sexism and racism are ongoing concerns.

The judgement Miss Maaß faces as a single mother seems to confirm Brigitte’s own fears. In the book, Brigitte first raises the issue with another neighbor, Helga, who has just learned about Brigitte’s own secret pregnancy. Helga, however, problematically assures her it is the boys’ different ethnicities that worry the house residents, and not Miss Maaß’s single motherhood:

Die Maaß spinnt doch! Eines Tages überrascht die uns noch mit einem Chinesen. Ich will um Himmels willen nichts gegen Chinesen sagen, aber
The social commentary in this passage of Holland-Moritz’s satirical novella is clear: GDR society is still structured by an “us” and “them” mentality that is not limited to East and West or socialist and capitalist. Helga’s explanation evidences racial prejudice and gender bias among GDR citizens. In the guise of concern for the children’s welfare, the neighbors are allowed to express their disapproval of the children’s minority status by disapproving of the mother’s actions, which led to their conception in the first place. Though the children are part of the community, and the neighbors take care of and nurture them when Miss Maaß is away at work, they are still seen as Other. For them, the mother’s indiscretion is to blame for her children’s social challenges, rather than society’s persistent prejudices and the absent fathers. Despite the rhetoric of international socialism, the actual embodiment of that ideal—a heterogeneous society—is improbable. Based on the neighbors’ opinions, it seems that racial and cultural heritage (including linguistic heritage) must remain German—any deviation from that is just not seen as “normal.” Despite the seemingly innocuous word choice Helga uses to describe people’s reactions—“angestaunt” and “bewundert,” both even suggesting positive responses like

400 Maaß is crazy! One day she surprises us again with a Chinese boy. For heaven’s sake, I don’t want to say anything against the Chinese, but the woman isn’t thinking about his future. What will become of the children? They will always be outsiders. They’ll be stared at and people will marvel at them, and it’s just not normal when a little mulatto runs around speaking Berlinish like a cab driver from Ackerstraße. You can’t compare your situation with hers. And don’t pay attention to other people’s gossip!”
“marvelled at” or “admired”—she really means “stared at” or “gawked at.” Moreover, her other statements are clear: Black children should not be speaking German (or more specifically, Berlinisch), and ethnic minorities will always be outsiders.

Rather than framing the discussion of race through the problematic opinions of the neighbors, as the book does, the film deals with the topic of race and racism by offering the mother’s point of view when Brigitte asks her about it directly. However, the film also adds a tense scene between Miss Maaß and Mutter Klucke that precedes Brigitte’s conversation with Miss Maaß, which indicates that Maaß’s troubles in the community stem from deep sexism and racism that has persisted into this new socialist society. Miss Maaß rings Klucke’s doorbell late one evening and rouses both Klucke and Brigitte out of bed. Brigitte hears Klucke rebuke Maaß: “Nur ein Wort von Frau zu Frau: Wer Kinder ohne Vater in der [sic] Welt setzt….”\(^{401}\) As a moment of dramatic irony, audiences feel the full weight of Klucke’s words because they all know about Brigitte’s pregnancy and know that Klucke does not. Brigitte clamors to the door to stop Klucke’s verbal condemnation of Miss Maaß and all single mothers; but when Brigitte accompanies Miss Maaß to her apartment later that evening, Klucke lies in bed worrying, “Die verdirbt mir noch dat junge unschuldige Ding.”\(^{402}\)

The exchange between Klucke and Maaß reveals Klucke’s own flawed character in her rather simplistic ideas about good and bad women. This is a trait of Kraus’s stardom: using irony to show compassion for people and their flaws by revealing herself as a flawed character. Klucke shows her gender bias when she berates Maaß for being a

\(^{401}\) “Just a piece of advice from woman to woman: Whoever brings children into this world fatherles…”

\(^{402}\) “She’ll ruin that young, innocent thing.”
single mother; but her color blindness is problematic in itself, since the adults in the apartment building are clearly unable to deal with the racial discrimination towards the very children they vow to protect and nurture if they refuse to even see it in themselves.

Certainly, the film expects white GDR audiences to have noticed that Miss Maaß’s children are not only fatherless, but also have different ethnic backgrounds, since her Black son is one of the first tenants Brigitte meets when she enters the building. The book verbalizes Brigitte’s reaction to the children: “ein Osterhäschen aus Vollmilkschokolade.” She then attempts to rationalize her own offensive reaction: “Weiβ Gott, Prüderie lag mir fern, außerdem saß ich im Glashaus. Aber diese Familie war doch höchst eigenartig zusammengestellt.” As a visual medium, the film simply introduces the children on screen and gives the audience time to do its own reflecting (or self-reflecting), but it does eventually confront audiences about the issues when Brigitte and Maaß sit down for their late evening chat.

In Maaß’s apartment, the two women get to know each other over a bottle of schnapps, and it is during this drunken conversation that the film lets Maaß answer any questions about her single motherhood and her children. When Maaß shares with Brigitte that her role model is the pre-World War II international star and African American expatriate Josephine Baker, the two women reminisce and imitate Baker’s famous banana

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404 Ibid. “God knows, I’m not a prude. Besides, I’m sitting in a glass house. But this family was very peculiar.”
dance, before moving on to discuss the background of Maaß’s own little family. It is worth quoting this sequence in full, before moving on to an analysis:

*Brigitte*: Außerdem hat sie wohl ein Dutzend Kinder aus allen herren Ländern adoptiert.

*Maaß*: Eben! Das ist es! Diese Tat habe ich schon als junges Mädchen kolossal bewundert. Ich weiß nicht wie Sie darüber denken, Brigitte. Aber ich halte diese Tat für die einzig mögliche praktikabel Möglichkeit der Völkerverständigung gegen diesen ganzen Rassenwahn. Sie verstehen, was ich meine?

*Brigitte*: Das ist eine Möglichkeit. Aber wer kann sie schon handhaben, wenn er nicht gerade Millionär ist?


Unlike the film, the novel invites audiences back into Brigitte’s private thoughts after this conversation. Like Helga, who was sure to clarify that she didn’t have anything against Chinese people before she went on to criticize Maaß for having a Chinese son, Brigitte assures readers that she “nichts gegen Marina Maaß sagen [will]. Aber...”

Departing from the novella, the film carries Brigitte’s private thoughts about Maaß’s choices and her own into the conversation:

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406 *Brigitte*: Anyway, she allegedly adopted a dozen children from everywhere. *Maaß*: Exactly! That’s just it! Already as a young girl, this act had amazed me colossally. I don’t know what you think about it, Brigitte. But I consider this act the only possible, practical chance of intercultural understanding to fight against racism. Do you understand what I mean? *Brigitte*: That’s one possibility. But who can do it, if you’re not a millionaire? *Maaß*: I can! Well, I admit that, as an interpreter, I have more opportunities than others to make international contacts. This strongly influenced me in my views.

407 Holland-Moritz, *Durchgangszimmer*, 25. “She doesn’t want to say anything bad about Miss Maaß, but...”

408 *Brigitte*: And what do the residents think, Marina? I mean, one child without a father, okay, but three? And then this colorful collection? It’s a bit unusual, no? *Maaß*: Klucke? With Klucke anything is possible. I think she would take the child and kick you out. Klucke always takes the thoughtful position that a child is not guilty for the sins of his family.
Brigitte: Und wie stehen die Hausbewohner dazu, Marina? Ich meine Kind ohne Vater, na schön, aber drei? Und dann diese bunte Kollektion? Ein bisschen ungewöhnlich, hm?
Maaß: Sie kennen die Leute, Brigitte.
Brigitte: Und die Klucke? Was würde die sagen, wenn, zum Beispiel, wenn zum Beispiel ich in guter Hoffnung wäre?

With that final statement about Kraus’s flawed but endearing character, it is clear that it is not Klucke’s shortcoming alone, but a shared flaw of the entire community. According to Maaß’s answer to Brigitte’s question, there is blame to be given somewhere, and it is still lying at the feet of the mother (who would be kicked out). Moreover, now the children are also seen as damaged individuals, for no reason other than the fact that they could possibly grow up paying for their mother’s sins.

At the time, Kraus explained that she preferred “Frauengestalten mit Schwächen und Fehlern; nur keine vollkommenen.” Indeed, in Kraus’s films, her figures and the cast of characters depicted are imperfect but well-meaning people. They want a better society but still have a lot of work to do before they get there. In the meantime, society’s shortcomings are mediated by Kraus’s “mütterliche Berlinerin” persona, which she delivers with “Berliner Herz und Schnauze, zwischen Lachen und Weinen.”

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409 Hoffmeister, “Agnes Kraus,” (1972). “Female figures with weaknesses and faults; just not perfect ones.”
Holland-Moritz and Kraus teamed up two other times. Kraus had a supporting role as the neighbor Frau Köppe in Roland Oehme’s 1971 comedy, *The Man Who Replaced Grandma* (based on Holland-Moritz’s novella, *Graffunda räumt auf*). Engl. translation: *Graffunda Cleans Up*), a story about reversed gender roles when a young man is hired to be a family nanny and housekeeper. For this role, Kraus was part of an all-star comedic cast, including the famous stand-up comedian Rolf Herricht and the comedic actors Fred Delmare and Marianne Wünscher. The cast also included the emerging star Winfried Glatzeder, who had just performed his breakthrough role in Siegfried Kühn’s romance film, *Zeit der Störche* (*Time of the Storks*, 1971) and would one year later become the heartthrob of the GDR in his title role with Angelica Domröse in *The Legend of Paul and Paula*. In 1973, Kraus’s leading role as Alice Räppel in *One Hour Delay* was based on Holland-Moritz’s novella *An einem ganz gewöhnlichen Abend* (*Just Another Evening*), a situational comedy that brings perfect strangers together who subsequently build long-term relationships.

When the highly anticipated *Nurse Agnes* came out in 1975, scriptwriter Hermann Rodigast credited Kraus for her ability to bridge humor and tragedy. When he was asked if nurse Agnes really exists, he answered “jein.” The role was “auf den Leib geschneidert” for Agnes Kraus, and the shared name was intentional. He explains:

Ich halte Agnes Kraus für eines unserer originellsten komischen Talente, und sie hat Momente, in denen hinter dem Komischen plötzlich das Tragische sichtbar wird, ganz unsentimental und sofort wieder aufgehoben eben durch jenen schwer zu definierenden Schuß Krauss’scher Komik. Ich hoffe, daß es Agnes Kraus mit der Figur der Agnes Feurig gelungen ist zu zeigen, wie groß die Skala ihrer komischen Töne ist, was
Some critics were not convinced that the writer and director succeeded in providing Kraus this opportunity. The well-known critic Hans-Dieter Tok commented that ihr reiches schauspielerisches Vermögen dennoch ungenügend gefordert [wurde]. Sie verlieh ihrer Agnes Herz, Hingabe, Draufgängertum, nur fehlten eben entsprechende Wirklichkeitsbezüge und intensiver Realitätssinn. So entstand insgesamt ein kleiner mitunter gefälliger, aber allzu glatter Telefilm, der einen Großteil seiner Möglichkeiten einfach verschenkte.412

Dieter Krebs likewise lamented that “das Heitere […] ließ mehr ein augenzwinkerndes Mit-Lachen aufkommen denn ein Aus-Lachen.”413 Nevertheless, when *Nurse Agnes* was shown on a Saturday evening in March 1975, it enjoyed a high numbers of viewers: 52.5%, and even higher numbers in subsequent showings (59.7% in 1979 and 59.9% in 1981). While critics and officials criticized its lack of originality, its simple plot line, type characters, and oversimplified conflict resolutions,414 the numbers and reception proved

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411 Ilse Jung, “Review of *Schwester Agnes*,” *FF Dabei. Programmillustrierte* (Berlin), no. 10 (1975): 6-7. “I consider Agnes Kraus one of our most original comedic talents, and she has moments in which the tragic suddenly appears behind the comedic, totally unsentimentally and immediately rescinded precisely by that difficult to define shot of Krausian comedy. I hope that with the Agnes Feurig figure Agnes Kraus succeeds in showing just how great her range of comic tones is, which, of course, is proof of her excellent collaboration with director Otto Holub.”

412 Hans-Dieter Tok, “Die Gemeindeschwester auf dem Moped. Agnes Kraus als *Schwester Agnes*,” *Leipziger Volkszeitung* (Leipzig), March 12, 1975. “Her rich theatrical capabilities were still insufficiently demanded. She gave her Agnes heart, dedication, bravado; she just lacked the corresponding real-world references and intensive sense of reality. All in all, this resulted in a small, sometimes pleasing, but too-smooth Telefilm that simply gave away a large part of its potential.”


that the film struck a chord with GDR viewers for its portrayal of “Produktivkraft Humor,” which showed “reale Charakter, reale Probleme.”

Nurse Agnes was a single, middle-aged nurse for the little village of Krummbach in the Oberlausitz. Characteristically ornery and meddling, direct to the point of confrontational, with Kraus’s signature Berliner Schnauze, she drove around on her Schwalbe (the GDR version of a moped) and took care of village residents. Nurse Agnes didn’t simply treat medical ailments, however. She was a fixer and involved herself in other people’s lives to make sure the community had a progressive plan to continue solving problems socialism professed to fix. This included the urgent need for housing for young families, an issue the film forefronted with the story of nurse Agnes trying desperately to find housing for a young patient considering abortion rather than bringing a second child into her already crowded living quarters.

The storyline brings Kraus into open conflict with the town mayor, an overly macho younger man who is obsessed with health, fitness, and outward appearances and would rather invest in a fitness program than housing. Nurse Agnes represents his opposite, and the sparring the two engage in brings the housing conflict to a head. Agnes is rude and impertinent; she is loud and obnoxious; she can be just as hard-headed as he, and she uses her age, as well as her longstanding position as nurse, caretaker, and townsperson to try to overpower his position. Their escalating disagreement threatens the unity of the town, but as the young woman’s pregnancy progresses, the decision about the pending abortion becomes far more urgent. At the right moment, Agnes’s antics bring about that cathartic moment that staves off what is presented as a pending tragedy. The

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young couple will get new housing; and though it seems Agnes will have the last word, the young mayor is also able to save face. Order is restored. In the end, nurse Agnes’s efforts do not destroy the community but save it, as she saved a life in the process. This film, which is arguably Kraus’s most popular role, offered audiences “ein Volksstück” played by the GDR’s most beloved People’s Actress “mit Humor, Herz und echten menschlichen Fragen unseres Lebens.”

Though Kraus was famous in the GDR as a comedic actress, she personally coveted the chance to play dramatic roles, finding that humor was simply one way to confront many of life’s tragedies. Comedy and tragedy have a long, intertwined history, in part because both genres can offer readers or audiences different, overlapping experiences of tragedy, pleasure, and catharsis. 

Audiences are rewarded for enduring the dramatic plot through cathartic moments such as laughter and ultimately gain a happy ending. From what we know about Kraus’s own biography, the tragic was always there as well—from personal tragedies to national tragedies, such as the collapse of democracy and the rise of fascism in Germany. When fans asked if Kraus was just as funny in life as she is on screen, the question always exasperated her: “Das ist eine Frage, die gefällt mir nicht, weil es eigentlich Unsinn ist,” she answered on Porträt per Telefon. She often tried to find understanding by explaining her own missed opportunities in life, for which she used acting to in part recover. In the televised interview, however, she answered: “Also sie wollen wissen, ob ich so komisch im Leben bin, dann muss ich vor allem sagen: Nay!


Ich bin nicht komisch im Leben.” It was important for Kraus to dispel this notion for several reasons. First, her fans should know that acting was her job, and she worked hard to learn her lines and deliver a good performance. Second, as an actress she was not just playing herself, and she very much wanted the opportunity to do other things: to play a doctor, even be a film critic, and to play a dramatic role. Kraus was not just performing a role; she was performing emotions, life experiences (or missed experiences), and using acting to connect with life. Tragedy was a part of Kraus’s lived experiences, and though she never had the opportunity to do a more dramatic role for her screen performances, she demonstrated her capacity to do it by breaking into tragic moments or serious conflicts with irony, satire, or well-timed silliness. She often makes her character particularly exasperating and difficult to deal with, so when situations escalate, the only thing left to do is laugh.

Few stars, even those who worked rather seamlessly between stage and screen, were thus able to offer a more unifying point of identification than the Berliner Agnes Kraus. Kraus was an older, empathetic female figure who spoke the language of the common man and appealed to audiences across the generations. Kraus was already in her 70s when she reached stardom, but she imparted wisdom learned from her lived experiences through Germany’s 20th-century history, and she embodied both the past and the present by applying that accumulated knowledge to the betterment of her socialist community. She was guided by an innate humanism; thus, every gesture and utterance seemed natural and

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418 Porträt per Telefon, episode 160, 1983.
419 Porträt per Telefon, episode 160, 1983.
common sense, rather than didactic or overdetermined by cultural political ideology. Stories set in the countryside and broadcast via television to living rooms throughout the GDR allowed her to bridge the urban and the rural GDR, thereby becoming a more encompassing star figure for both the working and peasant classes.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

5.1 Research Questions and Argument

I began this project with the hypothesis that there was both a star culture and an active fan culture in East Germany. From there, I specifically wanted to know how and why the GDR, at all levels of cultural production and reception, used a celebrity star system to negotiate the tenets of Marxist-Leninist cultural ideology, a socialist economy, and the desires of the public that brought with it its own experiences of cultural and social life. Moreover, how did this public create a fan culture that made meaning of the negotiated space of the star? I was therefore interested not only in the ways cultural ideology was projected onto a star figure, but how actors performed their stardom themselves, and how audiences developed viewing habits, reception practices, and cultural practices that were then reflected back at them in the cultural production and cultural milieu of their society—namely, through the star.

In the 1964 Filmspiegel article I quoted at the opening of this dissertation, “Don’t we have any Stars?,” the author, GDR film critic Horst Lukas, suggested the term Publikumsliebling (audience darling) as a way to capture the distinctly socialist rendition of a star: a public socialist personality capable of creating that desired nexus of national culture, star image and audience identification—a figure representing egalitarianism and accessibility as typical socialist qualities and ways of behaving.\(^{422}\) It also captures the official cultural ideology that promoted a “heightened national consciousness of the first

German state of workers and peasants. The article, however, does not settle on one term. In fact, as is clear from the question format of the title, there was no consensus. Lukas was nevertheless clear about what GDR star culture was not: “Bei uns braucht keine Filmschauspielerin in prächtiger Abendtoilette in einen Swimming Pool zu springen, um dadurch aufzufallen.” Here Lukas is perhaps referring to Swedish supermodel-turned-actress Anita Ekberg’s famous scene in Federico Fellini’s La Dolce Vita (1960), when her character Sylvia, a famous Swedish-American actress, dressed in an evening gown, walks into the Trevi Fountain in Rome and seductively entices her love interest Marcello to follow.

While the favored term Publikumsliebling is useful for differentiating socialist and capitalist star concepts, I would argue that the term “audience darling” was a performative aspect of GDR star discourse itself. It also drew attention away from the impact cultural officials and the state had on the development of a socialist star culture, while emphasizing instead how socialist star culture evolved through a dynamic relationship between audiences and their stars. As we have seen, however, GDR stars were the result of cultural production and reception at all cultural levels, from the state, to the artists, to the fans. This is why I chose to use the loan word “star” for this project—to allow critical analysis of how officials, artists, and audiences engaged with capitalist film industries and historical developments in European theater to adapt well-established features of star culture to socialist ideology, thereby allowing the GDR to develop a

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424 Lukas, “Haben wir keine Stars?,” 6. “With us, no actress needs to jump into a swimming pool in a resplendent evening dress in order to stand out.”
competing system of its own that would resonate with GDR audiences and validate East German culture abroad.

In this dissertation, I have shown that GDR stars had a specific cultural ideological function: They mediated between cultural functionaries and audiences and bridged many contradictory elements that affected individuals and shaped social life during the global Cold War, such as the individual and the collective, the ordinary and the extraordinary, idealism and reality, the past and the present, tradition and progress, East and West. Though their public images were central to this function of their stardom, I demonstrate how stars used their on- and offscreen performances to complicate or even challenge the relatively stable image in the media. As actors, they interpreted their function as intermediaries, role models, and public personalities for GDR audiences and cultural life by attending to the shared values, experiences, and conflicts that made up everyday life.

Because of the need for talented actors to fulfill industry demands in film, television, and theater, an actor’s experience and training was essential to his/her development into a star figure, and from an ideological and economic perspective, it was considered the actor’s labor contribution to the state. However, GDR stars also pursued validation of their careers and celebrity status through a rigorous actor’s training, often learning and incorporating Brechtian methodology into their performances, which had the reputation of inviting cultural resistance in both the performance and viewing habits of artists and audiences to officially prescribed cultural and ideological practices. GDR stars offered audiences multiple points of identification that helped the working class navigate its new social position at the center of GDR social life. Officially, stars embodied and performed the “well-rounded” socialist personality through the values of work,
community, accessibility, and emancipation; but, as the case studies in the project have shown, the stars themselves often elected instead to present figures in the process of becoming a socialist personality, and of finding self-fulfillment in that process, which was often achieved through struggle, overcoming conflict (e.g. dialectic), and a developed self-awareness.

5.2 Findings

Star studies for socialist cultures in general is vastly understudied. The reluctance in socialism to apply the label “star” is certainly reflected in the scholarship. This project is therefore based on extensive primary source research. Two obvious starting points were the internet (e.g., Google searches and ebay perusings for possible memorabilia like star postcards and other collectibles), and the collections at The DEFA Film Library at UMass Amherst, where I began watching GDR films and reading through GDR press materials, ranging from fandom, such as the magazine Filmspiegel (1954-1991), to writings on theoretical and formal innovations in socialist cinema, such as the journal Deutsche Filmkunst (1953-1962). I expanded on my research of press materials at archives in Massachusetts and Germany to include research on East and West German newspapers, magazines, and journals related to GDR film and television productions and artists, as well as promotional materials released for distribution by Progress Film-Verleih. I also looked at production documents for DEFA feature films, including casting records, meeting minutes, budgets, and correspondence related to films for cinema; I watched a

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wide selection of GDR television programming, including TV films, recorded theater productions that were aired on GDR TV, and popular TV shows. Finally, I watched and read interviews, biographies, and auto-biographies that have been made or published since German reunification, including the DEFA-Stiftung’s Zeitzeugengespräche series (interviews with GDR artists that were recorded in the early 2000s). Though these more contemporary documents present their own challenges—what Sabine Hake has warned us leads to studying GDR stardom as a “retrospective affair”—they also offer valuable insights into the East German cultural scene, including the problematic nature of GDR star culture. Whenever possible, I confirmed these documents with original source materials from the time, which was a way to corroborate information from both before and after the GDR and DEFA, and allowed me to search for consistency—or inconsistencies—in how the narrative of GDR star culture has developed.

As my introduction outlines, there are also a number of articles and chapters in German studies on individual stars in the GDR. With the exception of one case study in Claudia Fellmer’s dissertation, however, all of these works focus on male stars in the GDR, in particular four: Armin Mueller-Stahl, Manfred Krug, Erwin Geschonneck, and Dean Reed. With women’s political and economic emancipation at the center of the GDR’s identity and its efforts to achieve both women’s emancipation and the emancipation of the working class, my study offers a corrective to the impression the current body of scholarship leaves us with, namely that GDR stardom was male. Through three case studies of top female stars in GDR film and television, I demonstrate how female actors in the GDR were uniquely situated to help mediate the values, experiences, and ideological work of GDR culture in the 1960s-70s.
It was during the early 1960s that we find evidence that critics, artists, and fans publicly and earnestly debated a socialist star culture in the GDR press. They were specifically deliberating if East Germany needed or had a star culture and what socialist stars were and were not. Stars and socialist culture could educate citizens about the core ideologies of the state’s domestic and international identity: antifascism, socialism, progress, emancipation, and international peasant and working-class solidarity. A number of events led to this turn to popular cultural in the early 1960s (and away from socialist realism that had shaped GDR culture up to that point). The building of the Berlin Wall in 1961 changed the landscape of GDR cultural and social life through the censorship of western culture and many western goods, cutting citizens off from people and jobs, and prohibiting travel to the West; but it also initiated a short period of liberalization in the East German arts, which GDR cultural officials, DEFA, and artists used to restructure and reorganize GDR filmmaking practices in order to respond to audience demands for more entertainment, artistic ambitions in socialism, and the state’s need to develop a thriving socialist film and television culture. During this time, film artists begin experimenting with form and content, and DEFA and GDR television began including popular genres in their production plans, as well as the development of a socialist star system.

The cultural and political landscape in the GDR was constantly shifting, and cultural policy, as well as social policy (e.g., women’s policies), influenced the development of GDR star culture as well. In addition to the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961, my research contended with three other major policy changes in the arts and government that impacted the development of socialist star culture in general, and the careers of the
actresses that I examine, in particular. The sweeping censorship decisions made at the SED Party’s 1965 Eleventh Plenum meeting abruptly ended the experimental and creative period the Berlin Wall had initiated for GDR filmmaking in 1961. In 1973, the new Party leadership under Erich Honecker introduced another brief period of liberalization, before Wolf Biermann’s forced expatriation in 1976 ended in the removal of more than eighty GDR artists—including filmmakers and actors—from public life or the GDR after they petitioned on behalf of Biermann and against the implications of the State’s drastic decision to revoke his citizenship. Jutta Hoffmann and Angelica Domröse both joined prominent filmmakers and fellow actors, such as the stars Manfred Krug and Armin Mueller-Stahl, in the West. This irreversibly changed GDR cultural life and GDR star culture, as it had developed up to that point.

In order to contend with the challenges of identifying, defining, and understanding star culture in East Germany, my project proposes a methodology that considers the limits and possibilities of attending to all three levels of cultural production and reception in a society that was restructured according to socialist values and a socialist economy, and an industry that was state-owned and state-run. My methodology is interdisciplinary and borrows from star studies, cultural studies, women’s studies, and performance studies. Beyond the production and reception of an image, I understand a star to be not only an ideological image or text that can be semiotically analyzed, as Dyer has demonstrated, but a performer as well. In the GDR, an actor’s training as a professional and talented performer was both desired and required, and as such, I was interested in how stars performed both their stardom and their cultural ideological function (or subverted it).
As Bertolt Brecht theorizes performance techniques for disseminating critical social messages, and Stuart Hall suggests the variability of the production and reception of those messages, Judith Butler illustrates the way individuals push the limits of social knowledge and power through fantasy and the performativity of gender itself. Butler’s theories of performance allow that it is also individual social actors who can make meaning of performances that point out the problems inherent in a cultural norm, thereby introducing the possibility for change (such as Jutta Hoffmann’s performance of a more fluid sexuality and different gender roles in *Her Third*). As Sabrina Qiong Yu’s and Austin Guy’s *Performing Stardom: Star Studies in Transformation and Expansion* (2017) demonstrates, incorporating performance studies into the study of stars can introduce new ways of thinking about the cultural values that are important for different cultural systems, their audiences, and their artists, which opens up the definition of “star” by not presuming that the superlatives traditionally associated with stars—the most beautiful, the best dressed, the most desirable, the most glamorous, etc.—are necessarily the basic requirements of star figures. For this project, I have used this approach to unpack the cultural values that are embodied, performed, and problematized by East Germany’s female stars, including values such as the collective, gender equality, and emancipation.

By opening up the study of GDR culture to its international connections and historic cultural antecedents— from Weimar and Nazi cinema and theater cultures, as well as western cultural productions in cinema and television—this project is able to make such a unique contribution to Film Studies and Star Studies. My project suggests a method for expanding the study of the star concept to systems outside of the predominant capitalist model. I introduce different values of attraction and pleasure in the GDR that artists, fans,
and cultural officials debated, such as artistic talent and humanist thinking, or more collective understandings of traditional stars attributes, such as the question of collective desires in and around Angelica Domröse’s stardom. The interdisciplinary nature of my approach demonstrates how star studies can be far more diversified and inclusive of multiple cultural systems, and my project examines stardom according to a system shaped by a very different economy, ideology and cultural values.

Through the three case studies of three very different stars—Jutta Hoffmann (b. 1941), Angelica Domröse (b. 1941), and Agnes Kraus (b. 1911- d. 1995)—I have been able to present a wider spectrum of GDR stardom and womanhood. This included: examples of what the GDR intended in the so-called “audience darling” through actresses Jutta Hoffmann and Agnes Kraus, to the value seen in a major star, such as Angelica Domröse; wide-ranging ideas of female emancipation, which might strive to hold onto more traditional notions of femininity on one hand, or extend women’s liberation to her sexual life on the other; and the room in socialist stardom to introduce actresses from all generations as a way to contend with varying experiences of everyday life under socialism. These stars offered audiences entertainment, social lessons, and continuity or social change—depending on the different cultural and political needs of the GDR cultural scene throughout the 1960s-70s, and the career trajectories of the different actresses. Each actress’s individual stardom becomes part of the larger culture of celebrity in East Germany.

When I analyze the cultural, ideological, and social functions of GDR stars, I lean on Kimberlé Crenshaw’s concept of intersectionality to unpack how these three actresses’ popularity developed precisely at the intersecting positions that actors and audiences
alike inhabited in society, and at which point individuals had to then negotiate power and oppression in GDR society. GDR stars were more than an image; they were trained performers, laborers, and socialist personalities, and for audiences, this meant they modeled the process and struggles, as well as the pleasure, of becoming exemplary socialist citizens in a new social order such as socialism. They carried with them specific ideological functions, bridging apparent conflicts and seeking resolutions, and they did this by complicating the intersecting identity issues that emerge with the different social stations a person occupies. Ultimately, stars as a whole illustrated how the development of the socialist personality was often an imperfect process of individuals striving towards a perfect collective ideal.

5.3 Looking ahead

In this dissertation, I have chosen to focus on the two-decade period in which East Germany introduced and then developed a socialist star culture that could respond to the cultural needs of both audiences and the state. The cultural rupture of 1976 that was created by the forced expatriation of Wolf Biermann changed GDR star culture through the subsequent removal of many of the GDR’s most beloved stars from East German cultural life. This void created a sudden need for new stars, and a reconsideration at the official level of the role stars have as public figures. Stars like Agnes Kraus, whose career continued after the Biermann affair, offered audiences continuity through this disruptive time, but it also enforced limits on her ability to change or develop her own stardom. However, the GDR was in sudden need of new faces and new talents as well, introducing a new set of stars, such as Corinna Harfouch and Katrin Sass, to the GDR cultural scene.
It also opened up GDR star culture to more international stars, including stars from Hollywood.

A study of GDR star culture in the 1980s is a logical next step. Not only would this evaluate how GDR culture overcame the changes enacted by the Biermann Affair, but it would also deepen our understanding of the long-term history of GDR cinema, especially as it developed as a national cinema in dialog with global cinemas. Finally, a study of the post-1989 careers of actresses like Corinna Harfouch and Katrin Sass would reveal much about both systems’ media realities—East and West, capitalism and socialism—especially for women.


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